LESSONS FROM A 2000 WORLD BANK E-DISCUSSION

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This first issue of practitioner notes reviews key lessons about community participation and biodiversity conservation that have been gleaned from a July 2000 electronic conference, with highlights from illustrative World Bank cases. The World Bank Institute sponsored this discussion and participants included World Bank staff and non-Bank colleagues. This activity built upon extensive efforts by the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility during the 1990s to develop general project guidance on participation (e.g., The World Bank Participation Sourcebook, 1996) and specific guidance related to environmental and conservation projects (e.g., World Bank 2000, 1998, 1994, 1993, Global Environment Facility 1999, Aycrigg 1997, Cruz and Davis 1997, Vedeld 2000). This 2000 electronic conference laid the groundwork for the Participatory Conservation Initiative (PCI) in 2002. The Biodiversity and

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Participation Teams of the World Bank’s Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Vice Presidency and the World Bank Institute sponsored the PCI and funding came from both the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank Institute. Activities included an e-conference and seminar series on three topics, expert interviews with senior World Bank Biodiversity Task Managers to identify topics and cases, along with a searchable annotated bibliography of current participatory conservation literature (See practitioner notes 2–4).

The starting point for the 2000 e-conference was the 15th Global Biodiversity Forum Statement to the 5th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity noted that: "The conservation, sustainable use and, in particular, the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of biodiversity should form an essential element of effective poverty eradication strategies" (biodiversity as a means to eradicate poverty). In addition, many believe that poverty eradication is an essential dimension of effective biodiversity conservation strategies (poverty eradication as a means to conserve biodiversity). These aims can be competing and conflicting agendas but practitioners are increasingly seeking win-win solutions that involve greater community participation (see Box 1).

While most e-conference contributors recognized the value of increasing community participation in conservation activities, it was noted that the term, “participation” has “...become both a buzzword and a sacred cow and in the process, its meaning and purpose have become confused and broadened” (source: Agi Kiss, list-serve contributor). Therefore, greater clarity is needed about the types of community participation (see Box 2), the meaning of community and the conditions under which community participation can contribute to conservation success.

**BOX 1: Participation Definition**

The World Bank (1996) defines participation as “a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.”

“... We do not interpret “participation” as participation in our project, but a joint effort based on local ownership.” (Sarah Timpson, UNDP/GEF Small Grants Programme, list-serve contributor)

In a similar vein, the term, participatory conservation, refers to activities with conservation objectives that are characterized by stakeholder influence and shared control of decisions and resources.
BOX 2: Types of Participation

Numerous typologies of participation have been developed. In general, the continuum ranges from passive forms of participation such as information sharing and consultation to more active forms of participation characterized by increasing levels of community involvement in decision-making and benefit-sharing, as well as empowerment/power-sharing and autonomy/self-management. While it is often implied that power-sharing is a higher form of participation, different forms of participation may often be appropriate at different times during the project cycle, depending upon the governance regime, opportunities, types of projects and the stakeholder mix. It is important to note that in the participation levels characterized by higher empowerment levels, stakeholders are initiating and managing their own development activities rather than simply responding to opportunities offered by others. In general, it is commonly assumed that more active levels of community participation and higher levels of empowerment will lead to more sustainable and appropriate development and conservation activities.

During the 2000 e-conference, Agi Kiss elaborated four common types of community participation for conservation:

- Communities participate in conservation-related decisions that affect them;
- Communities participate in carrying out conservation actions, probably defined by others, for which they expect payment or compensation;
- Community groups or individuals participate in direct and economic benefits derived from conservation;
- Communities or individuals dedicating land under their control to conservation use, with or without financial gain.

The Centrality of Communities to Sustainable Biodiversity Conservation Projects

For many biodiversity conservation projects (including integrated conservation and development projects), communities have more often been treated as objects in the process, versus partners from the outset, with whom negotiations over the rules of the game and objectives are to proceed" (source: list-serve contributor, Michael Brown). While there are still practitioners who believe that conservation projects should and can succeed without the support and involvement of communities, project experience suggests otherwise. There are a number of important reasons why conservation practitioners should consider inverting their priorities to emphasize communities, community participation and community development (see Box 3).
**BOX 3: Moral and Pragmatic Reasons for Community-Based Conservation Strategies**

“. . . Protection of the earth’s biodiversity without meaningful participation of the local communities is simply not possible . . . unless the genuine needs of the majority of the local community are addressed and perpetual rights to usufructs are given to the local people through policy changes and unless communities are involved in every aspect of decision-making including equitable sharing of benefits, biodiversity can not be conserved. I would in fact argue that the focus on biodiversity conservation should not be on conservation but on livelihoods.¹

