

Pro-poor conservation: the elusive win-win for conservation and poverty reduction?

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Abstract. Biodiversity plays a major and very often critical role in the livelihoods of a high proportion of the world's population. And yet, development agencies have often undervalued the potential role that biodiversity conservation can play in poverty reduction, while conservation organisations have generally viewed poverty concerns as outside their core business. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) recently conducted an examination of the linkages between wildlife and poverty and reviewed the scope for reducing poverty through wildlife-based interventions. Four themes are addressed: community based wildlife management, pro-poor wildlife tourism, sustainable 'bushmeat'¹ management and pro-poor conservation. This paper summarises the key findings of that study and then explores in depth one of the ways forward identified by the study - "pro-poor conservation" - and the issues and challenges it raises.

Linking conservation and poverty reduction

Conservation and poverty reduction— a growing divide?

Biodiversity plays a major and very often critical role in the livelihoods of a high proportion of the world's population: 1.6 billion people rely on forest resources for all or part of their livelihoods² while 150 million poor people count wildlife as a valuable livelihood asset.³ It is an unfortunate fact however, that some traditional approaches to conservation have exacerbated poverty.⁴ In particular, the protected area approach, while generating significant social, economic and environmental benefits at the national and international level, has in many cases had a negative impact on the food security, livelihoods and cultures of local people.⁵ Designation of many protected areas has been associated with forced displacement and loss of access to natural resources for the people living in and around them, with no or inadequate compensation.⁶ Moreover, conservation activities have, in the large part, reflected Northern priorities

towards rare or endangered species and habitats rather than species that are valued by local people for food, medicines or cultural significance. Local values remain poorly documented and represented in the global political arena.⁷

The growing realisation of the limitations of state-run protected areas, the need to maintain 'connectivity' and corridors between protected areas, and the need to address local peoples' concerns and aspirations brought about a shift in international conservation policy during the 1980s and 90s towards community-based conservation. However, in recent years the conservation literature has documented a growing criticism of this approach and advocated a return to more traditional, protectionist approaches.⁸ It is clear that neither the protectionist approach, driven by global conservation values, nor the community-based approach, with its focus on local rights, is without its limitations – and its merits. Yet, two potentially useful tools for conservation are increasingly being presented in

terms of an ideology in which human rights are pitted against the rights of nature. Nature “loses out” when humans “win” and there are “pro-nature” and “pro-people” camps. More broadly, development agencies have often undervalued the potential role that biodiversity conservation can play in poverty reduction – as evidenced by the decreasing emphasis on environment in the project portfolios of many donors



Picture 1. Oyster fishermen in Konkouati-Douli National Park (Congo Brazzaville). (Courtesy Christian Chatelain)

and its limited integration into national poverty reduction strategies.⁹ On the other hand conservation organisations have generally viewed poverty concerns as outside their core business.

2. Why link conservation and poverty reduction?

There are both practical and moral arguments for addressing the conservation-development divide:

- **Investing in conservation can contribute to poverty reduction:** Biodiversity provides a wide range of *goods* (food, fuel, fodder, medicines, building materials etc) and *services* (watersheds, carbon sequestration,

soil fertility, spiritual and cultural well-being etc) as well as opportunities for income generation through *jobs* and small *enterprises* (e.g., in forestry, tourism, wildlife trade, traditional medicines and so on). Moreover, numerous studies have found that it is often the poorest people and households that are most dependent on these resources.¹⁰ Of the 1.2 billion people estimated to live on less than \$1/day, 70 per cent live in rural areas with a high dependence on natural resources for all or part of their livelihoods.¹¹ This means that the impacts arising from the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services fall most heavily upon them. The critical role of biodiversity was recognised at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and conservation is prioritised within the WSSD Plan of Implementation. However, while it is agreed that resource conservation is critical to poverty reduction, *how* that happens and *what* is conserved requires a complex set of trade-offs.

