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Conservation with social justice? The role of community conserved areas in achieving the Millennium Development Goals

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I. INTRODUCTION

If the entire planet's population depends on natural resources and systems, why is there such inadequate provision for their maintenance? Why does this get such peripheral attention in the MDGs? Why do the policies of most governments and international agencies give so little support to community systems that have long protected such resources? Everyone depends on natural resources and systems for food, water and many other needs, and for keeping the planet inhabitable.

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More than half of the world's population depends directly on natural resources for part or all of their livelihoods – and this includes a high proportion of the poorest groups. Such dependence on natural resources should, in theory, bring with it a strong stake or interest in sustaining the resources themselves. Indeed, most traditional societies have belief systems and practices that demonstrate such an interest. However, in many areas traditional systems of resource management have broken down in response to processes of globalization, inappropriate policies and malpractices in government and non-government organizations, and a host of threats from wider economic and political forces. The net result of this has been degradation of resources and collapse of ecosystem services.[2]

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Because of their dependence on natural resources, and consequent vulnerability to environmental problems, poor people are most affected by the degradation of natural resources and ecosystems. Furthermore, the standard approach to the conservation and protection of these resources – the establishment of "protected areas" – has in many cases exacerbated the poverty[3] of local people by undermining traditional access and tenure rights. Ironically, this in turn has often stimulated over-exploitation, as local people have prioritized short-term gains, in the face of uncertainty, over longer-term sustainability.

Protected area coverage is a key indicator for MDG7, which is to "ensure environmental sustainability". Unfortunately, this rather simplistic measure of conservation activity, with its focus on quantity alone, ignores the role played by both management and governance regimes (how areas are managed, by whom and for what), and also the land and resource rights of people living in and around them in

2. The recent Millennium Ecosystem Assessment provides scientific evidence and wide consensus on this – see Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board (2005), *Living Beyond Our Means: Natural Assets and Human Well-Being*, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.
3. We define 'poverty' here as deprivation of critical resources; this could include natural resources, financial resources, or capacities needed for people to survive and enhance their well-being. People may be well off without much money if they have secure access to natural and human resources. It should be noted that, throughout this chapter, we are not using poverty to mean the lack of only financial resources.

improving the quality of environment.[4] Furthermore, protected areas are expensive to maintain, particularly when the local support for them is low. International conservation flows of revenue from sources such as the Global Environment Fund (GEF), the World Bank and international NGOs meet only a small percentage of the costs of maintaining protected areas in poor countries.[5] Ongoing discussions within the Convention on Biological Diversity Ad Hoc Working Group on Protected Areas indicate the continued reluctance of high-income countries to provide additional financial resources for protected areas in low- and middle-income countries.

A strong focus on officially gazetted and largely exclusionary protected areas also ignores the role local communities have played and continue to play in conservation of natural resources, and hence their contribution towards environmental sustainability. This excludes many areas that have been designated for protection by indigenous peoples or local communities, as well as those under private land ownership. Collectively, such areas contain an immense range of ecosystems and species, equivalent to – or even exceeding – those contained in official protected areas. Today many thousands of community conserved areas (CCAs) exist across the world, including sacred forests, wetlands, large landscapes, village lakes, catchment forests, river and coastal stretches and marine areas. Conservation and sustainable use in many of these areas is often far longer-established than in government-managed protected areas, yet they are often neglected or not recognized in official conservation systems.

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This chapter seeks to:

- provide a description of the phenomenon of CCAs, with illustrations of how they work;

4. See Roe, D (2003), "The MDGs and natural resources management: reconciling sustainable livelihoods or fuelling a divide?" in Satterthwaite, David (editor), *The MDGs and Local Processes: Hitting the Target or Missing the Point?* IIED, London, for a full discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the MDG7 indicators and the limitations of a protected-area approach.

5. Roe, D, J Hutton, J Elliott, K Chitepo and M Saruchera (2003), "In pursuit of pro-poor conservation: changing narratives or more?" *in Community Empowerment for Conservation*, special edition of Policy Matters, Issue 12, pages 52–53.

- highlight their importance in meeting conservation and poverty reduction objectives, and therefore their links with the MDGs;
- identify continuing challenges and problems;
- discuss the steps that need to be taken to support CCAs and strengthen their role in meeting the MDGs.

Throughout the chapter, examples are given of CCAs from across the world – although there is a heavy focus on CCAs from India, where most of the authors' experience lies.

II. WHAT ARE COMMUNITY CONSERVED AREAS (CCAS)?

Community conserved areas can be loosely described as natural and modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services and cultural values. These include ecosystems under minimum as well as substantial human influence. They are voluntarily conserved by concerned indigenous, mobile and local communities through customary laws or other effective means. Typically, these communities would have substantial dependence on the natural resources contained in the ecosystems, for survival, livelihoods and cultural sustenance. At the same time, many CCAs include "no go" areas, ranging from very small to large stretches of landscape and waterscape within their areas of control.[6]

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Conservation efforts by communities include continuation of traditional conservation and sustainable-use practices, revived and/or modified traditional practices, or completely new initiatives taken up by the communities when faced with external or internal threats to their resources or their access to the resources. Such efforts can be initiated and/or achieved with or without outside support but essential features are that:

6. Pathak, N, S Chowdhury and R Bandekar (in press), *Directory of Community Conserved Areas in India*, Kalpavriksh, Pune, India.

