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# Meeting the MDGs – Is Conservation Relevant?

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**Achieving the goal of liberating half the world's poor from their poverty by 2015 will either mark the true beginning of sustainability or the end of biodiversity at the hands of best-intentioned policies.[1]**

## 1. INTRODUCTION: COUNTDOWN TO 2015

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set 18 targets, to be achieved by 2015. Four years after the Millennium Declaration – from which the MDGs are derived – the United Nations has reported significant progress in many regions of the world and against many of the targets. The UN Secretary General's report of August 27th 2004 notes the following achievements:[2]

- 200 million fewer people in Asia living on less than $1/day than in 1990;

1. Sanderson, S. and K. Redford (2003). 'Contested relationships between biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction'. *Oryx*, 37, pp 389-390
2. *Implementing the Millennium Declaration* United Nations Press Release, 7 September 2004. http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/mdg_pr_09_2004.pdf

- Significant progress in reducing poverty levels in North Africa;
- Primary schools nearing the target of universal enrolment by 2015 in most of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa, and the Commonwealth of Independent States;
- Hunger receding in all regions of the world – although not at a rate sufficient to meet the 2015 target of a reduction by half in all regions;
- Broad improvement in access to improved water sources.

The UN report notes, however, that progress in some regions of the world – particularly in sub-Saharan Africa – and against some of the targets – child and maternal mortality and access to improved sanitation – has been slow, and in some cases is worsening. Getting back on track and making progress world-wide against the full set of goals and targets by 2015 is clearly going to require significant extra effort, from conventional and non-conventional sources. Can conservation play a role in this effort? This chapter investigates the arguments for and against linking conservation and development, and examines the potential role that biodiversity could play in meeting the MDGs – particularly in Africa.

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## 2. THE UNLINKING OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The relationship between conservation and development has been debated for decades by policy makers and practitioners alike. During the early 1980s, the global conservation paradigm of protectionism and human exclusion based on national parks and other protected areas that had prevailed since the late 19th century was gradually displaced by a new narrative – one that advocated community participation in, and benefits from, wildlife management. In 1980 IUCN published its *World*

2. ***Implementing the Millennium Declaration op.cit.***

*Conservation Strategy* that stressed the importance of linking protected area management with the economic activities of local communities. In 1985 the World Wildlife Fund launched its *Wildlife and Human Needs Programme*, consisting of some 20 projects in developing countries that attempted to combine conservation and development, and in 1986 the World Bank's policy on wildlands recognised that the protection of natural areas must be integrated into regional economic planning.

As a result, in Africa in the 1980s some now well-known projects and programmes based on participatory approaches to wildlife management were initiated, providing inspiration and models for similar initiatives around the world. It is important to note, however, that the focus of these initiatives was not solely the conservation of species and habitats. As important, if not more so, was the need for community development, local self-government and the creation of local institutions for the management of common property resources – all priorities of the development assistance community.

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Subsequently, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which arose out of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, emphasised three equally important objectives: conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity resources and fair and equitable sharing of benefits with local people, thus placing community involvement in wildlife conservation and management firmly on the international agenda.

In recent years, however, two parallel trends appear to have driven a wedge between the seemingly happy union of conservation and development. First, there has been growing disenchantment with community-based conservation and so-called Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs)[3] coupled with increasing

**3. This disenchantment arose not just from conservation organisations but also from donor agencies – for example the DFID *Wildlife and Poverty Study* (DFID 2002) points out that donors have grown increasingly concerned about high transaction costs, relatively low levels of financial benefits and apparent non-replicability of community based wildlife management projects.**

advocacy for a return to more protectionist approaches to conservation.[4] In some instances the renewed emphasis on traditional/protectionist approaches to conservation has taken a new form. There is a growing emphasis on direct payments for conservation benefits: for example, the concept of 'conservation concessions' has been pioneered by Conservation International, whereby payments are made to a developing country government or, in some cases, to indigenous/community groups in return for a long-term lease on a tract of land. The implications of this type of approach for the livelihoods of poor people are complex – an issue explored in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this volume.

