

BioSoc: the Biodiversity and Society Bulletin

Research highlights on biodiversity and society, poverty and conservation

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VALUING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE ON BIODIVERSITY-LIVELIHOOD LINKAGES: HOW TO WIN MORE AND LOSE LESS

A new publication by BirdLife International provides a synthesis of local analyses of biodiversity-livelihoods linkages in key biodiversity sites in developing countries. The studies were carried out by BirdLife partners and focused on sites designated by the organisation as 'Important Bird Areas' or IBAs. BirdLife's developing country partners are conservation organisations whose members and the local groups they work with are poor people. There is therefore a strong motivation to link conservation with poverty reduction at the local level. Doing this effectively, however, requires a clear understanding of who the poor are and what poverty means locally.

The studies explore how local people perceive poverty –from lack of money and lack of access to land and resources, to vulnerability to economic and environmental shocks – and how the IBA's contribute to alleviating some of these problems. The studies capture, in local voices, the values of natural resources that are familiar from the academic and scientific literature – food, medicines, building materials, grazing, safety nets – and highlight the poorest people's high level of reliance on environmental goods and services. They emphasise, however, that poverty means different things to different people in different places.

Understanding the contribution of biodiversity to local livelihoods therefore requires careful attention to local needs and a better evaluation of the importance of different resources to poor people's livelihoods. As has been said many times, there is no blueprint for identifying biodiversity-livelihood links, and there is no substitute for local knowledge in designing conservation measures that address human needs.

BirdLife has been able to use the findings of its local situation analyses to design interventions that respond to local peoples' priorities – supporting agricultural development around Kibira National Park in Burundi to relieve pressure on the park's resources; developing high-value, community-based ecotourism in Bolivia; commercialising non-timber forest product collection in Palas Valley, Pakistan. BirdLife does not suggest that its approach will always result in win-win solutions for biodiversity and for local livelihoods – indeed such scenarios are likely to be rare. However understanding local people's perceptions and values and integrating these into conservation interventions can, the report suggests, lead to "win more-lose less" outcomes.

SOURCE

BirdLife International (2006) *Livelihoods and the environment at Important Bird Areas: listening to local voices*. BirdLife International, Cambridge, UK

The report can be downloaded from:

http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/01/listening_to_local_voices_IBAs.pdf

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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.

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POVERTY AND CONSERVATION LEARNING GROUP (PCLG)

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