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Towards an institutional analysis of biodiversity offsets

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At both the international and national scale, since the 1990s, the international environmental community has been increasingly interested in market-based instruments (MBIs) as mechanisms for the provision of ecosystem services (OECD, 1993, 1995, 1997). In the biodiversity sector, “biodiversity offsets” (BOs) rapidly become one of the indispensable policy solutions in the response to the challenges of maintaining biodiversity. International organizations and conventions, think tanks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and even private enterprises have incorporated the concept and promoted offset based instruments on a supranational scale. Today, BOs are an increasingly popular yet controversial tool in conservation even if biodiversity offset schemes are very diverse and heterogeneous. “Their popularity lies in their potential to meet the objectives of biodiversity conservation and economic development in tandem; the controversy lies in the need to accept ecological losses in return for uncertain gains” (Bull et al., 2013, 1). To understand the success of BOs schemes, the communication analyses, first, the success of BOs in global biodiversity arenas since the beginning of the 2000’s and the policy entrepreneurs who introduced BO approach. Second, we discuss the multiple uses of BOs and their diverse institutional arrangements. Finally, we also propose an institutional framework that deals with challenges in the offset process in order to analyse opportunities and risks of BOs.