- **Addressing poverty concerns can result in increased support for conservation:** 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.
- **Poverty reduction is an international imperative.** The United Nations Millennium Development Goals include a clear target of halving the number of people (currently 1.2 billion - or one-fifth of the world's population) living in absolute poverty by the year 2015. Achieving this target

requires concerted action by all sectors of society. Given the role that biodiversity plays in supporting the livelihoods of millions of poor people, the conservation community has a particular potential to contribute to this international goal.

3. *Scope of this paper*

In 2002, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) conducted an examination of the linkages between wildlife and poverty and reviewed the scope for reducing poverty through wildlife-based interventions. This paper summarises the key findings of that study and then explores in depth one of the ways forward identified by the study - "pro-poor conservation" - and the issues and challenges it raises.

Findings from the DFID Wildlife and Poverty Study

1. *What is the known extent of wildlife-poverty linkages?*

A significant number of poor people - as many as 150 million (one-eighth of the world's poorest) - depend on wildlife for livelihood and food security.¹²

We call upon all stakeholders to pave the way for greater involvement of communities in creating a global world of peace, harmony and dignity.

Poor people in remote, marginal or forested areas have limited livelihood opportunities. For many, a significant proportion of their food, medicines, fuel and building materials

is hunted or collected from the wild, particularly in times of stress, such as drought. This will continue to be the case even for those whose aspirations lie in creating and accessing opportunities to reduce their dependence on wild resources.

Poor people use wild resources to build and diversify their livelihoods, whether through trading (e.g. honey), supplying inputs (e.g. handicrafts to the tourism industry), or formal and informal employment (e.g. in the tourism industry). Wild resources are often key to local cultural values and tradition and contribute to local and wider environmental sustainability. But poor people also bear the brunt of the costs of living with wildlife, particularly in terms of threat to lives and livelihoods (e.g. through crop destruction, disease risks and livestock predation). Conservation initiatives, in delivering the "international public good" value of wildlife, also often come at the expense of poor peoples' livelihoods; both directly in terms of unfair distribution of net benefit flow from conservation and indirectly from the opportunity cost of land uses foregone.

The DFID study identifies four major challenges for those aiming to bring about both poverty reduction and sustainable wildlife use. These are to:

- ensure that the poor, as compared with government and the private sector, capture a fair share of the economic and livelihood benefits of wildlife, particularly those from tourism;
- ensure that where poor people depend on wild resources, these are not overexploited at the local level, given that wildlife is a common pool resource and requires collective action to ensure its sustainable management;
- address the role of wildlife as an international public good, where the challenges are to ensure that the costs of supplying wildlife as an international public good are not borne excessively by the poor, that it is not under-emphasised at national policy

level, and that the supranational governance and funding mechanisms are in place to ensure that it is not 'under-supplied';

- enable effective collective action, recognising that the creation of new civil society structures to enable effective collective management tends to be expensive, time consuming and difficult.

The DFID study explores the scope for wildlife-based approaches to contribute to poverty reduction through four themes:

- Pro-poor wildlife tourism,
- Community based wildlife management,
- Sustainable 'bushmeat' management, and
- Pro-poor conservation.

The lack of quantitative data makes it hard to estimate the scale of poverty impact through each of these four themes. From the findings, it is unlikely that the scale of potential impact would make wildlife-based interventions in general a priority over, say, those to support agriculture-based livelihoods. However, the scale of actual and potential impact is likely to be high enough to warrant intervention for specific groups of poor people, notably forest dwellers; people living adjacent to protected areas; those in remote wildlife-rich areas; and those in high tourism potential countries. The fact that wildlife is intimately linked into the livelihoods of millions of poor people, and that the potential for using wildlife-related approaches to enhance livelihoods appears to exist, should be reason enough to ensure that key policy processes, including participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) and poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), take wildlife into account.

2. Pro-poor wildlife tourism

Currently the scope for wildlife-based poverty reduction through growth and local economic development is underestimated. Donors and policy makers tend to assume that the only development option for the poor is to move as rapidly as possible away from dependence on wild resources. As wildlife scarcity increases globally, so the intrinsic and commercial value of remaining reserves increases, thus increasing the opportunities for the poor to build viable wildlife-based livelihood strategies.

