

FOREST: TAKING PEOPLE HOME, NOT ONLY WILDLIFE

MANAGING PROTECTED AREAS THROUGH LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

By: Nabin, Wei, Citra, Loraini & Samuel

Executive Summary

Managing protected areas is one of the key element in good forest governance. In practice, participation of the community in decisions on protected areas is excluded leading to them facing problems in accessing the resources from these forests. Community involvement in management and running of protected areas can be a solution leading to sustainable forest protection (resource and biodiversity), prevent conflicts.

Background

Protected areas (PAs) are widely recognized as one of the most important strategies for achieving conservation and sustainable development. However, they face great challenges. Realizing the importance of biodiversity conservation, many governments have set aside large tracts of forests as protected areas. Yet many challenges remain in their sustainable management, especially in the context of population growth and increasing demand for resources. Historically, most protected area management systems have adopted an “exclusion” approach, keeping people out through rules and regulations. Due to this step, there are several adverse effects like conflicts between community people and protected areas. Many studies have indicated that most of the problems affecting PAs involve activities that originate in surrounding areas (Kozłowski et al., 1997) seriously undermining the harmonious balance between conservation and sustainable development in and around PAs (Abdullah et al., 2013). In some cases, advanced concept has been employed but are still far from success so, participatory approach integrating culture and social background is very important to promote new solution to specific local issues.



Protected Areas and communities: Historical Changes in Their Relationship

The Yellowstone National Park was established in the USA in 1876, with the idea of creating an isolated conservation environment that excluded local people and all forms of local participation.



This idea gained worldwide attention, especially in developing countries. The model, also termed as “people out model” excluded local communities so as to leave nature undisturbed (Ignacio et al., 2013). This model helped in the protection of core areas of PAs, but overlooked park-people relationship. This resulted in conflicts between the community and the protected areas and numerous other significant technical and ethical issues. In 1982, during the World Park Congress (WPC) in Bali, Indonesia, leaders saw the need for a conceptual shift from PAs being areas “set aside” to their being “components of sustainable development”. This meant that PAs were no longer viewed as being isolated from their surroundings and that the people living around them were no longer to be ignored. Further progress was achieved during the fourth WPC in 1992, held in Caracas, Venezuela. Focusing thematically on “Parks for life”, the conference addressed PA categories and their management effectiveness, stating that “partnership of stakeholders outside the boundaries must be lobbied during the planning and management process of any protected areas” (Shafer 199). The fifth WPC in 2003, held in Durban, South Africa, was a

significant landmark in the evolving relationship between PAs and their surroundings. A

Box 1: Conservation without Participation: A case study from Nepal by Sushama et al., 2016

Nepal has undergone several policy reforms over years to address global conservation goals. However, such reforms, in most cases, seems supplanting the participation of local people; leading to the conflicting situation between the state and the people. Relocation program, one of the government policy implemented to enhance levels of nature protection, carried out involuntarily, has often been accompanied by poverty, deprivation, and dissatisfaction among local people. Based on the retrospective analysis of policies and field study, we analysed the effect on the local people due to changes in policies for managing protected areas over the years. The results showed that the local people have had positive perception towards nature conservation, however, involuntary process adopted for protected area management, such as relocation programme, restrain their rights. This case study suggests that such policy reforms should be done with proper participation of people being affected, therefore, to insure sustainability of the policy implementation.

recommendation put forward during the conference was that governments, NGOs, local communities, and civil society should adopt and promote design principles that emphasized the linkages between PAs and the communities, focusing especially on a shift toward “benefits beyond boundaries” (IUCN 2005). Henceforth, people have been considered as environmental stewards, and, thus, as essential elements, of protected areas. The theme of the sixth WPC, held in Sydney, Australia, in 2014 was “Parks, People and Planet: Inspiring Solutions”. This was aimed at developing a much more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between PAs, their surroundings, and the wider world.

Present situation and obstacles.

After analysing current trends in conflicts between communities and protected areas, the following issues were found:

- Population of local people living near wildlife habitat is increasing by 2% annually and increasing land-use activities (resources to build houses, agriculture etc.) causing major degradation of PA’s influencing species distribution.



- Communities living next to these protected areas are the most marginalised group.
- Decisions are centralised.
- There is no stakeholder participation in any level of development. Implementation is a trickle down process. Rural and local level problems are not correctly addressed.



- Most of the programs are in theory and are not practical.
- Lack of multi-stakeholder cooperation and communication.
- After PA rezoning, local people are losing their rights to access resources on these land.
- Communities who once enjoyed surrounding/nearby forests/landscapes to meet their needs are no longer able to freely access these areas. Local people have seen the park as an attempt by the government to curtail their access to their traditional rights of resources use. However, the park has become a very good source for villagers to fulfil their needs by venturing into illegal poaching, logging and hunting, all of which are directly conflicting with the park's objectives. Conflicts between communities and parks is not only occurring in

one country but is a global issue and is evident in most developing countries.