“There is no point in ever referring to sustainability in conservation projects, or in shooting for it, unless we can figure out how to involve communities in conservation on a sustainable basis . . . Unless the World Bank together with other major donors are prepared to foot the bill for a major policing effort in priority conservation landscapes with increasingly are being planned out on eco-regional scales, it is impossible for me to see how one can avoid communities in conservation programming.”²

“If the community remains the focus of the efforts—not the protected area—there is much more local acceptance.”³

Sources:
1 Madhav Karki, list-serve contributor.
2 Michael Brown, list-serve contributor.
3 Ephrat Yovel, list-serve contributor, regarding Florida parks.

In many places, poverty undermines conservation efforts, as does inequality within communities. Without local acceptance and benefits, conservation efforts are often sabotaged or ignored by communities. In addition, conservation approaches that rely on government policing and enforcement are usually coercive, corrupt, ineffective, expensive and unsustainable.

So What Is a Community?

Most often, communities are geographically or administratively defined groups of people living in households. They can include residents living locally, those who temporarily live elsewhere, long-term residents and newcomers. They may be culturally similar or dissimilar.

Key issues related to defining communities include:

**How communities represent themselves to outsiders.** Particularly when negotiating their rights with government of outsiders, communities often find it to be in their self-interest to represent themselves as a homogeneous unit.

**Differences of interests and needs within communities.** List-serve contributor, Macsood Hoosein, noted that communities are generally not homogeneous units and that “commu-
nities are the wider society in microcosm." There are often class, ethnic, religious, gender and age differences, even within indigenous communities. For the latter, there are differences within and between communities as to their degree of modernization and reliance on the cash economy. Wolfram Dressler, list-serve contributor, noted that community participation processes can reveal differences, including conflicting and antagonistic needs, among community members and between communities, park staff and outsiders. Some also believe that participation processes, particularly overly rapid ones, have the potential to inflict the tyranny of majority rule on minority interests and do not necessarily reflect or build community consensus.

Who legitimately represents communities. The authority of community representatives and leaders can derive from legitimate and more questionable sources. Some leaders are appointed by central government and may not correspond to true local leaders. Elites may claim to represent community interests to outsiders. However, in places where local leaders are democratically elected and/or accountable to constituents, their support has been very important to the success of conservation activities.

NGOs without community memberships also make claims to represent community interests. National groups often try to speak for community interests. In addition, in Australia and other rich countries, environmental activists sometimes claim to represent communities (source: Jim Shields, list-serve contributor) or particular communities and sometimes governments and the private sector inappropriately view these activists as proxies for whole communities.

Noble Conservers? Avoiding Assumptions about Communities and Conservation

While there is evidence of locally initiated conservation and conservation responses to appropriate incentives, it is important to not assume or romanticize the conservation motivations of poor people in developing countries. Sarah Timpson, list-serve contributor, observed that it is unrealistic to expect that people who are struggling on the edge of survival will want to make sacrifices "in the global interest." While secure tenure has often led to conservation outcomes, indigenous people and farmers with tenure rights have not automatically done what is best for conservation.

Getting the Incentives Right

Conservation is nested in a web of other human activities and constraints and biodiversity conservation cannot be disassociated from the actual world order (source: Marc Hufty, list-serve contributor). While environmental education and awareness-raising activities are generally inadequate motivations for conservation-related behavior change, economic motivations are not the only answer since economic activities are a part of broader community life and social relations. For those communities and households motivated by cash needs, they will opt
to sell land or cut trees, as do larger farmers and private companies. In some instances, pay-
ment for direct management of biodiversity may be more attractive to them than selling land
or trees or jobs with the tourism/hospitality industry (source: Jim Shields, list-serve contribu-
tor). Incentives related to sustainable agriculture, agroforestry and permaculture may be more
appropriate in other settings. While many incentives are related to participation, one list-serve
contributor, David Simpson, asked when moving households and communities (a form of
non-participation) might be appropriate.

It is important for conservationists to not raise community expectations with exaggerated
promises to communities about the scope and timing of benefits from consumptive and non-
consumptive uses of biodiversity. Typically, these benefits have been lower than expected and
slow in coming. Agi Kiss, list-serve contributor, noted that community expectations can
become excessive and communities can take on an "entitlement mentality" vis-à-vis biodiver-
sity conservation projects. (see practitioner notes 4 for additional insights)

**Resurrecting Community Rights as Well as Responsibilities and Sanctions**

Many discussions about conservation incentives focus on the importance of rights. These
include rights of tenure, intellectual property, procedural rights (e.g., rights to information,
rights of assembly), and local rights to prosecute resource use violations (see Box 4), etc. For
example, it is not clear if communities will adequately benefit from initiatives such as bio-
prospecting and eco-tourism in the absence of resource rights (source: Gayatri Acharya, list-
serve contributor).