Box 3.1: Village empowerment and management of natural resources: a case of Mendha village

Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra state in India, with areas in the surrounding districts and states, is a region famous for its biodiverse, dry deciduous forests as well as for its tribal communities. In the 1970s the forest-dependent tribal communities in this area faced displacement, and destruction of their forests, because of a government-sponsored hydroelectric project. This led to a strong tribal opposition to the project, which was eventually shelved by the government. United by this opposition, the tribal people in the area started a campaign towards tribal self-rule, declaring their own villages as small republics within the constitution of India. Mendha-Lekha was one of these villages, with a population of 400 tribals called Gonds, where the process towards self-rule gained momentum.

During the 1960s, 1,800 hectares of forest which were traditionally part of the village boundary had been taken over by the government and used for revenue generation through logging by contractors, charcoal making, and bamboo extraction for the paper industry. At the same time, restrictions were imposed on local people's resource use to meet basic needs. An important aspect of the later self-rule movement was reclaiming the local forest and promoting its sustainable use for current and future generations.

In the early 1980s, the village established a *gram sabha* (village assembly), including at least one man and one woman from each family in the village. Decisions in the *gram sabha* are taken unanimously and implemented through oral yet strong social rules. Social ties and sanctions are so strong that the decisions taken by the *gram sabha* prevail over any other official or unofficial orders. All outsiders who intend to carry out any activities in the village or the adjoining forests have to present their plan in the assembly for permission.

The village has various other institutional structures, such as the *van suraksha samittee* (forest protection committee) that deals with forest-related decisions. Villagers have stopped all logging and other commercial exploitation of forests by outside agencies, finding them damaging to the forests. Non-timber forest produce and bamboo are currently extracted (after a decade-long moratorium) jointly by the forest department and the villagers. Villagers follow strict rules and regulations for the exploitation of these resources. Encroachment of forests by the villagers, forest fires and unregulated extraction of non-timber produce, which were significant annual processes, have largely been stopped. Such is the reputation of the forest protection committee that the government forest workers have agreed that forest protection in the village is no longer their job.

SOURCE: Kothari, A, N Pathak and Vania, F (2000), *Where Communities Care: Community Based Wildlife and Ecosystem Management in South Asia,* Kalpavriksh and International Institute of Environment and Development.

- the relevant indigenous peoples, mobile and local communities are "concerned" about the ecosystems and species, and relate to them culturally and/or because of survival and livelihood dependence;
- the outcomes of local management decisions and efforts include the conservation of habitats, species, ecological services and associated cultural values, although the objectives of management may be different (e.g. livelihood, water security, safeguarding of cultural and spiritual places);

- the indigenous, mobile and local communities are the major players in decision-making and implementation, and their institutions have the capacity to enforce regulations – in many situations there may be other stakeholders in collaboration or partnership, but primary decision-making is with the community.

Community initiatives are site-specific in their approach, and varied in their origin. Methods of use, regulation and management of natural resources differ from site to site. Evolution of these methods depends on the local context, such as the nature of the community, history and tradition of conservation, kind of resource and other political and economic factors. In India for instance, CCAs can be broadly classified into three categories based on their origin:

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1. Self-initiated by communities, when facing a resource scarcity, ecological hardships like landslides and drought, or external threats like dams and mining, or initiated by communities generations ago for various reasons but mainly to ensure long-term availability of resources. Such practices in many cases continue to be followed.
2. Initiated with the help of NGOs, to overcome crises of resource availability, to fight social injustice, or to work for biodiversity conservation.
3. Initiated by state-sponsored programmes or individual government officials, where sensitive officials play a crucial role in starting community conservation initiatives.

III. HOW CAN CCAS HELP ACHIEVE THE MDGS?

An analysis of the impacts of CCAs suggests that many of them are helping to achieve the MDGs in different ways. Table 3.1 illustrates their ecological and socioeconomic impacts in South Asia.

a. Eradicating extreme poverty (MDG1)

Given the strong and continuing dependence of most rural and some urban populations on natural resources for their

Table 3.1: Ecological impacts of CCAs in South Asia

Type of initiative	Ecological impact	Examples*
Traditional protection of sacred sites	Protection, often total, of forests, grasslands, tanks	Several thousand in India and Bangladesh, usually small in extent
Traditional protection of sacred species	Protection of key species	Bluebull (*nilgai*), Rhesus macaque, and *Ficus* species, all over India; Blackbuck and other species in Bishnoi community area, Rajasthan, India; *Ficus* species, *Madhuca indica, Prosopis cineraria*, other trees in many countries
Traditional sustainable use practices for habitats	Conservation of habitats such as village tanks, pastures and forests, and wildlife species resident in them	Kokkare Bellur, India; *bugiyals* (pastures) in Indian Himalaya; several marine sites with traditionally regulated fisheries, in India and elsewhere
Traditional sustainable use practices for species	Conservation of wildlife species along with or independent of their habitats	Trees like *Madhuca indica*, harvested with great restraint in many parts of tribal India; hunting restraints for several species
Recent initiatives to revive degraded habitats and use them sustainably	Regeneration of forests, grasslands and other ecosystems, and of species dependent on them	Several million hectares of forest lands in India (joint forest management, or community-initiated) and several hundred thousand hectares in Nepal and Bhutan (community forests)
Recent initiatives to conserve and/or sustainably use relatively intact ecosystems	Conservation of important ecosystems and their resident species, reduction in threats to them	Mendha (Lekha), India; Annapurna Conservation Area, Nepal; Muthurajawela Marsh and Lagoon, Sri Lanka; Eco-development at Periyar Tiger Reserve, India; community wildlife and forest reserves in Nagaland, India
Recent initiatives on sustainable (consumptive and non-consumptive) use of species	Revival of threatened populations of wildlife, e.g. ibex; and reduction in over-exploitation, e.g. of plant and aquatic species	Hushey, Pakistan; Rekawa, Sri Lanka; Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Sanctuary, India
Resistance to destructive commercial forces	Reduction or elimination of factors threatening ecosystems and species	Protection of Indian coastline and marine areas by traditional fisherfolk, from destructive fishing and aquaculture; several movements against big 'development' projects in several countries; movement against mining in Sariska Tiger Reserve, India

