

BioSoc: the Biodiversity and Society Bulletin

Research highlights on biodiversity and society, poverty and conservation

ISSUE 3: MAY 2006

LINKING LOCAL AND GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY BENEFITS – A MISSED OPPORTUNITY IN THE GEF?

Established in 1991, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is intended to help developing countries cover the cost of initiatives that protect the global environment. GEF funds the incremental (additional) costs to developing countries necessary to deliver global (as opposed to national or local) environmental benefits, such as reducing biodiversity loss or climate change.

In many cases, generating local benefits – or compensating for local costs – is an essential way of delivering and sustaining global benefits. This is particularly true in the GEF focal area of biodiversity where the majority of projects have focused on protected areas – recognised for having, in many cases, negative effects on local resource users. A recent study by the GEF Evaluation Office found, however, that the links between local and global benefits were often either overlooked, misunderstood, or inappropriately addressed.

The two main strategies employed to secure ‘win-win’ outcomes for global and local benefits were alternative income-generating activities – intended to *substitute* for practices negatively affecting biodiversity – and sustainable use activities – intended to *enhance* existing resource use practices. In many cases, the income generating activities were adopted as *additions* to existing livelihood strategies rather than substitutions because of their lack of fit with local livelihood realities, while the sustainable use activities (usually ecotourism) often failed because of a lack of commercial and market awareness, inadequate local capacity, and ineffective distribution (bypassing the poorest and most vulnerable groups).

The study recognises that the opportunities for win-win outcomes are context-specific and that the protected area focus of the GEF biodiversity portfolio has been a major limiting factor – given the local costs imposed by restrictions in resource access and use. Enhancing the contribution that actions at the local level can make to global environmental benefits means more attention to local benefits within GEF projects. This will require involving a broader range of expertise in project design, management, monitoring and evaluation and, perhaps most crucially, establishing mechanisms for identifying and managing trade-offs in the majority of cases where win-wins are unlikely.

The future holds potential. The findings of the local benefits study are based on projects from 1991-2000, but the study team also examined a small sample of more recent projects that reflect GEF's new biodiversity priorities. While there remains a focus on protected areas, increasing emphasis is now placed on biodiversity in productive landscapes outside of formal protected areas – with far greater recognition of the socio-economic and cultural links with resource conservation. Recognising and managing potential negative impacts remains, however, a major weakness. Until local people are treated as part of the solution to biodiversity conservation – rather than the problem – GEF is unlikely to achieve, let alone sustain, its environmental objectives. Enhancing local benefits is not the solution to global biodiversity loss but it provides many opportunities for contributing to this imperative.

SOURCE

GEF Evaluation Office (2006) *The Nature and Role of Local Benefits in Global Environmental Programs*. Global Environment Facility Evaluation Office: Washington DC.

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Hard copies of the report will be available from the authors at:
GEF Evaluation Office, 1818 H Street, NW MSN G6-604, Washington, DC 20433, USA

Electronic copies of the study documents can be downloaded from:

www.gefweb.org/MonitoringandEvaluation/MEOngoingEvaluations/MEOLocalBenefits/meolocalbenefits.html

More information about the GEF can be found at www.gefweb.org/index.html

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