Tenure is often viewed as a necessary but not sufficient incentive to induce conservation
behaviors. Communities, even those with official tenure, cannot necessarily stop oil explo-

**BOX 4: Good Tenure Reform Intentions Do Not Always Equal Tenure Security**

The World Bank's Conservation of Priority Protected Area Project in the Philippines
was supposed to process community-based forest management tenure instru-
ments. However, the suspension in the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples
Rights Act and the much-delayed reorganization of the National Commission on
Indigenous People froze the processing of ancestral claims. This situation was
aggravated by the lack of clear standards and guidelines for community-based for-
est management agreements for protected areas from the Department of Environ-
ment and Natural Resources.

Source: World Bank Project Supervision Reports.
ration and drilling activities and pollution generated by multinationals under the mantle of economic development. Due to cash or other motivations, communities and households with secure tenure may not always do what is best for conservation. They may be offered restricted forms of tenure with externally imposed use restrictions rather than pure freehold title to land which could lead to greater investment and protection or use conversion. When rights to de facto open access land are granted exclusively to one group of people or to segments of communities, this process is likely to disenfranchise others, especially women, and increase pressure on other areas of biodiversity. In addition, there may be significant hurdles that need to be reduced to implement tenure reform that are potentially supportive to conservation. These hurdles include the high cost and logistical difficulties associated with processing legal papers. Tenure reform and implementation are often stalled by inadequate political will and the influence of other economic stakeholders. (see Box 4)

There are also issues that need to be addressed so that communities, particularly indigenous communities, benefit from bio-prospecting. To date, there has been considerable "cognoprospection" and "cognopiracy" (prospecting and piracy of indigenous knowledge related to biodiversity). Some biodiversity projects knowingly coopt indigenous rights to compensation for biodiversity information and do not respect local cultures. Others fail communities by not being pro-active about helping communities to benefit from external interest in local knowledge and adaptive resource management systems. Bioprospecting and other biodiversity-related enterprises (e.g., certified forest products) can have high transaction costs that reduce the local benefits to negligible levels.
Community involvement has led to conservation successes when:

- Communities have seen a clear self-interest in restricting their fish take to allow replenishment after a significant decline in fish catch,
- Fish breed in the fish reserves and easily repopulate surrounding non-reserve areas,
- Offenders are noticeable because boats and gear are noticeable on the water,
- Communities have the power to enforce the restrictions, against community members or outsiders.

Source: Agi Kiss, list-serve contributor.

Community-based conservation and resource management involves not just rights of access but also local rights to sanction and enforce environmental regulations (see Box 5). All too often, states have stripped these rights from communities long ago. However, in some situations, particularly countries undergoing devolution and decentralization reforms, indigenous communities are being empowered, allowed to revitalize traditional social structures, including their capacity to exert sanctions for unsustainable resource management behavior (source: Guillermo E. Rodriguez-Navarro, list-serve contributor).

The community responsibility side of the equation has often been the weak link for conservation activities. Community responsibilities can include changing their resource management practices, respecting restricted access, reporting violations and sanctioning others in the community. Some believe that conservation incentives should be tied to, or contingent upon conservation behaviors. This improved link between rights, benefits and responsibilities would also be reinforced if Governments and Donors addressed corruption and accountability for technical and elected government staff who misuse and misappropriate revenues from natural resources.

Building Upon Current Conservation Behaviors

While conservation may be a new idea in some areas, there are situations in which indigenous peoples and small farmers are already practicing biodiversity conservation on their lands. Many of these groups and households need assistance and payment for community care of forests and watersheds (see Box 6). In the long run, communities need more than micro projects. Drawing from experience in Bolivia, list-serve contributor Conny Peters noted that communities need organizational strengthening to make themselves heard in the social, economic and political arena. The trick is to provide the right amount of outside help for locally controlled development initiatives (source: Tom Hodges, list-serve contributor).
BOX 6: Consensus-Building in World Bank Community-Driven Conservation Activities in Mexico

Under the Mexico Natural Protected Areas Project, the keys to consensus building and creating trust between reserve directors and households living in or near the reserves have been:

- Finding alternative income-generating activities to replace traditional resource consumptive activities such as slash and burn agriculture, overgrazing, etc.;
- Providing technical advice to support local communities to convert to newer technologies from traditional practices;
- Involving community members in all project phases so that their points of view are considered in a democratic, transparent process.
- Training reserve staff in consensus building, conflict resolution, negotiation and strategic planning.