Second, the way in which development assistance is designed and implemented has changed significantly. Until the mid- to late-1990s, donors provided much development aid in the form of project funding and supported the dominant paradigms of the day – those centred on devolution, decentralisation and local participation and those that emphasised the 'triple bottom line' of sustainable development. Biodiversity conservation fell within the environmental responsibilities of donors committed to sustainable development, and was once a significant part of the project portfolios of many international development agencies. Community-based conservation went a step further, enabling donors to meet both environmental and participatory objectives.

**In 1999, the World Bank launched a new framework for development assistance – the Comprehensive Development Framework, coupled with national poverty reduction strategies – emphasising developing country ownership and direction of the development agenda**

In 1996, the OECD published its report *Shaping the 21st Century* which included a set of International Development Targets – the precursor to the Millennium Development Goals – and emphasised poverty reduction, rather than sustainable development, as the overriding objective of development assistance. In 1999, the World Bank launched a new framework for development assistance – the Comprehensive Development Framework, coupled with national poverty reduction strategies (PRSs) – emphasising developing country ownership and direction of the

**4. Terborgh, J. (1999). *Requiem for Nature*. Island Press, Washington DC. Spinage, C. (1998). 'Social change and conservation misrepresentation in Africa.' *Oryx* 32(4): 265-276. Bruner. A.G. *et al.* (2001). 'Effectiveness of parks in protecting tropical biodiversity' *Science*, Vol.291, 5 January 2001,125-128**

development agenda. Many development agencies thus shifted their funding away from projects to direct budgetary support (DBS) and, rather than driving the agenda according to their own priorities, responded to those priorities articulated in individual PRSs. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) for example, recognises that once a partner country qualifies for DBS, channelling a significant proportion of its bilateral aid through this mechanism directly addresses the urgent need to empower national governments to direct and prioritise their own poverty reduction processes, and creates strong incentives for good governance.

**Biodiversity conservation has dropped down the agenda of both donors and developing country governments because it has not been identified as a priority for poverty reduction by either**

This combination of factors has meant that both biodiversity conservation, and direct donor support for local processes, have become increasingly marginalised in mainstream development. Biodiversity conservation has dropped down the agenda of both donors and developing country governments because it has not been identified as a priority for poverty reduction by either. In part this is due to the fact that despite the particularly high dependency of poor people on biodiversity and other natural resources, environmental goods and services are generally unaccounted for in national statistics and thus not reflected as priorities in national policies[5] (see Chapter 9 in this volume for a detailed analysis of efforts to mainstream environment at the national and international level). Indeed, environmental issues in general have received little attention in the majority of PRSs.[6] Local processes have suffered as donors increasingly do business directly with government offices, which may, or may not, support local participation in planning, decision-making and implementation. David Satterthwaite provides an analysis of the mismatch between current patterns of aid allocation and community-driven processes in the first volume of this series[7] noting 'The national governments with whom [external funding

**5. DFID (2002). *Wildlife and Poverty Study* Department for International Development, London**
**6. Bojö, J and Reddy, R.C. (2002). *Poverty Reduction Strategies and Environment* Environment Department Paper no 86, World Bank, Washington DC for a review of the treatment of environmental issues in PRSPs and DFID (2002). *op.cit.* for a preliminary review of biodiversity in PRSPs.**
**7. Satterthwaite, D (ed.) (2003). *The Millennium Development Goals and Local Processes: Hitting the Target or Missing the Point* IIED, London.**

agencies] work often do not want development assistance allocated to these processes, or at least they want to manage the allocation of such resources and influence who gets them (and who does not).'

## 3. FROM DEVELOPMENT TO POVERTY REDUCTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), reaffirm the poverty reduction imperative, subsuming the OECD targets and, indeed, many other development targets set by the United Nations over the last thirty years.[8] A big difference, however, is the fact that many governments, donors and international organisations have made public commitments to achieving the MDGs and have encouraged other sectors of the international community to do the same. As a result, the conservation-development debate has, in recent years, been couched in terms of conservation and poverty reduction or 'pro-poor conservation'.

