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India: Using Social Assessment to Foster Participation in Protected Areas

Designers of the India Ecodevelopment Project found social assessment (SA) to be a good starting place for stakeholder and nongovernmental organization (NGO) participation in project preparation. The SA also prompted collection of socioeconomic and biophysical information to feed into project implementation and monitoring, and enabled designers to build on the experience of people's involvement in forestry, conservation, and rural development projects in India. The SA enabled stakeholders to identify interactions between parks and people, map out potential and actual conflicts, and agree on a framework for ongoing participation during project implementation through which communities and park officials will choose ecologically appropriate development activities and livelihoods.

tenure and use rights and the needs and aspirations of local people with a long history of inhabiting and managing forests. It also requires increasing local people's involvement in conserving protected areas in a nonconfrontational way.

When discussions began on an ecodevelopment project in India to be funded by the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MOEF) and the Bank team were interested in learning from past mistakes and in broadening public involvement to increase the likelihood that change would be sustainable. Aware of past failures of top-down approaches and the promise of participatory resource management programs, the MOEF consulted with NGOs, including a national coordinating NGO, the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), about participatory approaches to ecodevelopment. Following these consultations, the MOEF agreed to prepare an ecodevelopment project jointly with the IIPA. The IIPA promised to be a valuable partner to the MOEF because of its previous community forestry successes and because other NGOs trusted the IIPA and were likely to join in the collaboration.

Approaching Biodiversity in India

In the past twenty years, state governments and India's Forest Department have developed an extensive network of protected areas to conserve biodiversity and back it up with strong enforcement measures. Recently, Indian state governments have recognized that conserving and protecting biodiversity entails far more than identifying areas of biodiversity importance through surveys and inventories and employing a guard force. The long-term survival, protection, and management of forests depends on political, social, and economic factors. It requires support measures that take into account local land

SA Objectives

The MOEF and the IIPA wanted to avoid a rigid blueprint design. Therefore, they agreed to undertake an indicative planning approach to build consensus among stakeholders around a guiding ecodevelopment action plan that could be iterative and adjusted throughout the life of the project. The IIPA had extensive experience with the use of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and proposed that PRA methods be used in the SA to involve stakeholders in the project preparation process. The MOEF agreed to this approach.

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Jointly, the MOEF and IIPA designed an SA to

- Involve stakeholders in designing the ecodevelopment project
- Ensure that the indicative plan and incentives for change are acceptable to stakeholders
- Pinpoint the areas of interaction between people and the proposed protected areas and map out potential conflicts
- Develop means to mitigate negative impacts so as to ensure commitment to sustainable development
- Gather, analyze, and use operationally relevant social information, such as data on gender and ethnicity
- Define a framework for ongoing participation during implementation, monitoring, and evaluation
- Assess the social impact of ecodevelopment investments over time.

SA Methods

The SA employed a variety of methods, including stakeholder workshops, consultations, and PRA (see box 1). Throughout the process, state forestry department and NGO representatives and project officials engaged in joint activities. At least thirty-eight

meetings were held with representatives of national and state institutions and of NGOs from March 1992 to May 1995. They discussed project design components, proposed activities, and detailed work plans.

Findings

A stakeholder identification process alerted project planners to the multiple uses of protected area resources and the long history of human habitation in forest areas (see the table). The stakeholders with interest in the project sites include the following:

- Tribal groups who collect nontimber forest products (NTFP) and grazers whose livelihoods are highly dependent on access to fodder and forest resources. The establishment of protected areas has severely curtailed their access and led most residents to pursue employment outside protected areas.
- Cultivators who have been legally excluded from national park and sanctuary boundaries and have long histories of forest habitation.
- People responsible for cultural sites, which attract large numbers of pilgrims.
- People in recently settled forest villages

Box 1. Social Assessment Methods

A variety of participatory methods were used to gather, analyze, and disseminate information for the indicative plan and SA, namely:

- Stakeholder workshops and consultations. A MOEF workshop in 1992, which involved representatives from protected areas throughout the country and key NGOs, set the stage for a multilevel consultation process.
- Participatory rural appraisal (PRA). State and park officials and NGOs undertook PRA in affected communities to establish baseline profiles of affected populations and assess the capacity of local institutions to implement ecodevelopment activities. In some villages, NGOs and officials conducted PRAs jointly. Through PRA, information was gathered on
 - the identification of stakeholders, including tribals, women, and the poor
 - the potential social impacts of ecodevelopment plans in each state
 - strategies for including vulnerable groups in decisionmaking
 - strategies for reducing negative impacts and increasing positive interactions.
- Secondary data, including the number, distribution, and composition of people in and around the protected areas, socioeconomic parameters, and the social organizations and culture, supplemented PRA data.
- Focused studies. NGOs and research institutes undertook special studies on social and other factors relevant to project design.
- Consultative workshops and brainstorming meetings. National and state institutions and NGOs were invited to discuss findings from surveys and studies.