* The list of examples is not exhaustive but only a random selection.

SOURCE: Adapted from Kothari, A, N Pathak and F Vania (2000), *Where Communities Care: Community Based Wildlife and Ecosystem Management in South Asia*, Kalpavriksh, Delhi/Pune, and IIED, London.

livelihoods, conservation is central to poverty eradication and sustainable development. Broadly, the following kinds of livelihood security are provided by CCAs:

- continued, strengthened, or new access to ecological services that are critical for survival, such as water,

productive soil and microclimatic stabilization;

- continued, strengthened, or new access to economic opportunities, including natural-resource enterprises, domestic resource needs and employment.

Watershed protection is one of the most common motivations for CCAs. Several dozen villages in the arid state of Rajasthan, in western India, have regenerated and conserved forests in catchment areas of small-scale water-harvesting structures, aware that such measures will provide greater water security than any large engineering interventions. As a result, a previously dried-up river, the Arvari, has come back to life. The increased reliability and amount of water in the Arvari has resulted in a significant increase in local agricultural production. Hundreds of initiatives across India are based on similar motivations – ecological and economic – from the traditional 'safety forests' of Mizoram, to the new 'village forest reserves' in Nagaland.

Community efforts are about not only conservation but also regulated access to the conserved resources. By taking a de facto control over resources where such control is legally not allowed, and demonstrating effective management, community conservation efforts meet the survival needs of some of the poorest people

Many CCAs are based on sustainable use of resources. Community efforts are about not only conservation but also regulated access to the conserved resources. By taking a *de facto* control over resources where such control is legally not allowed, and demonstrating effective management, community conservation efforts meet the survival needs of some of the poorest people. In the Coron Islands of the Philippines, villagers claiming their customary rights have been able to prevent unregulated fishing and encroachment by outsiders. The subsequent regeneration of previously depleted resources has also provided economic benefits for the local people.[7]

Conservation efforts are also providing ecologically sound economic options to local communities. A number of CCAs in different countries have focused on livelihood security based on strengthening traditional resource uses or introducing new ones. Enterprises based on forest or

7. Ferrari, M F and D de Vera (2003), "A 'participatory' or a 'rights-based' approach? Which is best for protected areas and indigenous peoples in the Philippines?", Policy Matters Vol 12, pages 166–170.

aquatic produce, community-based ecotourism, employment in conservation and land/resource management are examples of such initiatives. In Mendha Lekha village (see Box 3.1), villagers have managed to create employment opportunities throughout the year. At Makuleke in South Africa, community-based tourism is providing revenues and continued incentives to conserve a part of the former Kruger National Park recently restituted to local communities from whom it had been taken away during the apartheid regime.[8] In Peru, communities are establishing biocultural heritage sites such as the Potato Park, where indigenous populations are reviving the traditional diversity of potato in its place of origin, and combining this with landscape conservation, enhanced livelihoods, and protection of traditional knowledge.[9] (See Chapter 6 for more details of this park.)

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Perhaps even more importantly, CCAs can often provide an opportunity for empowering hitherto marginalized sections of society. They encourage communities and individuals to participate more confidently in social and political processes, and to confront or resist sources of exploitation. At the Arvari river initiative in western India, for example, the river-basin villages have formed an Arvari *sansad* (parliament), which meets regularly to take decisions on natural resource management, sharing of benefits, inter-village disputes and agricultural strategies – decisions which were previously made at government level.[10] At Saigata village in central India, a forest conservation initiative has been led by a youth of Dalit caste, the most oppressed section of caste-based society in India. His leadership in this has brought him and his caste much greater respect within the community than has any government scheme for social development. In Brazil, indigenous Kayapo communities gained political power by confronting the government about the importance of protecting the boundaries of

8. Steenkamp, C (2000), *The Makuleke Land Claim*, Evaluating Eden Discussion Paper 18, IIED, London.
9. Pathak, N, S Bhatt, T Balasinorwala (2004), *Community Conserved Areas: a Bold Frontier for Conservation*, Briefing Note 5, TILCEPA, CEESP-WCPA (IUCN), CMWG, CENESTA, Iran.
10. Kulhari, O P et al. (2003), *Arvari Catchment Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Substate site for the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, India*, Tarun Bharat Sangh, Alwar, Rajasthan.