**Proponents of pro-poor conservation argue that linking conservation and poverty reduction makes sense for both objectives, but sceptics, from both conservation and development organisations, fail to see the relevance of each other's agenda**

Regardless of the terminology, huge divisions remain. Proponents of pro-poor conservation argue that linking conservation and poverty reduction makes sense for both objectives, but sceptics, from both conservation and development organisations, fail to see the relevance of each other's agenda.

A recent article in *Oryx*, an international conservation journal, by Steve Sanderson and Kent Redford of the US-based Wildlife Conservation Society, typifies the position of many conservation practitioners. Their first argument is that poverty reduction is not the role of conservation organisations – if current patterns of development have failed the world's poor, how – and why – should conservationists even begin to tackle the problem?[9] Protected areas, it is argued, struggle to pay for themselves, let alone to generate benefits for local communities. The second argument is that the mantra of poverty reduction has supplanted that of sustainable development, and the

8. Satterthwaite, D (2003). *op.cit*
9. Sanderson and Redford (2003). *op.cit*

environmental considerations that implies – with negative consequences for biodiversity conservation. The MDGs, it is argued, may well signal the end for biodiversity.

That poverty reduction is not the role of conservation organisations can be countered with both moral and practical arguments: not only is poverty reduction an international imperative, but addressing poverty concerns is critical for long term conservation success. Poverty is multi-dimensional and includes a lack of power and rights as well as physical assets. While the close dependence of poor people on biodiversity brings with it a theoretically strong incentive to conserve natural resources weak access and tenure rights of many poor people mean there is a strong potential for local over-exploitation. As a recent study by DFID notes: 'Much conservation money is still invested with only limited consideration of poverty and livelihoods concerns, despite a growing consensus that poverty and weak governance are two of the most significant underlying threats to conservation'.[10]

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The second argument – that poverty reduction strategies, including the MDGs, have failed adequately to address biodiversity conservation concerns – is more difficult to counter. The lack of attention, not just to biodiversity, but to environmental issues in general, has been increasingly recognised, and Chapter 9 of this volume describes attempts by UNDP and other international organisations to address this. As worrying is the apparent lack of awareness amongst development practitioners and policy-makers of the potential contribution that biodiversity conservation does and can make to poverty reduction and the achievement of the MDGs.

## 4. ACHIEVING THE MDGS: WHAT ROLE FOR CONSERVATION?

Biodiversity conservation is directly addressed in MDG7 'Ensure Environmental Sustainability'. This includes a target

10. DFID (2002) *op.cit*

to 'Integrate the principles of sustainable development in country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.' Of the seven indicators for MDG7, two specifically address conservation: first, the proportion of land area covered by forest, and second, the ratio of area protected to maintain biological diversity to surface area. Clearly conservation has an important role to play in the goal of environmental sustainability. However, recent reviews by IIED, IUCN and others confirm that biodiversity also has a valuable role to play in achieving the other goals:[11]

- *Income (MDG1)*: In addition to safeguarding livelihood security through maintaining seed varieties and protected water and soil resources, the sustainable use of biodiverse wild resources helps directly to generate income through employment and enterprise opportunities such as forest and veld product derivatives and through nature tourism.
- *Hunger (MDG1)*: FAO has emphasised that there are close causal linkages between reducing hunger and the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.[12] The Millennium Project Task Force on Hunger highlights the importance of improving core productive assets (soil, water, vegetation) as the first step towards tackling hunger. Sustainable food production systems rely on conserving and maintaining agricultural soils, fish stocks and habitats, water, genetic resources and ecological processes. IUCN notes that a large proportion of poor people live in marginal environments, fragile lands or areas of low agricultural productivity.[13] In these areas, wild foods can be particularly important – especially in terms of reducing the vulnerability of the poorest groups.

