

BioSoc: the Biodiversity and Society Bulletin

Research highlights on biodiversity and society, poverty and conservation

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TACKLING POVERTY NEEDS MORE THAN PROJECTS

A number of influential publications have recently highlighted the linkages between healthy ecosystems and human well-being (*World Resources*, 2005; *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*). The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a significant conservation fund administered by Conservation International (CI) that specifically recognises this link between people and nature.

Launched in 2000 by CI, the World Bank, and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), CEPF now also includes the MacArthur Foundation and the Government of Japan as donor partners – and has an operating budget of US\$125 million. The objective of the Fund is to advance conservation in the world's so called 'biodiversity hotspots' by mobilising civil society action.

Accordingly, grants are made to support a range of civil society organisations and to encourage strategic alliances between different groups, in order to scale-up impacts and avoid duplication of effort. CEPF has, so far, committed grants of nearly US\$70 million – and, five years into the initiative, an independent evaluation was commissioned at the end of last year to determine its effectiveness to date.

Given that the CEPF focuses on biodiversity-rich areas in developing countries, initiatives that link biodiversity conservation with poverty alleviation are seen as a critical component of this fund.

The World Bank and the Government of Japan in particular are concerned that the CEPF should fit with their core focus on poverty reduction. The evaluators found that while a significant number of grants have 'provided the basis for improving the incomes and economic well-being of poor communities' – through jobs, income-generating opportunities and so on – poverty alleviation has not been an explicit focus of the ecosystem profiles that guide grant-making priorities. Moreover, direct project impacts are small, localised and not easily aggregated. More significant poverty impacts are likely to be revealed only in the long term as a result of the effects of the CEPF process on policy, institutions and civil society capacity. In short, governance once again reveals itself as the critical factor constraining success.

The implications for CEPF? Continued support to capacity development of civil society organisations is critical to fulfilling CEPF's vision of biodiversity conservation and human well-being – and funds such as CEPF that are accessible to local organisations are a rare commodity. Scaling-up and extending short-term local impacts however requires this focus on local organisations to be coupled with strategic interventions:

- working with donor partners to mainstream biodiversity into development policy;
- working with implementing partners to integrate poverty issues into ecosystem profiles; and
- engaging government and private sector organisations to develop a more supportive policy framework.

The good news is that CEPF is already responding to the evaluators' recommendations and plans to pay 'special attention to the links between conservation and poverty reduction' as it improves its performance monitoring systems – as well as exploring how it can contribute to poverty reduction strategy processes. With the resources that CEPF appears able to command – and a firm recommendation from the evaluators that the Fund should continue – this has the potential to become an exciting mechanism for nurturing initiatives that put the recommendations of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment into practice.

SOURCE

Wells, M.P., Curran, L.M. and Qayum, S. (2006) *Report of the Independent Evaluation of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund*. CEPF, Washington DC

Please direct queries or comments for the authors to Michael Wells: wells@online.no

A copy of the report can be downloaded from:

www.cepf.net/ImageCache/cepf/content/pdfs/cepfevaluationreport_5fandmanagementresponse_2epdf/v1/cepfevaluationreport_5fandmanagementresponse.pdf

More information about CEPF can be found at www.cepf.net/xp/cepf/

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