BioSoc: the Biodiversity and Society Bulletin

Research highlights on biodiversity and society, poverty and conservation

ISSUE 7: SEPTEMBER 2006

MANAGING HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT: PREVENTION IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER THAN A CURE.

As the world population continues to grow, and pressure for land and resources becomes more intense, people and wildlife are increasingly coming into more direct contact as their territories overlap and their needs compete. The agricultural frontier is expanding continuously in the drive to produce more food to feed a growing population. Land that is suitable for agriculture, however, tends also to be good habitat for wildlife and many farms jostle over boundaries with protected areas. While living alongside wildlife can provide poor farmers with opportunities for earning income and for livelihood diversification it can also bring costs as crops are trampled, grain stores raided, livestock eaten and, sometimes, human lives lost. As is usually the case, the poor are hit the hardest when disaster strikes. The loss of a few cattle to a wild predator may be an irritation to some farmers and a life-threatening catastrophe to others.

The long-term success of any wildlife conservation initiative is dependent on local support. Clearly this support is not going to be forthcoming where human lives and livelihoods are at stake. Managing human-wildlife conflict (HWC) is thus a critical issue for both people and wildlife. A recent report by Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) Initiatives within FAO has examined the extent and significance of the problem worldwide and reviewed the effectiveness of the management strategies that have been employed. The conclusion? In only a limited number of situations can HWC be avoided – eg through the erection of physical barriers intended to prevent wildlife coming into contact with people – or their livestock, crops and houses. In the majority of cases, however, this preventative approach is impractical, expensive and often species-specific (elephants can knock fences over, antelope can jump over them, monkeys can climb over them, wild boar can burrow underneath them).

The more effective strategies are those where wildlife managers and local residents acknowledge the problem and jointly agree a strategy for mitigating wildlife impacts. A common example is some kind of compensation scheme where people are reimbursed for losses they have incurred. These are fraught with difficulties, however, not least because of the transaction costs involved, the difficulty of validating claims and the lack of financial resources available. More innovative approaches are showing some promise including insurance schemes and incentive mechanisms - involving local people in managing and benefiting from wildlife through tourism, hunting and so on – especially where the species in question is endangered and its global conservation value is high.

Not surprisingly, HWC is particularly intense around the boundaries of protected areas. With the continued drive to increase protected area coverage it is likely that conflict will only escalate. It is thus essential that there is a renewed effort to tackle the problem. This will require greater commitment by policy-makers at local, national and international levels. But as important, it will require greater attention to the socio-economic and cultural contexts within which human-wildlife interactions occur, greater recognition of traditional knowledge and practices, and much, much more – and better – innovation.

SOURCE

Distefano, E (2005) Human-Wildlife Conflict Worldwide: ***A collection of case studies, analysis of management strategies and good practices.*** SARD Initiative Report, FAO, Rome

Please direct queries or comments for the authors to Elisa Distefano : elisa.distefano@fao.org

The full paper can be downloaded from http://www.fao.org/SARD/common/ecg/1357/en/HWC_final.pdf
More information about the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) Initiative can be found at www.fao.org/sard/initiative

BIOSOC

BioSoc is a new monthly email bulletin from the Poverty and Conservation Learning Group (PCLG), hosted by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). BioSoc highlights key new research on biodiversity and society, poverty and conservation and is available in English, Spanish and French.

All issues are available online at: www.povertyandconservation.info

Please let us know about other networks that might be interested in subscribing by emailing us at: BioSoc@iied.org

POVERTY AND CONSERVATION LEARNING GROUP (PCLG)

The PCLG aims to share key information, highlight new research highlight and promote learning on poverty-conservation linkages. For more information visit: www.povertyandconservation.info

TO UNSUBSCRIBE TO BIOSOC

Please email BioSoc@iied.org with the subject heading UNSUBSCRIBE.