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, and tourism in developing countries is growing twice as fast as that in the rest of the world.¹³ Wildlife tourism presents a major source of future comparative advantage for some poor countries, including many in southern and eastern Africa. However, with the exception of community-based tourism, the bulk of tourism still marginalises poor people. The challenge is to test and apply mechanisms for increasing the share of the poor in tourism value added through 'pro-poor tourism', particularly in terms of creating the incentives and opportunities for improved private sector participation contribution to poverty reduction.¹⁴ These approaches are fairly new, but the evidence to date indicates that they may offer significant potential for impact on poverty, and should be supported.¹⁵

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Tourism also offers important insights into opportunities for increasing private sector contributions to poverty reduction.¹⁶ Voluntary codes of conduct, social labelling schemes and certification are

being pursued by tourism associations in several developing countries while the international tourism bodies and other stakeholders discuss the scope for improving international frameworks and standards for improved corporate responsibility in the tourism sector.

3. Community-Based Wildlife Management

The livelihood impact of many Community-Based Wildlife Management (CBWM) initiatives has been disappointing, particularly in terms of delivering economic benefits to the household level. One of the reasons for this is the fact that many CBWM initiatives have been led or funded by organizations primarily in pursuit of conservation objectives. There is evidence,

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however, that CBWM has brought significant employment and income generating opportunities to some remote communities, notably

through wildlife tourism, for example at household level in Namibia and at district level in Zimbabwe.¹⁷ Evidence also shows that CBWM initiatives have delivered significant empowerment and governance impacts and improved well-being – communities place a high value on having control over their wildlife resources.¹⁸ By contrast there are few examples of successful community-based bushmeat management initiatives.

CBWM faces significant constraints, including high barriers to entry for communities and high transaction costs for donors. The extent to which development-led CBWM, designed to deliver livelihood benefits at household level, can help trigger broader rural develop-

ment, particularly for the remote poor, is not yet clear.¹⁹ This warrants further investigation, and is the subject of recent DFID-funded work in Namibia and Tanzania.

4. Sustainable 'bushmeat' management

The steady decline in wildlife populations appears to be increasing the vulnerability of poor people. Dependence on bushmeat increases in times of stress, such as famine, drought and economic hardship, and the declining availability of wild foods is increasing poor peoples' vulnerability to stress. Where wildlife is declining or access to wildlife is denied, poor people adapt, but often at a cost to their livelihoods in terms of reduced income, fewer livelihood diversification opportunities and increased vulnerability. Decline in access to wildlife resources is often associated with a decline in poor people's access to forest resources generally, and is often an indicator of additional stress.

The informal, and often illegal, nature of bushmeat harvesting and consumption means that the scale of the problem is neither understood at national level nor fed into the relevant policy processes. Bushmeat research has tended to approach the issues from

a perspective of species conservation rather than the needs of poor people. Research tends to be better at estimating levels of destruction of wildlife (such as the often-published figure of between

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one and five million tonnes of bushmeat harvested each year from the Congo Basin), than assessing the role

of the trade on the livelihoods of poor people.²⁰ Little is known of the relative importance of bushmeat as a livelihood strategy as compared with crops and livestock, both of which are known to be vital to the majority of the rural poor. Better understanding of the role that bushmeat plays in nutrition, food security and income is needed. Finally the impact of declining bushmeat supplies on poor people's livelihoods and the effectiveness of their coping strategies, such as substitution with alternative sources of protein, including fish where available, need to be assessed, as little is currently known.