Source: World Bank Project Reports.

Broadening Partnerships for Conservation at Different Scales

Conservation inevitably involves stakeholder conflicts. The degree and duration of community participation often rests on how these differences are heard and negotiated. To negotiate and advocate their interests, communities and community sub-groups need both skills and partnerships. Michael Brown, list-serve contributor, noted the importance of negotiated fora and broad partnerships to reach consensus on conservation roles and responsibilities (see Boxes 6...
BOX 7: A Multi-Level Institutional Approach to Participation for Ghana’s Coastal Wetlands

The World Bank’s Ghana Coastal Project significantly contributed to establishing and strengthening institutions and groups involved in conservation from national to local levels:

- At the national level, participation influenced parliamentary recognition of some of Ghana’s wetlands under a new law inspired by the international Ramsar Convention and the development of a national wetlands strategy;
- At the district level, district assemblies created linkages with partner agencies in wetland management;
- At the community level, site management committees were created to represent the interests of stakeholders, including local government, central government agencies at the district level, traditional councils, women’s groups and community members.

Source: World Bank Project Supervision Reports.

These partnerships become even more important as conservation activities increasingly scale up to eco-regional and landscape levels.

Permission to Participate

In some locations, governments are reluctant to allow communities to fully participate in conservation decision-making. This situation may reflect larger governance issues and legal barriers to participation (e.g., rights of assembly, rights to information, legal standing to bring lawsuits against government). Alternatively, the barriers may reside in the negative attitudes held by some government officials toward communities. They may only have experience directing rather than facilitating multi-stakeholder processes and may not be able to handle highly polarized situations or highly disruptive groups. Some government officials simply do not want to give up or share power and the benefits associated with power (e.g., bribes, access to resources, etc.). In a few instances, conservation projects have looked into systemic governance reforms to foster community participation. More often, conservation projects have used capacity building approaches and persuasion to address attitudinal and skill barriers to participation. Stakeholder analysis is another important tool to use to develop effective strategies for stakeholder participation and communication, particularly in polarized situations.

Addressing Issues Beyond Community Control

Community participation is a necessary but insufficient solution to ensure biodiversity conservation success because a number of biodiversity pressures are beyond community control. These pressures include wars and conflicts, post-war land settlements in forests, tourism development, road construction, corruption in forest and mining concession practices, illegal trade
in diamonds and bushmeat, etc. Because a few corrupt high-level officials can undo years of conservation work and participatory processes, conservationists need to work on multiple levels and on multiple fronts to achieve their aims. Part of the problem often stems from governance problems. Accordingly, conservationists need to build conservation constituencies across a wider range of host country partners and build good governance skills for both government and civil society (see the third practitioner note).

Concerns and Contradictions from the International Conservation Community

Several “frequently asked questions” are raised by segments of the international conservationist community. Feeling the urgency of biodiversity loss, some raise the issue of time. They worry that community participation will always be a lengthy process. Their concern is get projects “up and running” as quickly as possible. However, failing to address social concerns and negotiate differences often stops projects after they have quickly started or makes projects biologically and socially unsustainable in the long run. Some of the biologists who are comfortable with natural system diversity and complexity are not comfortable dealing with complex social systems and perspectives contrary to conservation thinking. Others believe that outsiders should play a role in altering land use in restrictive ways. But they are less comfortable recognizing or accepting responsibility for the social (including gender-related), economic and political consequences arising from land use changes. For some conservationists, altering land use for conservation is often mistakenly perceived as less interventionist than supporting
the resource rights of the poor or women, building civil society capacity or battling corruption. Tony Whitten, list-serve moderator, notes the concern that community social needs are infinitely expandable and will require a "bottomless pit of funds." There are also concerns that conservation projects will turn protected area buffer zones into "honey pots" that draw people in and create greater pressure on resources. While these outcomes are possible, they are less likely to occur when projects are more transparent about their available funds and community self-governance is strengthened. Project funding will always be limited so it is important to weigh the efficiency and tradeoffs of various participation alternatives and also make strategic decisions about when to incorporate different forms of participation.