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**11. See: Koziell, I and McNeill, C (2002). *Building on Hidden Opportunities to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals: Poverty Reduction through Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity.* WSSD Opinion Paper, IIED, London. Roe, D (2003). 'The MDGs and natural resources management: Reconciling sustainable livelihoods and resource conservation or fuelling a divide?' In D. Satterthwaite (ed) (2003). *op.cit*. Pisupati, B and E. Warner (2003) *Biodiversity and the Millennium Development Goals*. IUCN Regional Biodiversity Programme, Asia**
**12. http://www.fao.org/es/ESS/mdg_kit/contrib.asp**
**13. Pisupati and Warner (2003), *op.cit***

- *Gender and Education (MDGs 2 and 3)*: IUCN highlights the links between conservation and gender equality. Women and girls spend significant proportions of their day collecting firewood, water and other biological resources. Availability of (and, importantly, access to) these resources dictates the amount of time needed to perform household duties, which in turn impacts on the amount of time available for education, employment and so on. IUCN also notes the knock on effect that long journeys to collect fuel and water can have on health.[14]

- *Health (MDGs 4, 5 and 6)*: Natural resources underpin health care provision world wide. In many cases there is a direct reliance on wild resources as traditional medicines – WHO estimate that up to 80 per cent of the world population is dependent on these medicines.[15] This is particularly true of the poorest people who can't afford modern drugs and/or don't have access to clinics and doctors. In addition the majority of the world's modern drugs have their origin in natural products. Chapter 2 of this volume explores the links between biodiversity conservation and human health – particularly the role that biodiversity can play it addressing major illnesses that prevail in Africa more than anywhere else.

- *Water and sanitation (MDG 7)*: It is urban as well as rural populations that are dependent on the goods and services that biodiverse resources support. In addition to the direct benefits of food and other goods, conservation of areas such as water catchments, wetlands, swamps, forests and floodplains is vital to sustain delivery of ecosystem services that provide urban centres with services such as water supplies and flood control. In a presentation to an Equator Initiative meeting, Ian Douglas highlighted the use of constructed wetland technologies such as reedbeds as a mechanism for treating effluent in urban areas.[16] The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

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**14. Pisupati and Warner (2003), *ibid***
**15. WHO, IUCN and WWF (1993). *Guidelines on the Conservation of Medicinal Plants*. IUCN, Gland**
**16. 'Water, sanitation, urban poverty and biodiversity.' Paper presented at the Equator Initiative meeting: *Biodiversity After Johannesburg*, London, March 2002**

project will shortly be publishing reports of its investigation of links between biodiversity, ecosystem services and livelihoods, and the extensive scientific work done within the project is expected to help clarify the nature and extent of these linkages.

Mark Malloch Brown, UNDP Administrator, notes that the location of most of the world's biodiversity in some of the poorest countries presents the poor with an opportunity for local economic development.[17] Nowhere is this comparative advantage likely to be more important in meeting the MDGs than in Sub-Saharan Africa, where it is estimated that economic growth of at least 7 per cent per annum will be necessary.[18] Biodiversity-based enterprises have flourished in some parts of Africa including the capture and trade of live animals, trade in bushmeat, skins and other products, game ranching, hunting, medicinal plants and so on (Box 1.1). Any of these products offer potential growth opportunities where the markets, production opportunities and appropriate policy frameworks exist.[19] Markets for environmental services such as watershed protection – also offer an opportunity for rural communities to compete in the global economy,[20] an issue explored in Chapter 4.

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Tourism, (within which nature based tourism is a rapidly growing niche) is a likely source of a significant volume of investment and employment over the coming decade. Tourism is already a key economic sector in many African countries, making vital contributions to GDP, foreign exchange earnings, employment and enterprise opportunities. While some are sceptical of the fit between international tourism and poverty reduction, others are promoting 'pro-poor tourism' arguing that tourism is a great source of local economic development opportunity, given that it offers local employment and spin off business opportunities in poor and often remote areas and it can

17. Mark Malloch Brown on http://www.scidev.net/biodiversity
18. Ashley, C and Elliott, J (2003). *Just Wildlife? Or a Source of Local Development?* Natural Resource Perspectives No 85. Overseas Development Institute, London
19. Ashley and Elliott (2003). *op.cit.*
20. Mark Malloch Brown *op.cit.*

