
BioSoc: the Biodiversity and Society Bulletin

Research highlights on biodiversity and society,
poverty and conservation

Linking biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction: rigorous evidence required – and multidisciplinary too!!

Five years ago a publication of the Wildlife Conservation Society reviewed 37 case studies of biodiversity-poverty linkages and highlighted the weaknesses of the evidence base¹. This issue of evidence was taken up by the Poverty and Conservation Learning Group (www.povertyandconservation.info) which commissioned a series of “State of Knowledge” reviews² and hosted a conference on this theme last year.³ Cornell University has now brought this issue to international academic attention, coordinating a special feature on biodiversity conservation and poverty traps within the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) - one of one of the world's most widely read and cited journals. They remind us that continued biodiversity loss and persistent poverty are not inevitable – but equally will not be resolved without evidence that can highlight the opportunities and risks of different interventions: “In the absence of rigorous evidence on the synergies and trade-offs between biodiversity conservation and escapes from poverty traps, opinion and untested hypotheses predominate and crucial linkages are too often overlooked”.

The special feature includes 10 papers that explore different approaches to linking biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation in a variety of locations and scales. An introductory paper highlights current weaknesses in the evidence base: the absence of landscape-scale matched controls; the absence of sufficient baseline or historical data; the absence of credible counterfactual analysis. The authors point out major areas of concern with the current literature – including the need not only to get the metrics right but also to consider temporal changes in those metrics; the need to consider tipping points; the need to consider a multiplicity of different

biodiversity-poverty relationships that may be occurring in one location.

The rest of the feature is therefore devoted to a series of papers that draw on multi-disciplinary data. The studies include empirical analyses of key questions such as do protected areas cause/exacerbate poverty or do they offer a route out of poverty? and case studies of innovative approaches to linking biodiversity and poverty alleviation – including insurance schemes and market mechanisms. The authors hope these papers will not only help shape how we think about the relationship between biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation – but also how we measure, evaluate and interpret the results of interventions. Most importantly the authors hope that these papers will provide the starting point for a new era of new empirical, interdisciplinary research. Researchers: the gauntlet has been thrown down!

Dilys Roe, September 2011

¹Agrawal, A and Redford K (2006) Poverty, Development and Biodiversity Conservation: Shooting in the Dark. WCS Working Paper no 26, Wildlife Conservation Society, New York. http://www.forest-trends.org/documents/files/doc_536.pdf

²Roe, D (ed) (2010). Linking Biodiversity Conservation and Poverty Reduction: A state of knowledge review. CBD Technical Series no 44; Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal. <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-55-en.pdf>

³Roe, D; Walpole, M; and Elliott, J (2010) Linking Biodiversity Conservation and Poverty Reduction – What, where and how? Report of an international symposium held at the Zoological Society of London. http://www.povertyandconservation.info/docs/20100901_ZSL_Symposium_Report.pdf

The special feature of **PNAS** on Biodiversity Conservation and Poverty Traps edited by Chris Barrett, Alex Travis and Partha Dasgupta is available free to download at: http://www.pnas.org/cgi/collection/biodiversity_conservation

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