

Poverty and Conservation Learning Group

Update
November 2006

The Learning Group Initiative So Far

The Poverty and Conservation Learning Group (PCLG) is a multi-stakeholder forum, coordinated by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). It is intended to promote organizational learning on the nature, extent and implications of linkages between biodiversity conservation and poverty in order to:

- Strengthen organisations working on these issues;
- Help build consensus on key issues;
- Improve practice and policy-making.

Members of the Learning Group are representatives of organisations from a range of backgrounds (conservation, development, indigenous rights); sectors (NGOs, government agencies, private sector, civil society); and levels of operation – international, regional and national.

The Learning Group initiative started in 2004 with support from the Ford Foundation, in response to a continuing – and potentially divisive - debate on the links between conservation and poverty. During this phase a consultation process set out to determine the need for the Learning Group, to explore different models for operating the Group and to start identifying the key issues around which information sharing, dialogue and learning were required. The first phase of the Learning Group initiative culminated in a two-day symposium in Cambridge, UK, in December 2005 with invited participants from a range of backgrounds representing over 30 organisations working on conservation-poverty linkages. The first day was spent discussing the options for the structure and functions of the Learning Group and on discussing key issues that the Group could potentially tackle. It was agreed by the meeting participants that the Group needed to fulfill two major - but different – functions:

- 1) promoting good practice amongst *policy makers and practitioners* through information analysis, synthesis and dissemination;
- 2) facilitating dialogue and mutual learning among and between different types of *organisations* through a programme of “learning activities”.

The second day was run as the first “Learning Event” – to give participants a flavour of how these might work in practice. The event was a workshop that brought together the coordinators of international initiatives addressing conservation-poverty linkages. These ranged from broad poverty-environment initiatives to those focussed on specific components of biodiversity (e.g. forests) or specific conservation strategies (e.g. protected areas).

A full report of the inception meeting and the learning event, together with all the presentations, can be found on our website www.povertyandconservation.info. This website was an important, and we hope you find useful, output of the first phase of Learning Group work. The website now contains a wealth of resources for public use, including an extensive bibliography, case studies, and links to member organisations and related initiatives, and the next Learning Group phase will see opportunities to use the website more interactively. In the meantime we would welcome your comments and suggestions for additions to content.

Launching Phase Two of The Learning Group

Recognising that PCLG represents a wide range of stakeholders with very different needs, perspectives and agendas, and building on the outputs of the December 2005 symposium, the second phase (Sept 06-08) will focus on four main sets of activities:

- i. Maintaining an overview of ongoing initiatives – synthesising and interpreting findings of individual initiatives in a bigger context - the Learning Group as the *Big Picture Synthesiser*. The Conceptual Framework that was developed during Phase 1 identified a set of seven assumptions or hypotheses about the nature and extent of conservation-poverty linkages and described the state of knowledge associated with each of these hypotheses. Through the PCLG we will explore how new research findings contribute to this body of knowledge, dispel some of the myths or confirm some of the assumptions.
- ii. Making links and fostering learning between and within different communities of interest – the Learning Group as a *'Dating Agency'*. PCLG will continue to “map” the range of different organisations engaging in the poverty-conservation debate, document their activities and impacts and the skills and resources they have to offer. In this way PCLG will be able to highlight complementarities with other organisations and to help identify different perspectives from other groups working on the same issues or in the same locations. It will also help to highlight initiatives where poverty or conservation are being addressed in isolation but where there is potential for synergy.
- iii. Collecting information from a diverse range of sources and making it widely accessible – the Learning Group as an *Information Portal*. As part of the establishment phase of the Learning Group, a multi-lingual website has been developed at www.povertyandconservation.info. This is the Learning Group's main repository for information and a key means for dissemination. In this new phase, we will continue to develop the existing resources and links on the site as well as developing new functions. We will also explore non web-based outreach mechanisms.
- iv. Facilitating a series of learning activities on key issues – the Learning Group as a *Capacity Building Mechanism*. Many organisations working on conservation-poverty linkages are keen to share their experiences and learn from others. In many cases, however, resources are not available to enable key groups to come together and many activities continue in isolation. The PCLG intends to establish a small grants fund to enable Group members to develop activities around three broad thematic areas:
 - Poverty and conservation in international and national policies and processes
 - Implementing conservation with social justice – governance, rights and participation
 - Assessing - and addressing - conservation impactsThis will be coupled with an annual learning event that brings together those involved in these initiatives and other participants in the Learning Group to share their experiences and lessons learned.