Xingu National Park.[11] Communities often see such political empowerment in itself as a strong motivation for CCAs.[12]

b. Promoting gender equity (MDG3)

In many parts of the world, women are at the forefront of conservation initiatives. The famous Chipko movement of the Indian Himalaya was led by village women concerned about the destruction of their livelihood security by deforestation. A number of forest protection committees or natural resource management committees across India (such as many community forestry initiatives in Orissa state) are all-women, or have significant female leadership. Numerous studies highlight that women suffer most when resources are degraded.[13] Women have to walk much longer distances, and face many hostile situations (for example, when confronted with government officials in charge of forests), to meet everyday biomass requirements. Since they are often the primary resource collectors, longer hours spent in collection affects health, child and family care. The situation is much worse for single-woman households. Absolute shortages of biomass, nutritious wild foods, medicinal plants, and other survival resources, therefore adds to the marginalization and impoverishment of women, and with them of children, livestock, the elderly and other dependants.

In many instances women, out of sheer desperation at the degradation of survival resources, have been forced to take natural resource management into their own hands. Such struggles eventually lead towards improved status for women in the society in general

Community conservation efforts, where they have taken into account these requirements, have helped improve the status of women. In many instances women, out of sheer desperation at the degradation of survival resources, have been forced to take natural resource management into their own hands. Such struggles eventually lead towards improved status for women in the society in general. In the case of the Chipko movement, for instance, the need to protect forests from outside contractors as well as from their

11. Brockington, D and J Igoe (2005), *Anthropology, Conservation, Protected Areas and Identity Politics*. Unpublished manuscript.
12. Kothari, A, N Pathak and F Vania (2000), *Where Communities Care: Community Based Wildlife and Ecosystem Management in South Asia*, Kalpavriksh, Delhi/Pune, and IIED, London.
13. See, for example, IIED (2002), *Drawers of Water II*, IIED, London.

own menfolk, contributed significantly to increased influence for women in village matters.

Externally aided or motivated programmes often insist on greater involvement of women in decision-making. Such external interventions also help to improve the status of women. The legislation that facilitates the Namibian community conservancy movement, for example, emphasizes the representation of women on conservancy committees, while an NGO initiative has helped to formalize their roles as "community resource monitors", so greatly enhancing their participation in decision-making on natural resource management.

c. Ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG7)

As with the protected areas that are the focus of MDG7, CCAs help to conserve critical ecosystems and threatened species, maintain essential ecosystem functions including water security, and provide important gene pools for evolutionary and human uses. They do this following social sanctions, locally adopted and functional rules and regulations. Often these sanctions are also deeply associated with the beliefs, practices, and livelihood strategies of the communities that manage them.

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CCAs can provide corridors and linkages for animal and gene movement, including often between two or more officially protected areas. In the Himalayan state of Uttaranchal in India, two critical protected areas (the Nanda Devi National Park and Biosphere Reserve, and the Askot Sanctuary) are linked by hundreds of square kilometres of community forest land managed under the traditional *van panchayat* (village council) system.[14] Together they form a contiguous forest swathe of almost 300,000 hectares (3,000 square kilometres), which would make it one of India's biggest protected areas if the village forests were recognized as equivalent to official protected areas.

14. Foundation for Ecological Security (2003), *A Biodiversity Log and Strategy Input Document for the Gori River Basin, Western Himalayan Ecoregion, Uttarancha*, a substate process under the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan India, FES, Munsiari, Uttaranchal.

Box 3.2: Community-based management initiatives in Madagascar

There has been dramatic environmental change in Madagascar since the arrival of humans around 2,000 years ago, including significant loss of forests, changes in hydrology, sedimentation of lakes and rivers and loss of Madagascar's unusual endemic species. Many factors probably contributed to these changes, including desertification of some parts of the island just before human arrival, and also land conversion for agriculture.

Despite the apparent spiral of degradation, there are many examples of local initiatives and traditions where those relying on valued natural resources have developed institutions and rules to control use and maintain resources. For example, at the Manambolomaty lakes, a closed season is respected to allow fish stocks to recover during the spawning season, which is dictated each year by a traditional leader known as the *tompon-drano* or 'lord of the water'. In the southeast of the country it is forbidden to cut down the hovao tree, *Dilobeia thouarsii* in the rainforest because the nuts provide a valued source of cooking oil. In the southwest, the Bara people protect Zombitse and Vohibasia forests as a pasture area for their cattle, and also to hide cattle from and for cattle thieves.

There are also many natural areas of cultural and spiritual importance for the Malagasy people that are protected through traditional management. Angavo is one of the many sacred forests in the south of Madagascar where spiny forest covering around 3,000 hectares is protected from deforestation, fire and any wood extraction. Many forests throughout Madagascar are protected by local customs because they contain tombs or ritual sites, although the areas protected are usually small, for example up to 100 hectares. In the west of Madagascar, there are sacred lakes where nets and boats are prohibited. A council of elders, often in collaboration with a traditional leader such as the head of a local royal family, or *mpanjaka*, reinforces the rules and decides on any sanctions after these have been agreed at a meeting of the community. Although there are many cases of continued respect for such traditional values and management, there are many more cases in which societal changes and outside pressures have undermined traditional practices, which are now remembered as something of the past.

Recent government policies have explicitly aimed to reinforce community management of natural resources through the GELOSE (*Gestion Localisée Securisée,* or Secure Local Management) law passed in 1996 that enables communities to sign a contract with the state to manage specific natural resources on their lands. The contract, or *cahier de charge*, defines management objectives, rules and quotas. As of January 2005, almost 500 contracts had been signed, covering around 500,000 hectares. These contracts reinforce and legalize traditional forms of management, and show great promise for facilitating sustainable resource management, especially in a country where government agencies are generally regarded as under-funded, demotivated and corrupt.