Defining Success

Within a project context, conservation and development are often posed as two sides to a zero-sum equation. There is a perception that funding community development activities or taking time for participation takes resources away from more science- or management-based conservation activities. There is a concern that recent protected area projects are failing at both their conservation and development agendas. Accordingly, the definition of conservation as a biological or social enterprise or both and the definition of success need closer scrutiny. According to list-serve contributor, Michael Brown and others, conservationists have been overly quick to conclude that the concept of community conservation does not work. This dismissal of community conservation is often based on the empirical record of a set of projects that have been flawed in both their design and execution (see Box 8). In Brown's estimation, they are "throwing the baby out with the bathwater." On the other hand, list-serve contributor John Newby suggested the trade-offs and choices in conservation and development work might be more manageable and palatable with scaled up activities across a much broader landscape.

BOX 8: Last Words

Regarding the GEF Small Grants Programme, Manager Sarah Timpson writes that it:

"...operates on the premise that people will be empowered to protect their environment when they are organized to take action, have a measure of control over the resource base, have the necessary information and knowledge, and believe that their social and economic well-being is dependent upon sound long-term natural resource management. This is a premise difficult to demonstrate because these conditions are rarely in place and processes to try to establish them are very complex. However, we have seen very little success through other approaches and continue to believe that, with further experience and learning, this path provides grounds for hope."
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It is important to clearly communicate, at all levels, the linkages between biodiversity conservation and the larger socioeconomic context. At the national level, it is important to link national biodiversity and national poverty strategies; at the local level, biodiversity conservation goals need to be closely linked to community needs and priorities.

Situation-specific and flexible incentives are needed to develop conservation constituencies within communities. Well-organized social assessments and other types of participatory activities allow project designers and managers to address socio-economic differentiation and the changing needs, importance and composition of stakeholders over time.

Two-way communication, early and throughout the life of the project, helps to clarify project objective and benefits, as well as people's responsibilities and expectations and ensure participation over the life of the project. Environmental communication and education (e.g., peer communication, mobilizing opinion formers and journalists) reinforce genuine community participation in conservation decision-making but are not adequate substitutes for it.

The most successful projects are those where community action is already underway and project funds enable communities to strengthen, intensify and build upon their activities. In these and other situations, the most important role for project staff is to expose locals to additional external resources and opportunities.

Large amounts of outside money are not always needed for locally initiated and controlled projects and may be more likely attract the attention of corrupt officials. To ensure that appropriate sums reach the right levels, it may be useful to seek out non-governmental channels for disbursing project funds.

Donors should lengthen time frames and make longer term investments to build trust and capacity, encourage participation, create a solid incentive structure and achieve community consensus.

Participation is greater with accountable and transparent governance. Conservation projects can help to improve the system of checks and balances by supporting partners involved in environmental governance reform and by promoting participation at all levels of governance. In addition, governments, civil society organizations and communities often require capacity building for participatory conservation (e.g., skills in facilitation, conflict management and negotiation; guidelines and business plans for community efforts in eco-tourism and alternative livelihoods; livelihood-related technologies, particularly for women).

PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES FOR PRACTIONERS
NGO partners with skills in community participation and strong ties to communities may make better partners for participatory conservation projects than many environmental NGOs.

To glean lessons from successful and less successful conservation projects and improve conservation priority setting and budgeting, donors need to use routine monitoring and evaluation, undertake applied research and create a multi-agency success story inventory from work during the last decade. The inventory could identify models of decentralized conservation that alleviates poverty and improves sustainable resource access for those with less access to resources, including women.


THE PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

This series of practitioner notes is part of the World Bank’s Participatory Conservation Initiative, which has been sponsored by the ESSD Biodiversity Teams with support from the GEF and the World Bank Institute. In response to the interest of protected area project managers within the World Bank, we designed this interactive initiative to expand the dialogue on key operational issues related to participation for protected area projects. We are focusing on the needs of practitioners, both within and outside the World Bank. To date, we have interviewed a sample of Sages (long-experienced biodiversity project managers within the World Bank) to identify key issues, created an annotated bibliography of relevant internal and external literature, organized an international, electronic list-serve discussion and seminar series on three topics and created a web-site for related documents. In addition, this issue of the practitioner notes represents an earlier electronic dialogue held in 2002 and sponsored by the World Bank Institute. Highlights from these activities are here incorporated. Our future plans involve technical assistance and training directly to World Bank staff involved with protected area projects.

For additional information about this series or the Participatory Conservation Initiative, please contact: Gunars Platais (gplatais@worldbank.org) and Nancy K. Diamond (nkdiamond@aol.com). Please share these publications with interested colleagues. Other issues of these practitioner notes include:

Issue No. 2, “Scaling Up Participatory Conservation”

Issue No. 3, “Linking Participatory Conservation to Governance Reforms”

Issue No. 4, “Crumbs, Christmas Trees, Committees or Control: Buying Constituents for Conservation”