

Protected Areas and Equity: Myth or Reality in the CBD?

CBD COP8 Side Event, Tuesday 21st March, 2006

Meeting Summary

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), Care International, Kalpavriksh – Environmental Action Group and the IUCN WCPA-CEESP joint Theme on Indigenous and Local Communities, Equity and Protected Areas (TILCEPA) organized a side event on Protected Areas and Equity during the CBD 8th Conference of Parties in Curitiba, March 2006. The objective of the event was to explore the equity issues associated with protected areas and to whether there was any real commitment within the CBD to addressing these.

The CBD Programme of Work (PoW) on Protected Areas includes a specific goal (Goal 2.1) on Equity and Benefit Sharing that suggests a number of activities CBD parties could take:

- Adjust policies to avoid and mitigate negative impacts, and where appropriate compensate costs & equitably share benefits in accordance with the national legislation.
- Recognize and promote a broad set of protected area governance types which may include areas conserved by indigenous and local communities.
- Use social and economic benefits generated by protected areas for poverty reduction, consistent with protected-area management objectives.

Experience shows, however, that there are no simple solutions to enhancing equity within protected areas and many question the cost implications of following such a route when resources for conservation are already stretched and biodiversity loss is continuing unabated. There is a danger therefore, that despite the CBD's adoption of social justice rhetoric, there is little commitment to putting this into practice.

Dilys Roe (IIED) opened the meeting by providing a summary of the key developments in international conservation policy processes that had resulted in the adoption of equity goals in the PoW. Disquiet about equity - and the need to address it within the CBD - started to arise in the 2000 World Conservation Congress in Amman, but it was the 2003 World Parks Congress in Durban that was a pivotal point, with unprecedented attendance by indigenous and community representatives and the development of a range of recommendations covering governance, poverty, indigenous rights and so on. It was agreed at this meeting that the CBD's draft PoW on Protected Areas should take account of these recommendations, and at COP7 in Kuala Lumpur the following year the PoW was finalized with an additional element on Governance, Participation, Equity and Benefit Sharing.

Rob van den Berg, Director of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Evaluation Office then presented highlights from the recently published *Local Benefits Study* to illustrate some of the equity issues associated with protected areas. The objectives of the GEF study were:

- To explore the inter-relationship between environmental and local livelihood benefits
- To understand how to mobilize local actors to support environmental management and reduce negative impacts on local communities
- To assist the GEF family to improve its policies, strategies and implementation.

88 GEF biodiversity projects were sampled of which 76 were mainly focused on protected areas. Of these, restrictions on resource access featured in 72 projects but these costs imposed on local stakeholders dependent on natural resources were rarely recognized or addressed by project interventions. Equity and/or poverty issues were only considered in 29 out of 88 projects with most tending to ignore negative social impacts in design and implementation.

Addressing equity issues is specified in GEF operational strategy and policy. Strategic considerations for the Biodiversity Focal Area include, for example:

- Stakeholder involvement – including local communities in project design and implementation
- Issues of poverty ... distribution of benefits and accountability for conservation of key resources
- Demographic, gender and social organizational processes that influence human and environmental interactions.

Further the GEF Incremental Costs Policy requests projects to consider that costs and benefits may accrue to different groups. To ensure acceptability and sustainability of the proposed intervention, good project design would address any re-distributional (equity) effects of that intervention. As with the CBD PoW, the rhetoric is there – the problem is one of turning good policy into good practice.

Lea Scherl (TILCEPA) emphasised the importance of addressing equity issues in protected area management – from both an ethical and a practical perspective and discussed whether different governance types for protected areas resulted in greater equity. Participatory governance is often assumed to be equitable – and indeed there are many success stories particularly amongst community conserved areas and co-managed areas. But there are also many problems. A lunchtime session held in the Community Tabo on the same theme provided an opportunity for community representatives from developing countries to highlight some of the problems including the capture of benefits by powerful and elite groups (Kenya), the high transaction costs of participation (Philippines) and the lack of tangible benefits at the local level – despite a co-management agreement (Peru).

Identifying potential winners and losers from protected areas – at both the micro and macro scale – is critical to enhancing equity. A presentation by Phil Franks (Care International) found that conservation incentive mechanisms such as revenue sharing schemes and community trust funds can make a substantial contribution to conservation and equity but only if carefully targeted at those who are most dependent on natural resources and most affected by a protected area. The CBD has a critical role to play in providing an enabling framework for equity issues to be addressed, but worryingly there seems to have been considerable back-peddling on its commitment. COP1, for example noted the need for “innovative measures, including ... economic incentives..., including those which assist developing countries to address situations where opportunity costs are incurred by local communities and to identify ... means by which these can be compensated, in accordance with article 11”. This need to recognize winners and losers was re-emphasised at COP6: “any conservation measure has some impact on stakeholders; incentive measures should take into account those who benefit and those who assume the cost of that measure”. By COP8, however, there was no longer any reference to compensation for local costs, the purpose of monetary incentives being “to create a differential in favour of desirable activities where it is not feasible to discourage the undesirable alternatives through other measures” (ie a last resort).

The CBD's apparent ambiguity on equity raises concerns as to its commitments to addressing this and other social justice issues in its PoW on Protected Areas. Having agreed to the insertion of these important goals in the PoW there is a real danger that the CBD will now feel the job is done and the hard-won efforts of indigenous and local community groups, social justice organizations and other advocates who lobbied so hard in Durban and Kuala Lumpur will have been in vain. Reinvigorating the social equity agenda of the PoW is essential to maintain the momentum from Durban. This is an issue that WCPA will be working with TILCEPA and other partners to address.