SOURCE: Joanna Durbin, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, USA and Jersey (Channel Islands).

CCAs can thus be a powerful tool for enhancing a country's network of formal protected areas – although they are not often given this level of recognition. One exception to this is Madagascar (Box 3.2). At the IUCN World Parks Congress in 2003, the President of Madagascar, Marc Ravalomanana, committed his country to tripling its land area under protection, from 1.7 million to 6 million hectares (some 10 per cent of the land area) in the next five years. But rather than do this through conventional models alone, the country's wildlife agency has drawn up plans to use a range

of governance types for protected areas, including a large number of CCAs, and to 'democratize' the governance of protected areas in general.[15]

The conventional protected area approach to natural resource management has undoubtedly generated significant social, economic and environmental benefits. However, protected areas have also extracted a huge cost. In some cases, protected areas have failed to sustain the wildlife populations they were designed to protect, while, at the same time, having a negative impact on the food security, livelihoods and cultures of local people.[16] In general, the distribution of costs and benefits in relation to conventional protected areas has been highly inequitable, with local people bearing the brunt of the costs and reaping few of the benefits. CCAs help to provide a much closer link between the costs that communities pay towards achieving conservation and the benefits that they receive from such conservation – in the form of cultural and livelihood security, and enterprise opportunities.

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CCAs also help to strengthen the links between agricultural biodiversity and wildlife, providing larger land/waterscape-level integration. The example of the Potato Park mentioned above is a prime one, where different elements of the landscape are being integrated into a seamless conservation unit, encompassing both agricultural and wild biodiversity, and of course human cultures related to these.

CCAs are often built on sophisticated ecological knowledge systems, elements of which have far wider positive use. This local knowledge in many cases has been used to control smuggling of forest resources and poaching of wild animals. For example, in Ranapur forest range in Orissa state in India, timber smuggling was a major source of livelihood until a few years ago. Now these same communities are protecting the forests within the territory of their villages, and past experience with timber extraction and sale helps them to

15. Guy Suzon Ramagason, Director General, ANGAP (National Parks), Madagascar, personal communication, 2005.
16. Ghimire, K and M Pimbert (1997), *Social Change and Conservation*, Earthscan, London.

keep the smugglers under control. Often, the combination of traditional and modern knowledge has helped to achieve more effective conservation. In the Alto Fragua-Indiwasi National Park of Colombia (see Box 3.3), established at the request of the Ingano indigenous people, zoning and management planning have combined the ecological knowledge base of the local people with scientific inventories by the Von Humboldt Institute and GIS-based mapping by the National University.[17]

Box 3.3: Alto Fragua-Indiwasi National Park (Colombia)

The Alto Fragua-Indiwasi National Park was created in February 2002, after negotiations between the Colombian government, the Association of Indigenous Ingano Councils and the Amazon Conservation Team, an environmental NGO. The park is located on the piedmont of the Colombian Amazon on the headwaters of the Fragua River, part of a region with the highest biodiversity in the country. The site covers different Andean ecosystems including the highly endangered humid sub-Andean forests, and includes endemic species such as the spectacled bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*), and sacred sites of unique cultural value.

This area, called 'House of the Sun' in the Ingano language, is a sacred place for indigenous communities. This is one of the reasons why traditional authorities have insisted that the area's management should be entrusted to them. Although several protected areas of Colombia share management responsibilities with indigenous and local communities, the creation of Indiwasi National Park represents an historic precedent for the indigenous people of Colombia. For the first time, an indigenous community is the principal actor in the design and management of a protected area fully recognized by the state.

SOURCE: Oviedo, G (2005), "The Alto Fragua-Indiwasi National Park of Colombia: challenges and lessons" in Lockwood, Michael, Graeme Worboys, Terry De Lacy and Ashish Kothari (compilers and editors), *Managing the World's Protected Areas*, IUCN – World Conservation Union, Gland (in press).

Indigenous, mobile and local communities in many areas have been able to resist existing or impending commercial and industrial threats. The Coron Island example from the Philippines, mentioned above, is typical of such initiatives. In Nigeria, the Ekuri community has warded off threatened timber logging, by forming the Ekuri Initiative and declaring the ancestral forests a community conserved area.[18] Several CCAs in South America and India have managed to stave off mining, logging or other threats.

17. Oviedo, G (2005), "The Alto Fragua-Indiwasi National Park of Colombia: challenges and lessons" in Lockwood, Michael, Graeme Worboys, Terry De Lacy and Ashish Kothari (editors and compilers), *Managing the World's Protected Areas*, IUCN – World Conservation Union, Gland (in press).
18. Ogar, Chief Edwin (2005), "Ekuri community requests for community conserved area" in Lockwood, et al., op.cit.

d. Sustaining cultural diversity and security

Culture is an important driver of CCAs, as many of them are sacred sites, conserved for religious and spiritual purposes. In Ghana, sacred forest groves are patches of forest where the royal members of a particular village are buried. They are protected out of respect for the dead and belief the ancestral spirits live there. In other areas, forest is protected because it provides habitat for certain wildlife species considered to be sacred or taboo. The Boabem-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana is protected because it is home to Colobus and Mona monkeys, considered sacred by the residents of Boaben and Fiema villages.[19]

