

# BioSoc: the Biodiversity and Society Bulletin

Research highlights on biodiversity and society, poverty and conservation

ISSUE 19: SEPTEMBER 2007

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## MAPPING NATURE'S BENEFITS: AN ALTERNATIVE ATLAS OF KENYA

As a follow up to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), the World Resources Institute together with the International Livestock Research Institute and the Kenya Government have published an innovative new atlas of Kenya. *Nature's Benefits in Kenya* explores the link between ecosystem services and poor people, overlaying socio-economic information with spatial data on ecosystem goods and services. The atlas shows the location and status of key environmental resources - including water, biodiversity, agricultural land and forest land – and the ways poor people use these resources.

The conservation-poverty debate that is being played out in the literature and in international policy processes has highlighted resource conflicts and competing demands for ecosystem services. In particular, conflicts between land for wildlife conservation and for agriculture have been emphasised. This atlas demonstrates the contribution that visual aids such as maps can make to this debate, analyzing competing demands for different ecosystem services — food, water, wood — across one region, the Upper Tana River watershed. Whereas academic journals may be intimidating or inaccessible to many, maps can be powerful communication tools that can be used by professionals and public alike, allowing patterns, trends, and clusters to be easily identified.

There are many limitations – not least, that not all ecosystem services and social processes relevant to poverty are easily mapped. Even for those aspects that can be mapped, the final product is only as good as the data that goes into it. Yet both poverty and environmental data can be patchy, unreliable and open to wide interpretation. Even when good data are available, the analysis may reveal little about the causes of poverty, or changes in the underlying processes and functions of natural environmental systems.

Nonetheless, as a first step to more closely examine potential synergies and tradeoffs among different ecosystem services the report authors point out that “such a visual and geographic approach may let policymakers ‘see’ Kenya’s natural systems in a new light, helping them to visualize ways to use those systems to alleviate poverty.” This could result in improved poverty-reduction strategies that take into account where the poor live and what ecosystem services they depend upon, how these are changing and what opportunities exist to invest in the environment to improve rural livelihoods.

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## SOURCE

World Resources Institute; Department of Resource Surveys and Remote Sensing, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Kenya; Central Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and National Development, Kenya; and International Livestock Research Institute. (2007). *Nature's Benefits in Kenya, An Atlas of Ecosystems and Human Well-Being*. Washington, DC and Nairobi: World Resources Institute

The report is available to download from: [http://www.wri.org/biodiv/pubs\\_description.cfm?pid=4279](http://www.wri.org/biodiv/pubs_description.cfm?pid=4279)

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If you have a recent publication addressing conservation-poverty links that you would like reviewed in BioSoc please send a copy to the editor, Dilys Roe: [dilys.roe@iied.org](mailto:dilys.roe@iied.org). All publications should be freely accessible on the internet to be eligible for review.

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