Table 1: Paradigm shifts in protected area management (Phillips, 2003).

The conventional understanding of protected areas	The emerging understanding of protected areas
Established as separate units	Planned as part of national, regional and international systems
Managed as “islands”	Managed as elements of networks (protected areas connected by “corridors”, “stepping stones” and biodiversity-friendly land uses)
Managed reactively, within a short timescale, with little regard to lessons from experience	Managed adaptively, on a long time perspective, taking advantage of on-going learning
About protection of existing natural and landscape assets – not about the restoration of lost values	About protection but also restoration and rehabilitation, so that lost or eroded values can be recovered
Set up and run for conservation (not for productive use) and scenic protection (not ecosystem functioning)	Set up and run for conservation but also for scientific, socio-economic (including the maintenance of ecosystem services) and cultural objectives
Established in a technocratic way	Established as a political act, requiring sensitivity, consultations and astute judgment
Managed by natural scientists and natural resource experts	Managed by multi-skilled individuals, including some with social skills
Established and managed as a means to control the activities of local people, without regard to their needs and without their involvement	Established and run with, for, and in some cases by local people; sensitive to the concerns of local communities (who are empowered as participants in decision making)
Run by central government	Run by many partners, including different tiers of government, local communities, indigenous groups, the private sector, NGOs and others

Paid for by taxpayers	Paid for from many sources and, as much as possible, self-sustaining
Benefits of conservation assumed as self-evident	Benefits of conservation evaluated and quantified
Benefiting primarily visitors and tourists	Benefiting primarily the local communities who assume the opportunity costs of conservation
Viewed as an asset for which national considerations prevail over local ones	Viewed as a community heritage as well as a national asset

Table 2: A comparative view of conventional and CBC approaches: Scope, policy and practice.

S. N.	Conservation Components	Conservation Approaches	
		Conventional Approach	Community-based Approach
1	Biodiversity	Main focus	One of the main
2	Tourism and	Limited	Major
3	Education/Resea	Strong	Strong component
4	Revenue	For	For local
6	Community	None**	One of the main
7	Resource sharing*	Minimum; seasonal	Maximum; seasonal; based on
8	Administration/	Expensive;	Less expensive,

* Note: In the core area of the park authority.
 ** Community development is one of the agendas of all the mountain national parks where there are

Conclusions

Participatory approach is one of the best approach for the sustainable conservation and management of protected areas and main features of participatory approach has been highly influential in PA management. This entails two key aspects, the relationship between the conservation agency and role players and the benefit that accumulate to local people. It emphasizes the decision-making process in the management of PAs. It also helps the perspectives of various individuals and groups in relation to the conservation and development of PA. This approach helps in integrating PAs and their surroundings and maintaining a balance between conservation and sustainable development.

To manage protected areas in a sustainable way, people participation (planning stage to implementation stage) is essential and policy and strategy need to develop. Governments are still following western model of Protected Areas (PA) management. Local people should not be overlooked in the management issues. Local people are associated with forestry, wildlife and even with the land and river systems which is under the protected area. To address this issue policy and strategy and action plan need to prepare for the conservation of local indigenous knowledge and culture. Development and conservation plan has not given priority for the monitoring and evaluation. Programs that have been implemented in many PAs but could not come up with convincing records of outcomes. So, participatory approach planning is now very much alarming to conserve our biodiversity, culture, social respects, etc. for the betterment of local community and protected areas.

Recommendations

It is recommended that, biodiversity and its resources are utmost for the people living in and around the protected areas. Concept of buffer zone should be in action, which benefits to local people and helps in the conservation of biodiversity. Similarly, conservation area concept applied by Nepal might be the good option for the participatory approach, where community themselves manage the area.

Finally, it is highly recommended to:

1. Engaging with, rather than against, indigenous and local communities, NGOs, and the private sector, provided that all such actors are committed to basic conservation goals.
2. Develop management partnerships among social actors, benefiting from their complementary capacities and advantages. The formulation of a joint management committee.
3. Perceive the conservation of biodiversity as inseparable from its sustainable use and the fair sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources, as reflected in the three main objectives of the CBD.
4. Capacity trainings should be provided to the protected area officials and local communities respectively. For the officials, training focused

on participatory approach, communications should be carried out, with an aim to equip the officials with proper skills to work with the communities, and result in changes in their attitudes and behaviour. For the local communities, they should be trained for their participation in biodiversity conservation and skills needed for the management

5. Evaluation and assessment should be conducted regularly to get feedbacks and ensure the implementation of the new strategy, and also for the continuous improvement in the future.

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