Indirectly, but as effectively, CCAs often become a tool for the protection of cultural diversity. In keeping out destructive external forces of 'development', or in providing a forum for self-assertion, they help to protect languages, traditions, knowledge and practices that may otherwise be threatened. They may even help to revive pride in local cultures which are otherwise beginning to be considered 'primitive' and 'outmoded' not only by outsiders but also by community members themselves. This is the case with several indigenous people's initiatives to conserve cultural and natural landscapes in South and North America, and Australia. In Mendha-Lekha village of central India (see Box 3.1), revival of *adivasi* (tribal) self-identity and associated practices such as the *ghotul* (hostel for unmarried youth, earlier discouraged by British colonialists as being 'immoral') have been linked to the CCA effort, and have helped to spread similar cultural revival in neighbouring villages.[20]

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19. IIED (1994), *Whose Eden?*, IIED, London.
20. Pathak, N and V Gour-Broome (2001), *Tribal Self-Rule and Natural Resource Management: Community Based Conservation at Mendha-Lekha, Maharashtra, India.* Kalpavriksh, Delhi/Pune, and IIED, London.

IV. THE CHALLENGE

The discussion above highlights the role that CCAs can play in achieving the MDGs. It is not claimed here that all CCAs have achieved all the above-mentioned goals, or that their functioning is always transparent and equitable. However, the examples illustrate that there are many CCAs that have achieved one or more of these goals and that local systems have great potential that is currently unrecognized. Nevertheless, CCAs do face a number of critical challenges to their continued existence and growth, as well as having some limitations in what they can achieve.

Because of a general lack of recognition at the national and international level of the values of CCAs, alternative development models continue to be imposed on local communities, undermining conservation efforts. A similar challenge is posed by the dominant intellectual and belief systems which communities managing CCAs may not have the political power to challenge. Wider market forces and "modern" lifestyles have deeply penetrated local economies, increasing their dependence on the "outside", as well as changing the perspectives and aspirations of the youth. Externally driven changes in value systems, including neoliberal economics and science-based education models, are sweeping aside the knowledge systems that formed the basis for social sanctions. Young people in some communities grow up knowing more about the world outside than about what is happening within the community. They subsequently become more and more isolated from local values, and drift away, threatening the human and institutional base of the local CCA.

Externally driven changes in value systems, including neoliberal economics and science-based education models, are sweeping aside the knowledge systems that formed the basis for social sanctions

Lack of government recognition means that planning processes for conservation and development often do not take account of – and serve to undermine – CCAs. Such planning needs to be done with local consultation, transparent public hearings, and clearly taking into account what the communities would or would not desire for their area. Even more alarmingly, many CCAs have suffered through the undermining of traditional institutions by

centralized political systems. National and local governments have taken over most of the functions and powers that communities traditionally enjoyed. Even well-intentioned government policies, aiming to support conservation, involve taking over functions and powers, or establishing uniform and parallel institutional bodies based on representative politics. This is done instead of facilitating and improving upon existing systems, which often do have much scope for improvement. In many parts of Asia for example, there is a strong tradition of local management of small irrigation reservoirs that also support large populations of birds and other animals. These reservoirs – together with sacred forests or landscapes – have been declared as state-run protected areas, breaking down the intricate community management systems and generating resentment among the surrounding populations.[21] A better approach would have been to understand the weaknesses and strengths of the community institutions, and then help to develop them.

Even well-intentioned government policies, aiming to support conservation, involve taking over functions and powers, or establishing uniform and parallel institutional bodies based on representative politics

CCAs often contain valuable renewable and non-renewable resources, such as timber, fauna and minerals. As a result, they are subject to extreme pressure from developers – from both the private sector and government – eager to exploit those resources. They also suffer illegal incursions by outsiders, and are not easily protected because of their lack of recognition and support. Communities themselves are often highly stratified, and decisions may be taken by the dominant sections of the society (such as men, big landowners, "upper caste" communities), without consideration of the impacts on the less privileged sections. Party or power politics also takes its toll on traditional systems of justice and conflict resolution. Party politics can make cohesive community action very difficult. Aside from internal divisions, many communities also lack the capacity for managing CCAs – in terms of the required administrative, accounting and marketing skills – and are heavily dependent on external support.

21. Pandey, D N (2000), "Sacred water and sanctified vegetation: tanks and trees in India", paper presented at the conference of the International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP), in the Panel "Constituting the Riparian Commons", Bloomington, Indiana, USA, 31 May – 4 June.

These and other challenges have to be faced jointly by communities and others, including formal conservation agencies and NGOs. However, it is important to note that the above-mentioned factors are constraints that need to be kept in mind while extending support to CCAs, and not intractable situations that would make conservation impossible. Indeed these constraints are beginning to be dealt with in countries where CCAs are recognized in one form or another (as shown in some of the examples presented in the boxes in this chapter). Documentation and awareness about such initiatives, previously neglected, are gradually increasing in many countries, and could eventually lead towards greater support for CCAs.