**Box1.1: Income from Wild Resources in Sub-Saharan Africa**

**Cameroon**: Cola nuts comprise between 5-37 per cent of households' cash income.
Ghana: The collection and sale of wild meat realises an income similar to that received by government employees.
**Kenya**: In the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, hunters can earn US$275 per year by selling meat compared to an average per capita income in this area of US$38.
**South Africa**: Trade in medicinal plants in KwaZuluNatal is estimated to be worth R60 million per year, with the overall value of the trade in South Africa worth around R270 million (US$60 million) per year.
**Zimbabwe**: On average, wild resources comprise 35 per cent of total household incomes.

Source: Adapted from Roe, D, Mulliken, T, Milledge, S, Mosha, S, Mremi, J and Grieg-Gran , M (2002). *Making a Living or Making a Killing? Wildlife Trade, Trade Controls and Rural Livelihoods.* IIED and TRAFFIC, London and Cambridge

attract investment in infrastructure and local markets.[21]

Major concerns exist over security of land tenure, rights and access to natural resources, and known trade-offs between conservation and other livelihood opportunities (see for example Chapter 6 on conflicts between biodiversity and agriculture). Despite this, wildlife is clearly seen as an entrepreneurial asset by poor people – the challenge is to enable them to access a greater share of wildlife's potential development benefits.[22]

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Is there really a choice between development and conservation? Is it not possible to imagine poverty reduction leading to a new commitment to providing the economic resources and political will necessary to conserve the global, national and local values of biodiversity? Much biodiversity conservation makes sound economic and political sense at national level – particularly where it is associated with the sustainable supply of ecosystem services and contributions to local and national economies (e.g. through tourism, forest products), though these links are often complex, hard to quantify and therefore poorly understood/reflected in policy processes. However, the emphasis placed by many conservation organisations on preservation of endangered

**21. Ashley, C, Roe, D and Goodwin, H (2001). *Pro-poor Tourism Strategies: Making Tourism Work for the Poor.* IIED, ODI and ICRT, London. www.propoortourism.org.uk**
**22. Ashley and Elliott (2003) *op.cit.***

species, which tends to be the primary focus of northern interest in biodiversity conservation, is actually only one component of the linkages between conservation and development. As IUCN's Chief Scientist Jeff McNeely notes in Chapter 6: 'We need approaches to conserving biodiversity that recognise the dynamism of systems, the dependence of local people on their natural resources, and the need to build redundancy into our systems of protecting biodiversity.'

Maximising the contribution of conservation to achieving the full spectrum of MDGs – particularly those where progress is lagging – requires efforts by both conservation and development communities to:

- Enhance awareness amongst development agencies as to the importance of conservation – not least because of the real contribution that biodiversity can make to poverty reduction and other development objectives (see, for example, Chapters 2 and 3 on health and climate change respectively).
- Acknowledge and build on the comparative advantage that biodiversity offers to many poor countries, exploiting opportunities for income generation and enterprise development.
- Shift the focus of international conservation policy from one that appears to focus primarily on rare and endangered species and the extension of protected areas, towards one that also emphasises the development values of biodiversity and landscape management approaches that can deliver both conservation and development benefits, (See Chapter 6 on sustainable landscapes).
- Acknowledge the opportunity that community-centred biodiversity conservation offers to re-examine rights-based approaches to natural resource management and to support strengthened local governance and decision-making.
- Integrate environmental concerns into poverty reduction activities – and vice versa – so that international goals and

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targets such as the MDGs and the CBD – are mutually reinforcing (see Chapter 9 on mainstreaming poverty and environment).

*We need to go down a path that recognises that for rural people living in poverty, development can't happen without the conservation of biodiversity. The real key to a sustainable future is to remember that our efforts towards poverty reduction and conservation are mutually reinforcing. In other words, our programmes should focus on 'biodiversity for development' not 'biodiversity or development.'* [23]

**23. Mark Malloch Brown *op.cit***