From the evidence available, the bushmeat trade in West and Central Africa is best tackled by putting the policy and legislative framework into place to encourage responsible logging in production forests and community-based responses where appropriate. Where communities have the right to manage their own forest and wildlife resources, and are able to exclude outside hunters, within a context that encourages and enables them towards sustainable utilisation, experience suggests there is a win-win solution for wildlife and poverty reduction. However, where there is growing poverty, conflict, high mobility of human populations, weak tenure and an unstable political environment, the scope for successful intervention is low. But, above all, effective tackling of the bushmeat trade requires a concerted attack on the root causes of illegal logging and bushmeat harvesting i.e. corruption, weak governance and poverty.

5. Pro-poor conservation

Wildlife is an international public good. As a result, significant funds and effort are invested in conserving wildlife for its existence value. Yet, international public goods ought to genuinely benefit

all – including developing countries. The conservation of wildlife to preserve its existence or option values places considerable costs on poor people in rural areas of developing countries, where much of the world's biodiversity is located. It is important to ensure that poor people are able to access and benefit from wild resources; both to encourage sustainable use and to ensure wildlife-human conflict is contained. The rationale of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) acknowledges that the protection of wild resources as a international public good often places burdens on developing countries and their poorer citizens, who have to restrict their own development and livelihood options accordingly.



Picture 2. Gathering passion fruits in Uganda's forests. (Courtesy Purna Chhetri)

The DFID study highlights the need to ensure that poverty issues are integrated into the work of the leading conservation agencies to ensure "pro-poor conservation". The World Bank has built up a portfolio of conservation projects worth about \$2 billion over the past decade. The GEF has a portfolio of more than 400 biodiversity projects in 140 countries worth a total \$5.4 billion and is now embarking on a two-year assessment of the 'human

impacts' of this portfolio. The leading conservation NGOs spend tens of millions of dollars on conservation initiatives in developing countries each year. The DFID study concludes that the degree to which poverty issues have been mainstreamed and monitored within conservation institutions varies greatly, but is disappointingly low on average.

Why pro-poor conservation?

Pro-poor²¹ conservation rests on the often overlooked fact that conservation can be as important a tool for poverty reduction as it is for protecting endangered species and critical habitats. The case of 'bushmeat' is a good example. The over-harvesting of wild species, especially in tropical forests, is presented as a "crisis" by many conservation organisations because of the impact on endangered species, particularly primates. But this ignores the fact that a crisis is also looming in terms of local food security. If hunting for bushmeat is not managed in a sustainable way local people will be severely

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affected. In this case, conservation of bushmeat species can both ensure the continued survival of those species and, at the same time, provide a continued source of local protein. Indeed, in many poor countries opportunities exist for wildlife to make a long-term contribution to national

and local development goals – through tourism (both inside and outside protected areas), wildlife trade, hunting and so on. These opportunities provide strong incentives for conservation but will be wasted unless they are seen to be fair to the poor.

- Pro-poor conservation is thus about **"harnessing" conservation in order to deliver on poverty reduction and social justice objectives.** Pro-poor conservation can thus be defined in a number of ways:
 - by **outcomes**: conservation that delivers net benefits to poor people;
 - by **process**: a progressive change in practice of conservation organisations – from using poverty reduction as a tool for better conservation through to using conservation in order to deliver on poverty reduction;
 - by **actions**: conservation strategies that are explicitly designed to address the challenge of poverty reduction and development strategies that recognise the role of biodiversity conservation;
 - by **drivers**: conservation that puts poor people and their priorities at the centre of decision-making.

Pro-poor conservation can clearly take a number of different forms and encompasses a spectrum of approaches that are summarised in Figure 1:

- **Community-based conservation** can deliver on poverty reduction objectives but it requires strong institutions, equitable benefit sharing mechanisms, government recognition and, in many cases, effective partnerships with the private sector for wildlife based enterprises.
- **Integrated conservation and development projects** with their dual objectives would appear to be

the ideal way forward but many have focussed on promoting "alternative" livelihoods as a diversion from wild-life use rather than using conservation in order to deliver development objectives. There is therefore a need to focus on the "I" in ICDP.