V. ENHANCING THE ROLE OF CCAS IN ACHIEVING THE MDGS

Ensuring that the protected area indicator for MDG7 contributes to poverty reduction rather than exacerbating poverty implies a need for different approaches to resource conservation that provide benefits for poor people and meet social justice objectives.[22] CCAs provide crucial lessons in participatory governance of protected areas – lessons that are already being used in many countries to resolve previously intractable conflicts between official conservation agencies and local rights holders and stakeholders. It is clear that there is no "one size fits all" solution: site-specific situations and circumstances need site-specific rules, regulations and institutions. This points towards a system of conservation in which decisions about who manages the resources, and how and why, depend on the local situation rather than uniform national legal requirements.

It is clear that there is no "one size fits all" solution: site-specific situations and circumstances need site-specific rules, regulations and institutions

Many communities do not have protection or conservation of biodiversity as the main motive for establishing CCAs – although it is a key outcome. Indeed, most CCAs would relate to a range of community motivations and needs, including continued access to survival and livelihood resources, cultural importance, political empowerment and

22. Roe 2003, op. cit.

others. Conservation is a part of livelihood insurance but it is deeply rooted with other social dynamics as well. On one hand, community conservation initiatives may actually lead to social reforms (equity and empowerment), while, on the other, efforts to achieve social reform could lead to conservation of natural resources. It is essential to understand that conservation cannot be seen in isolation from the other social, economic and political processes of the community. Regardless of the motivation for establishing a CCA, a number of key factors stand out as being major determinants of its success of failure.

Tenurial security. For a community to start conserving its natural resources, it needs to have a sense of belonging or custodianship towards the resources. This develops through economic, cultural or religious interaction and association with these resources. The most successful community conservation initiatives are where the communities have legal ownership of the area (such as in Nagaland state in India, see Box 3.4), tenurial security through rights over resources, or *de facto* control over the resources (such as in Mendha-Lekha, see Box 3.1).

Equity and transparency in decision-making. The equal representation of all sections of society in information-sharing, and a transparent and impartial process of decision-making, are essential features of successful and sustained community initiatives. Unequal access to funds or power, and social inequities of other kinds, often threaten or undermine conservation initiatives. Successful community initiatives therefore have an open system of decision-making and accounting. Decisions are taken with the involvement of as many of the members of the community as possible, and accounts are regularly disclosed to the village council. It is only through such open processes that some CCA initiatives have been able to provide answers to some very critical and troubling issues (e.g. encroachments, forest fires, illegal use of resources, poaching, smuggling of valuable timber, and others). However, there are still many community institutions that could do with external

Box 3.4: Community conservation in Nagaland state, India

Nagaland state of India, bordering Burma, is occupied by about 15 different tribal communities – each culturally and geographically distinct. Unlike other parts of India, nearly 90 per cent of the land is under community ownership and 85 per cent is still under forest cover. Originally hunter-gatherers, the tribal peoples have developed an intricate land-use system, with land distributed between shifting cultivation (on communally owned land), settled agriculture (on privately owned land) and forest reserves (on land that can be owned by family, clan or community), to provide food, fruit, fuel and timber. Wild meat is an integral part of tribal culture here, and most families own guns and go hunting nearly every day. Easy availability of guns (because of a few decades of insurgency in the state) and non-implementation of wildlife protection laws led to rampant hunting. Increasing population and heavy dependence on timber and forest produce for livelihood has affected forest quality.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, water resources began to dry up, and there were declines in the availability of wild vegetables and animals. In 1988, the Khonoma Village Council in Kohia district declared 20 square kilometres of forest and grassland as the Khonoma Nature Conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary. Rules were formulated to ban hunting (not only here but over the whole of Khonoma's territory of 135 square kilometres), to stop all resource uses in the sanctuary area, and to allow only a few benign uses in the surrounding buffer area. A trust was set up for management. A proposal is currently under discussion to extend the sanctuary area to include some of the adjoining forest. The villagers are also in discussions with neighbouring villages, to conserve 200 square kilometres of unique habitat, with several endemic and threatened species.

The village council of Sendenui also resolved to set aside an area of about 10 square kilometres, after discussions initiated by the village youth concerning declining populations of wild animals. The village has issued its own wildlife protection act, with rules and regulations for the management of the sanctuary. In 1983, the Luzaphuhu village students' union resolved to conserve 5 square kilometres of forest land above the village as a watershed. In 1990, they declared another 2.5 square kilometres as a wildlife reserve, in which hunting is strictly prohibited. Similarly, Kikruma village is regenerating and protecting 70 hectares (0.7 square kilometres). Several villages centred on Runguzu are protecting perhaps several thousand hectares of forest, and six villages led by Chizami are reviving traditional protection of a few hundred hectares. Village youth associations have put up notices along many roads in the state, warning that the area is under strict protection. Different villages have different ways of dealing with violations, a simple fine being the most common. Some are more sophisticated, with a higher fine for more endangered species.

SOURCE: Pathak, N (2005), *Nagaland Field Visit Report*, Kalpavriksh, Pune.

intervention or internal mobilization to rise above social inequities and local politics. Constant interaction with outsiders and regular discussions within the village make people more conscious and aware, which in turn helps them in taking informed decisions.

Local leadership. In most successful community initiatives, local leaders play a crucial role. These leaders are often apolitical and inclined to focus on the wider social good. They may not be traditional or political leaders but touch the soul of the community. Their achievements can come at

enormous personal and family cost, as they may have to spend large amounts of time leading an initiative, at the cost of personal and family responsibilities. Even in areas where conservation is more process-driven than individual-driven, motivation largely comes from individual leaders. Many communities find it difficult to find a second line of leadership, which would have similar dynamism and charisma. In supporting community action it is important to identify such leaders and facilitate their work (without cooption, or negatively affecting the local power dynamics), and create conditions within the community to help build up a second line of leadership. It is important that the leadership and motivation comes from within the community rather than from external sources, as is seen in many project-oriented initiatives. In such cases the initiative ends with the project.

