

Growing Places

The Newsletter of the **Social and Economic Research Group**

Winter 2012

Welcome to the SERG newsletter.

This winter edition highlights our recent work on monitoring and evaluation.

Since its formation in 2000, much of the work carried out by Forest Research's Social and Economic Research Group (SERG) has focused on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the social and economic dimensions of forest-related interventions. We quickly discovered that M&E is often regarded as an unwelcome burden and, as a result, we have worked hard to show that not only can M&E help demonstrate tangible outputs and effective delivery, but that it can also enhance opportunities for organisational learning and inform the next phase of policy, programme and project development.

To date, around one-third of all SERG's research projects have been M&E related. They include evaluations of national programmes and grant schemes such as the delivery of Forestry Commission England's corporate Quality of Life targets, Cydcoed in Wales, and the Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) programme in Scotland. In 2008 we completed a major valuation of the economic and social contribution of forestry for people in Scotland. We have evaluated individual projects focusing on health, education, youth training and employment, and rehabilitation of ex-offenders, as well as many with multiple objectives. We also regularly advise on the development of M&E frameworks and social indicators for national and local government; at the European level we have helped to refine the pan-European Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management.

Our work on M&E is ongoing, as shown by the projects featured here.

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Beyond the forest edge

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) is the reference standard for sustainable forest management in the UK. Along with its supporting guidelines, the UKFS defines legal and best practice requirements and provides a basis for regulation and monitoring. The latest edition was published in December 2011 and for the first time included Forests and People guidelines. SERG took a lead role in developing these new guidelines and has since taken part in a series of meetings organised by Forest Services England to introduce the new standards to Forestry Commission staff and other stakeholders. Participants at the meetings have provided feedback on how people could be involved more in the management and delivery of forestry.

For more information about the UKFS and guidelines visit:

www.forestry.gov.uk/ukfs.

Alternatively, contact Bianca Ambrose-Oji (bianca.ambrose-oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

Better Woodlands for Wales grant scheme evaluation

The Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) grant scheme ran from 2006 until December 2010, giving financial aid to landowners to encourage woodland creation and management. With a budget of approximately £3.25 million per annum, BWW incorporated Welsh Government strategic objectives for the forestry sector and European Rural Development Programme objectives. Forest Research scientists are leading a group commissioned to evaluate the outcome of the scheme.



Giving advice to woodland owners.

One of the major innovations of the BWW scheme was a move away from grant payments based on listed forestry operations to a scheme that provided holistic assistance for land owners by supporting them in the development of woodland management plans. In addition to this, the range of grant options offered was extensive. For example, it included grants not only for traditionally supported activities around woodland planting, but also for actions to improve the level of public benefits such as path and access improvements, forest school development and biodiversity management. The outcome was an inclusive grant scheme that covered an area of approximately 40,000 hectares and was taken up by nearly 2,000 land owners, including newcomers to woodland management.

The assessment is employing a mix of qualitative, quantitative and economic evaluation methods to establish the impact of the BWW scheme on participants, and the degree of environmental and social benefits generated by the programme as a whole. Qualitative assessments will include analysis of the views of grant recipients, BWW management planners and a wider stakeholder group drawn from decision makers and administrators. Quantitative assessments will examine the overall outputs of the scheme. Economic analyses will look at the carbon sequestration value of new planting, the biodiversity values of improved management, and the contribution to employment in the forestry sector.

For more information contact Bianca Ambrose Oji (bianca.ambrose-oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).



BWW new planting scheme.

Monitoring and evaluating the WIAT programme

The Woods In and Around Towns (WIAT) programme was established by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) in 2004 to deliver environmental, social and economic benefits to local communities in urban and peri-urban areas. The programme created new woodland, brought neglected woodland into active management and worked with communities to help them access and use their local woodlands. Our scientists have been involved with different aspects of monitoring and evaluating the WIAT programme.



Forest Club at Drumchapel.

The key goals of WIAT are linked to Scottish Government policy objectives around improving people's quality of life and health status. We recently completed a scoping study to develop a method for evaluating the

outcomes of the WIAT Challenge Fund (which is one part of the programme funding stream) from 2004 until 2011 (phases one and two). To do this, we collated existing data associated with more than 150 WIAT sites. We then looked for similarities between them, grouping the sites into four 'clusters', and suggested how the impacts of the Challenge Fund could be evaluated. A full evaluation will now go ahead and report in summer 2012.

Good quality data is essential for a whole range of stakeholders to be able to assess the achievements and value of projects in the WIAT programme. SERG is therefore also working with FCS to develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for use across a range of WIAT sites and projects funded under the next phase (three) of the programme. The framework will be used to assess social, economic and environmental impacts and to inform ongoing management and delivery.

For further information on WIAT Challenge Fund Evaluation contact: Bianca Ambrose-Oji (bianca.ambrose-oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

For details of the WIAT Phase Three M&E Framework contact: Jake Morris (jake.morris@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).