- **Direct payments** such as conservation concessions can be pro-poor as long as:
 - Social impact assessments and stakeholder analysis are carried out to ensure that the payments go to those who bear the costs – particularly challenging in the absence of clear property rights for poor people.
 - Payments are sufficient to cover the full cost of conservation (including opportunity costs).
 - Contracts are transparent and renegotiable and reflect the need for short-term flexibility to achieve sustainable livelihoods.
- **Traditional protected areas** also have pro-poor potential, particularly as cornerstones in the realisation of national comparative advantage in wildlife tourism in high tourism potential countries of southern and eastern Africa, but:
 - Their establishment must be based on the prior informed consent of indigenous peoples and local communities.
 - Thorough impact assessments must be undertaken with the full participation of indigenous people and local communities to identify potential negative impacts and provision made for full and fair compensation or mitigation where appropriate.
 - Marginalised groups – e.g., nomadic pastoralists, indigenous people
 - must be given recognition as well as those who are more powerful.
 - Mechanisms for including local values, based on utility, as well as

global values, based on intrinsic worth, are needed in determining conservation priorities

- Equitable sharing of rights, responsibilities, costs and benefits is required between all relevant actors – this implies mechanisms for enhancing North-South financial flows, balancing customary and formal norms and institutions and recognising historic tenure rights.

Conclusion: pro-poor conservation in practice

Pro-poor conservation is not an ideology. It is a pragmatic and moral way forward, centred on what has been learned from two decades of CBNRM and rooted in the new clear development focus on poverty reduction and the other Millennium Development Goals. Some conservation organisations have already begun to respond to this challenge. WWF-UK for example has a partnership agreement with DFID to, *inter alia*, mainstream poverty issues into its activities. IUCN is undergoing an internal scoping exercise to investigate how it might increase the poverty impact of its work. In 2003, a significant step forward was taken by the international conservation community: the IUCN World Parks Congress highlighted the need to address local people's concerns in international and national conservation policy producing a suite of recommendations on protected areas and poverty reduction, indigenous peoples, community conserved areas and governance. In 2004, the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity agreed a programme of work on protected areas that includes a significant focus on governance, participation, equity and benefit sharing while poverty-conservation links were a major theme of IUCN World Conservation Congress.

Table 1. A Typology of Pro-Poor Conservation

	Approach	Description	Examples
	Poverty reduction as a tool for conservation	Recognition that poverty issues need to be addressed in order to deliver on conservation objectives. Poverty is a constraint to conservation.	Alternative income generating projects; many integrated conservation and development projects; many community-based conservation approaches
	Conservation that "does no harm" to poor people	Conservation agencies recognise that conservation can have negative impacts on the poor and seek to provide full compensation where these occur and/or to mitigate their effects	Social impact assessments prior to protected area designations; compensation for wildlife damage; provision of <i>locally acceptable</i> alternatives when access to resources (water, grazing, fuelwood etc) lost or reduced or compensation for opportunity cost of land foregone.
	Conservation that generates benefits for poor people	Conservation still seen as the overall objective but designed so that benefits for poor people are generated	Revenue sharing schemes around protected areas; employment of local people in conservation jobs; community conserved areas
	Conservation as a tool for poverty reduction	Poverty reduction and social justice issues are the overall objectives. Conservation is seen as a tool to deliver on these objectives.	Value of wildlife reflected in national poverty reduction strategies; wildlife based enterprise; pro-poor wildlife tourism

Some development organisations are also recognising the value of conservation as a mechanism to deliver on development objectives. Care International, for example, has a programme of activities on integrated conservation and development while UNDP launched the Equator Initiative in 2002 in order to raise awareness of initiatives that were successful in achieving the two goals of biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.

Some initiatives that use conservation to deliver on poverty reduction have been in existence for many years – although not explicitly labelled as pro-poor conservation. The well-known CAMPFIRE programme in Zimbabwe was established in order to deliver local economic development through wildlife conservation and in Ecuador, the Cofan Ecotourism initiative is a good example of pro-poor tourism. Many protected areas also exist – including community conserved areas,

sustainable development reserves and biosphere reserves - that generate net benefits for poor people through sustainable use and tourism.