Importance of partnerships. In many CCAs, villagers have indicated and often demanded that management of resources be a joint activity of the communities and the government officials or NGOs. Here, communities realize the difficulty of managing natural resources on their own, given the internal and external social dynamics, political and commercial pressures. What communities expect is that the partner in joint management should play an active but equal role – a facilitator rather than a dominating ruler or enforcer. External agencies are also expected to play a critical role at discussion forums, when they help to bring in wider perspectives that are not so easily understood by villagers with limited access to outside information.

What communities expect is that the partner in joint management should play an active but equal role – a facilitator rather than a dominating ruler or enforcer

In the last few years there has been considerable debate and discussion on mechanisms for recognizing and supporting CCAs. Nationally, grassroots organizations and indigenous and local people are fighting for greater recognition of their conservation efforts, and international networks of such individuals and institutions are demanding the same from international treaties and commitments. Of particular importance has been the work of IUCN's Theme on Indigenous and Local Communities, Protected Areas, and

Equity (TILCEPA), and Collaborative Management Working Group (CMWG), which have been promoting the recognition and spread of co-management and CCA approaches. As a result, issues of good governance, the application of governance types to protected areas, the recognition of CCAs, and other related aspects were extensively discussed at the 2003 World Parks Congress, and at the 2004 Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The recommendations of the World Parks Congress [23] included the following for national governments:

- make an effort to promote a process for recognizing, enlisting, evaluating and delisting CCAs – although the participants of these processes should be multisectoral, including members of local communities;
- recognize and promote CCAs as a legitimate form of biodiversity conservation, and, where communities so choose, include them within national systems of protected areas, through appropriate changes in legal and policy regimes;
- ensure that official policies, guidelines and principles recognize diverse local (formal or informal) arrangements developed by communities on their own or in collaboration with other actors, for the management of CCAs;
- facilitate the continuation of existing CCAs, and their spread to other sites, through a range of measures including, financial, technical, human, information, research, public endorsement, capacity-building and other resources or incentives that are considered appropriate by the communities concerned, as well as the restitution of traditional and customary rights;
- acknowledge that it may be appropriate for some existing protected areas to be managed as CCAs, including the transfer of management of such areas to relevant communities;

23. http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/wpc2003.

- provide protection to CCAs against external threats – the nature of such support should be agreed in full consultation with the concerned communities;
- respect the sanctity and importance of CCAs in all operations that could affect such sites or the relevant communities, and give particular attention to applying the principles of prior informed consent, participatory environmental impact assessments, and other measures in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity;
- support self-monitoring and evaluation of CCAs by the relevant communities, and participatory monitoring and evaluation by outside agencies or actors; and
- provide impartial information when and where needed and/or asked for by the relevant communities.

The Convention on Biological Diversity Programme of Work on Protected Areas (which, importantly, is legally binding on governments that are party to the Convention) incorporates CCAs in several sections.[24] Most critical is Element 2 on "Equity, governance, participation, and benefit-sharing", which lays down targets and activities for establishing the rights, participation and benefits of indigenous and local communities in the full range of activities relating to protected areas. Countries are now legally bound to these targets. Of special relevance here are the sections that require countries to recognize and support CCAs, provide them legal backing within their national systems of protected areas, and link them to goals of poverty reduction. Donor agencies, which are appealed to by conservation organizations for help in expanding and securing the global protected area network, would do well to note these requirements and target their interventions at CCAs. In some cases this can be achieved through support to enlightened national governments (such as that of Madagascar), and in others though

Of special relevance are the sections of the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas that require countries to recognize and support CCAs, provide them legal backing within their national systems of protected areas, and link them to goals of poverty reduction

24. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2004), *Programme of Work on Protected Areas* (CBD Programmes of Work), Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal.

concerned civil society and other organizations (including the members of TILCEPA, as mentioned above).

VI. CONCLUSION

The first volume in this series of IIED booklets on the MDGs highlights the weakness in the indicators associated with MDG7 – in terms of both their coverage of the drivers of environmental sustainability, and their one-dimensionality – and also the lack of linkages between the eight goals, specifically the impact that environmental issues have on achievement of the other goals.[25] Furthermore, the targets-driven approach of the goals pays no attention to the process by which those targets are achieved. The governance of natural resources – particularly the rights, roles and responsibilities of different actors – is critical to delivering on poverty reduction and social justice objectives.

CCAs appear to be a valuable mechanism both for expanding the scope of the MDG7 indicators and for making linkages between environmental sustainability and human well-being. CCAs cover a wide range of ecosystem types – far more than the forest emphasis of MDG7. Through their focus on sustainable livelihoods, human rights and democracy, CCAs can also make clear contributions to the many dimensions of poverty articulated by the MDGs. However, ensuring this contribution does require concerted action at local, national and international levels, to increase the recognition of CCAs. Very considerable steps have been taken in international policy processes in the last two years. Action is now needed at the national level to ensure that these valuable local institutions can fulfil their potential and deliver on conservation with social justice.

25. Roe 2003, op. cit.