Interaction

- Grazing/lopping
livestock use
- Fuelwood collection
and sale
- Poaching/timber
smuggling
- Visitor use and
environmental
impacts
- NTFP use and
collection
- Industrial land
or water use
- Cultural use and
ritual hunting
- Reduced forestry
employment
- Crop depredation
by wildlife
- Livestock damage
by wildlife
- Human injury
and death

People-Protected Area Interactions by Project Area and Intensity

Buxa	Gir	Nagarhole	Park					Simplipal
			Plaamau	Pench	Periyar	Ranthambhore		
✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	
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- that were created to provide labor for commercial forest management, but whose job opportunities have declined with the designation of forest areas as protected.
- Government agencies with interests in mining, hydropower generation, irrigation, fisheries, roads, and tourism.
 - Periphery villagers who acquire substantial supplemental income from collecting and selling nontimber forest products and working for commercial forestry operations and small-scale industries, but whose access and opportunities are decreasing with the designation of protected areas.

—	none
✓	very low, occasional
✓✓	low, infrequent
✓✓✓	medium, fairly frequent
✓✓✓✓	high, frequent
✓✓✓✓✓	very high, very frequent

Outcomes
 The SA made a complex project less difficult to prepare because it provided a means to focus on real and potential conflicts that, if left undetected and unresolved, would jeopardize implementation. The SA contributed to the design of the ecodevelopment project (see box 2) by helping to

- *Develop a strategy for site-specific planning.* Given the wide variety of technical and social issues associated with each of the possible investments in each project site, participatory microplanning will be used in each village to arrive at local reciprocal agreements between park officials and communities on alternative livelihoods and resource uses.
- *Generate NGO commitment.* During consultative workshops and meetings, more than thirty environmental NGOs endorsed the microplanning approach as a viable program for addressing human and environmental issues. This endorsement was crucial to sustaining NGO involvement in the project, because NGOs will work with communities during the microplanning process and the implementation of local ecodevelopment agreements.
- *Integrate tribal concerns.* The project will address tribal concerns in an integral fashion rather than as a subsidiary tribal development plan or component.
- *Identify vulnerable groups.* The SA sensitized local and state officials to the importance of involving tribals, women, the poor, and landless households in the vicinity of the protected areas undergoing ecodevelopment because they are the most vulnerable to misdirected investments.
- *Develop synergy between planning and monitoring functions.* Finally, the SA sensitized planners to the importance of conducting socioeconomic analysis

Box 2. India Ecodevelopment Project

This project is designed to strengthen the conservation and management of protected areas by increasing local community benefits and local involvement, reducing conflict, and engaging local support. The project focuses mainly on village ecodevelopment activities that seek to reduce negative impacts on biodiversity in and around protected areas by providing alternative livelihood and development opportunities linked to conservation agreements between the communities and the park authorities.

Each village will be allowed to choose its own ecodevelopment opportunities, such as:

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|---|------------------------------|
| Ecotourism | Alternative fuel initiatives |
| Agroforestry and firewood plantations | Watershed management |
| Handicrafts | Artisanal small industries |
| Agricultural, livestock, or small-scale irrigation projects | |

Project-funded research will focus on biological and socioeconomic issues related to improving park management, on ethnobiology, and on traditional and indigenous resource use and management. Capacity building, communication, and extension programs will facilitate learning and disseminate lessons learned from demonstration projects to a wider audience.

Source: World Bank, "Integrating Conservation and Development," *Facing the Global Environmental Challenge: A Progress Report on World Bank Global Environment Operations* (1995): 10-11.

alongside biological analysis to evaluate the social consequences of investments and the social factors that affect implementation. This is also reflected in the project design: area-specific planning and monitoring will address concerns pertaining to legal and usufruct rights and status, traditional economies, cultural use of national resources, livelihood strategies, ability to adapt to new sites and economies, attitudes toward conservation, social distribution of proposed project investments, and benefits foregone.

Conclusion

Pre-project collaboration between MOEF officials and an experienced, reputable NGO was extremely important in gaining the trust of other NGOs. In addition, when participatory skills are lacking, project designers must be willing to invest in such skills. The willingness of local development NGOs to organize and be trained in PRA enabled the participatory process to begin quickly.

