

BioSoc: the Biodiversity and Society Bulletin

Research highlights on biodiversity and society, poverty and conservation

ISSUE 6: AUGUST 2006

SETTING NEW STANDARDS FOR CONSERVATION: DISPLACEMENT REDEFINED

Displacement of local people has been one of the most contentious negative impacts of protected areas. The World Bank was one of the first agencies to address this issue, developing a policy on involuntary resettlement in 1980. *Michael Cernea*, architect of the World Bank resettlement policy describes, in articles published recently in the *Journal of Social Change* and IUCN's *Policy Matters*, how the mounting criticism of forced, physical relocation from protected areas brought about a slight "tactical shift" in the establishment of conservation areas whereby a strategy of restrictions on local access to, and use of, resources within the park was employed in place of geographic displacement. While physical displacement brought with it (at least theoretically) an obligation to compensate and resettle those affected, restricting access to resources has not been accompanied by any counter measures to address the subsequent local impoverishment that this strategy has caused.

In response to this, researchers have documented evidence of the adverse socio-economic impacts of resource restrictions and argued that this is tantamount to "occupational displacement with imposed impoverishment." The World Bank and other development agencies have taken note of this weight of evidence. The Bank's resettlement policy has now been revised and extends the concept of displacement to include "involuntary restriction of access to legally designated parks and protected areas, resulting in adverse impacts on the livelihoods of the displaced persons." This applies not just to World Bank-funded projects but also to GEF projects executed by the Bank and private sector projects that have IFC financing. Meanwhile, the African and Asian Development Banks have rapidly followed suit with similar policies.

What are the implications of this new approach? The Bank is adamant that it is meant to be good for conservation and good for people. Its policy is not intended to oppose the use of restrictions *per se* but to challenge the effectiveness of using this approach without taking account of its potentially devastating impacts on local peoples' livelihoods. It is argued that unless local people are compensated for any resource restrictions that are imposed – and unless these compensatory benefits exceed the costs the restriction implies – they will seek to undermine the conservation initiative. Successful implementation, Cernea points out, should therefore be in the interests of both affected people and conservation supporters.

Turning this policy approach into a practical reality will require more detailed socio-economic assessments prior to protected areas establishment, and it will also require increased financial resources as affected people will be entitled to fair compensation for land and assets foregone. These resources will be made available as a result of changes to the Bank's land financing policy that provides new flexibility for using Bank funds to assist with land acquisition in displacement situations. We should also remember that this new policy currently only applies to projects financed or executed by the multilateral development banks. Changing the nature of the protected areas and poverty relationship will require adoption of similar policies by international conservation organisations and other agencies concerned with biodiversity protection. The Banks have set a new standard. Is it one that others are prepared to rise to?

SOURCE

Cernea, M (2006) Population displacement inside protected areas: a redefinition of concepts in conservation policies. *Policy Matters* 14, 8-26

Please direct queries or comments for the authors to Michael Cernea: mcernea@worldbank.org

The full paper can be downloaded from

<http://www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/Publications/newsletter/Section%20I-part%201.pdf>

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.

All issues are available online at: www.povertyandconservation.info

Please let us know about other networks that might be interested in subscribing by emailing us at: BioSoc@iied.org

POVERTY AND CONSERVATION LEARNING GROUP (PCLG)

The PCLG aims to share key information, highlight new research highlight and promote learning on poverty-conservation linkages. For more information visit: www.povertyandconservation.info

TO UNSUBSCRIBE TO BIOSOC

Please email BioSoc@iied.org with the subject heading UNSUBSCRIBE.