To date, however, these disparate experiences have not been analysed through a pro-poor lens and synthesised to allow assessment of the breadth of experience. This analysis is urgently needed in order to re-view the lessons learned and to evaluate the implications for other forms of conservation – such as landscape level approaches – and the potential for transferability to other contexts. Can institutions really pursue the dual goals of conservation and poverty

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reduction - or are they just examples of internal divisions and conflicting priorities? Overall it would appear that development organisations still need to be convinced of the value of biodiversity while conservation organisations need to strengthen socio-economic objectives and to address the challenge of alternative approaches to large-scale land acquisition. Moreover far greater understanding is required of the linkages between conservation and poverty reduction and the mechanism for measuring and monitoring progress.

Maximising the pro-poor impact of wildlife conservation therefore requires attention to a number of **key issues**:

- How do different conservation narratives become dominant paradigms? What are the **channels of influence**, changing assumptions and lessons learned; what are the current politics and **constraints to institutional progress**?
- How can global biodiversity values (rare species and habitats) be reconciled with local values (useful species that provide food, medicine, materials and so on)? What **trade-offs** are required and under what circumstances can intrinsic and utility values be integrated?
- How coherent are national and local policies dealing with conservation and development? Has the **comparative advantage of wildlife-rich countries** been recognised in poverty reduction strategies?
- What are the policy and institutional requirements to **scale up** local level success stories, allow for **innovation** and move on from the context specific?
- How can the trend towards **increasing private sector involvement** in

conservation be used for the benefit of poor people – e.g., through private sector-community partnerships?

- How can the **benefits to poor people** from the sustainable use of wildlife be **enhanced** (e.g., through pro-poor wildlife trade chains)?
- What **strategies** can be employed in **different approaches** to conservation to maximise pro-poor impacts?

What are the **risks** of not addressing poverty concerns?

“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.”

We do not suggest we have the answers. However, as the DFID Wildlife and Poverty study 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”. Addressing poverty concerns is clearly key to achieving conservation success – not an optional extra.

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Notes

- 1 “Bushmeat” is meat from wild animals.

- 2 Mayers and Vermeulen, 2002.
- 3 DFID, 2002.
- 4 E.g., see McShane, 2003.
- 5 Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997.
- 6 Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau, 2003.
- 7 Vermeulen and Koziell, 2002.
- 8 E.g., see Spinage 1998; Terborgh, 1999.
- 9 E.g., see Bojo and Reddy, 2002.
- 10 E.g., see Prescott-Allen and Prescott-Allen, 1982; Scoones, Melnyk and Pretty 1992; Nasi and Cunningham, 2001.
- 11 DFID, 2002.
- 12 Evidence reviewed by the DFID study indicates significant dependence of poor people on wildlife for livelihood and food security. This is not surprising given that, of the estimated 1.2 billion people who live on less than the equivalent of one dollar a day, about 250 million live in agriculturally marginal areas, and a further 350 million live in or near forests, of whom an estimated 60 million are indigenous people living in forests (World Bank, 2001). The DFID study estimates that as many as 150 million poor people (one-eighth of the world poorest) perceive wildlife to be an important livelihood asset.
- 13 WTTC, 1999.
- 14 Goodwin *et al.*, 1998 ; Ashley *et al.*, 2001.
- 15 See for example work by the Pro-Poor Tourism Partnership on www.propoortourism.org.uk
- 16 E.g., Ashley and Wolmer, 2002,
- 17 Hulme and Murphree, 2001.
- 18 Roe *et al.*, 2000.
- 19 Long, 2001.
- 20 Bowen Jones *et al.*, 2001.
- 21 The term "pro-poor" is one that is used in a variety of contexts and has, in some cases, caused much controversy and misunderstanding. We use it here simply to emphasise an approach that is locally driven, people-centred and rooted in goals of improved local livelihoods.

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