Across each of the above sets of activities it is important that the Learning Group should act as a neutral forum, providing a “safe space” to discuss contentious issues, facilitating a process of political negotiation between groups who have deeply opposing views on conservation and sustainable livelihoods, one that recognises the need to address issues of social and environmental justice, and catalyse appropriate action.

The result will be a step-change in scale-up of understanding about poverty-conservation links and how to act. This will not be achieved, however, without significant resources applied to coordination. IIED is well placed to convene activities at the global level. As the Group develops, however, we will explore mechanisms for extending the provision of these activities into national and local learning forums, for example through existing networks and through encouraging participation by regional or national organisations with the capacity to develop spin off activities.

How the Group Will Function

The Learning Group is convened and facilitated by IIED, and IIED staff will act as the PCLG Secretariat. Dilys Roe (Senior Researcher in IIED's Natural Resources Group) will coordinate the Group, assisted by Jo Elliott (IIED Visiting Fellow) and Alessandra Giuliani (Research Assistant). Many of the information dissemination and analysis activities described above will be conducted by the PCLG Secretariat but the active participation of all the Group members will be encouraged. The grant scheme for Learning Activities will be managed by the PCLG Secretariat, but Group members will be expected to take the lead in devising and running the activities and grant recipients will be expected to participate in the annual Learning Group symposium.

An ultimate goal of the Learning Group is to influence policy change so that conservation policy takes better account of poverty concerns; development policy takes better account of biodiversity concerns; and both pay attention to human rights. Activities to date have therefore focussed on *key organisations* that are engaged in the conservation-poverty debate including donor agencies, indigenous peoples groups, sustainable development institutes and conservation NGOs. We propose to continue this focus on policy-relevant organisations and additional members – including from government agencies and the private sector – will be encouraged to join the Group. The Group will meet as a whole once a year though the annual symposium – and potentially twice a year once the small grants scheme is established. Group members will also be actively encouraged to participate in smaller meetings that are convened as part of other international processes.

A small advisory committee was established in the first phase of this initiative and one of the first steps in this new phase will be to expand this committee to represent the mix of stakeholders currently participating in the Group. This will provide support to the Secretariat and maintain oversight of the planned activities.

Current Status

Funding for Phase 2 of the Learning Group Initiative was secured in September 2006. Substantive funding is provided by the Ford Foundation and by Irish Aid with smaller contributions from across IIED's range of donors including DGIS, Norad, Sida and DFID. As a result, activities i, ii, and iii are now underway:

- The BioSoc e-bulletin was launched in March 2006, supported by DGIS, and will continue to be produced on a monthly basis (<http://www.povertyandconservation.info/en/biosoc.php>). We are always looking for new research to highlight so please do forward any new publications for review.
- Apart from some final tidying, the website is now fully functional in English, French and Spanish. Next year we will start to add new functions including the practitioners exchange forum and the e-library.
- We will shortly circulate to members the first of our quarterly updates of major poverty-conservation initiatives, highlighting new activities and research findings – analysed against the hypotheses set out in our conceptual framework.

- In the new year we will start work on developing a Reader in Poverty and Conservation to be published by Earthscan.

Funding is not yet fully secure for the small grants scheme and we continue to explore other avenues for this. In the meantime the PCLG Secretariat has been able to support a small number of relevant activities that fit within the three themes we have identified including:

- A workshop coordinated by Fauna and Flora International on CITES and Livelihoods, held in Cape Town in September 2006 (see [http://www.povertyandconservation.info/docs/20060907-CITES_Livelihoods\(en\).pdf](http://www.povertyandconservation.info/docs/20060907-CITES_Livelihoods(en).pdf))
- Research support to a UNEP-WCMC initiative to explore the potential for socio-economic indicators for protected area management (see <http://www.povertyandconservation.info/en/activity.php>)
- Support to the establishment of a new Task Force on Protected Areas and Equity within the World Commission on Protected Areas.

We have also provided support to TILCEPA to cover printing costs for a special edition of PARKS journal, focussing on Community Conserved Areas. PCLG members will be sent a copy of this journal as soon as it is available.

We hope the next PCLG Update will announce the launch of our small grants fund for learning activities! In the meantime we hope you will keep sending us new content for the website and for BioSoc e-bulletins, your ideas for learning events and possible symposium themes and your suggestions for how the Learning Group can help your organisation better address conservation-poverty linkages.

Best wishes

Dilys, Jo and Alessandra