A survey in the New Forest.

Organisational learning, adaptation and change

Most people recognise that a key purpose of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is to demonstrate that an intervention has delivered against its stated aims and objectives. However, evaluation can, and arguably should, perform another important function – to enable organisations responsible for the design and delivery of projects to learn from previous experience. An increasing focus on the role of evaluation in organisational adaptation and change has given rise to the concept of 'evaluation for learning', sometimes referred to as 'formative evaluation'.

We are currently working on a research project, 'Learning from M&E', to develop and test models to improve the use of data within the Forestry Commission (FC) so that the organisation and its partners can become more responsive, adaptive and ultimately sustainable. The project arose from the recognition that better use could be made of data that are gathered to evaluate social forestry policy, programmes and projects, and that these data have the potential to inform processes of decision-making, planning and design.

The project is being delivered through the following three main research activities.

- First, a literature review established key principles for successful organisational learning and M&E that enhance learning. The review sets out ideals of M&E design, application and organisational orientation.
- Semi-structured interviews are being conducted with FC staff at policy, programme and project levels to examine current approaches to learning and M&E.
- Action research in 'live' M&E projects delivered by SERG is being used to apply, test and develop the principles identified in the literature review.

In the current economic climate, it is increasingly important both to demonstrate effective and efficient delivery, and to learn from experience and develop organisationally. It is hoped that this project will help the FC with these two related objectives.

For further information please visit: www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-8FVDKH.

Alternatively, contact Jake Morris (jake.morris@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

Evaluation of net economic benefits of greenspace

Throughout Great Britain, numerous policy documents acknowledge the important role of greenspace in sustainable development and in creating attractive and economically vibrant communities. We recently conducted a critical review of evidence on the benefits of greenspace, which focused on estimates of the net economic benefits (both direct and indirect) of interventions aimed at creating or improving greenspace.

'Greenspace' refers to the natural environmental components that lie within and between cities, towns and villages. In the context of discussions around landscape and habitat connectivity, these components are also referred to as green infrastructure (commonly used in England and Wales) or green networks (Scotland).

The review found that, despite some conflicting evidence, there is a growing body of research that confirms the benefits of greenspace. For example, a large-scale study undertaken in conjunction with the UK National Ecosystem Assessment showed that a one percent increase in greenspace as a share of total land use in a census ward increased property prices by around one percent. This study also found that expansion of woodland had positive effects (more so for broadleaved woodland than for conifer). Similarly, an economic appraisal of the Mersey Forest (a large-scale greening initiative) estimated that for every £1 invested, it would generate £2.30 in increased Gross Value Added over the 50-year lifetime of the project.

However, robust evidence on the net economic benefits of greenspace projects is sparse. Furthermore, one of the major observations of the review was that often new studies do not follow the latest best practice guidelines on evaluation. This results in estimates that are neither transferable nor comparable, which ultimately diminishes their value for wider policy-making and future research. Lack of monitoring from the start of a project often complicates the estimation of baselines and net impact.

For more information visit: www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-8PJETA.

Alternatively, contact: Vadims Sarajevs (vadims.sarajevs@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

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The 'Greenheart Bridge' sculpture in Herrington Country Park, Sunderland.

Recent SERG publications

Quine, C.P. and Edwards, D.M. (2011). Why do woodlands matter to Scotland? The source of the fifth element and more. In: S.J. Marrs, S. Foster, C. Hendrie, E.C. Mackey, and D.B.A. Thompson (Eds.) *The Changing Nature of Scotland*. TSO Scotland, Edinburgh.

Lawrence, A. and Gillett, S. (2011). *Human dimensions of adaptive forest management and climate change: a review of international experience*. Forestry Commission Research Report, Forestry Commission, Edinburgh, 52 pp.

Ciccarese, L., Elsasser, P., Horattas, A., Pettenella, D. and Valatin, G. (2011). Innovative market opportunities due to carbon sequestration in European forests? In: G. Weiss, D. Pattenella, P. Ollongvist and B. Slee (Eds.) *Innovation in Forestry: territorial and value chain relationships*. CABI, Wallingford.

Ambrose-Oji, B. and Fancett, K. (Eds.) (2011). *Woods and Forests in British Society: Progress in research and practice*. Conference proceedings, Forest Research Monograph 3. Forest Research, Surrey, 97pp.

Lawrence, A. and Stewart, A. (2011). Sustainable forestry decisions: on the interface between technology and participation. *Mathematical and Computational Forestry & Natural Resource Science* 3 (1), 42–52.

Dandy, N., Ballantyne, S., Moseley, D., Gill, R., Peace, A. and Quine, C. (2011). Preferences for wildlife management methods among the peri-urban public in Scotland. *European Journal of Wildlife Research* 57 (6), 1213–1221.

Where to find out about us:

What we do

www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/peopleandtrees

Who we are

www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-5XNATV

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