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INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, BIODIVERSITY AND THE GEF: LEARNING FROM PAST MISTAKES?

A number of studies have highlighted the negative impacts of Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects – particularly those associated with protected areas – on indigenous people. This includes studies conducted by the GEF itself - the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Office recently conducted an analysis of the extent to which local benefits are generated within GEF biodiversity projects (reviewed in BioSoc 3:

[http://www.povertyandconservation.info/docs/20060501-BioSoc_3\(en\).pdf](http://www.povertyandconservation.info/docs/20060501-BioSoc_3(en).pdf)). The study found that the links between local and global benefits were often overlooked, misunderstood or inappropriately addressed but noted that its analysis focused on old projects (up to 2000) while newer projects were much more sensitive to local socio-economic priorities.

In order to follow up on this assertion, Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) has recently analysed the extent to which indigenous peoples' issues have been treated in GEF biodiversity projects under preparation or implementation between 2005 and 2007. The FPP study analyses project documentation for 23 full- or medium-sized biodiversity projects and finds that while indigenous peoples' rights are considered in the majority of projects, the treatment is generally superficial. Within the portfolio there are a handful of global and regional projects which score better than the national projects – indeed some are intended specifically to support indigenous peoples' organisations including the World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism and the Indigenous People's Network for Change. Particular concerns are a inadequate consultation, lack of recognition of land and resource rights and a failure to respect the need for acquiring free, prior and informed consent. The most "socially-sensitive" projects still appear to be mainly confined to the UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme.

Overall the study suggests that, although improvements have been noted, the GEF's claim that it is now better addressing indigenous and other social issues within its biodiversity portfolio is only partly justified: "The overall trend is one of gradual and patchy evolution in GEF project design when a more radical shift in GEF policy and practice is urgently required across the biodiversity portfolio."

Monique Barbut, GEF's CEO, is already planning radical reform of the GEF. The FPP's concern is whether this reform will go deep enough to address the concerns of indigenous and local communities that are affected by GEF projects. In order to do so, it is not enough that the GEF improves attention to consultation and participation within its project design and implementation but that these principles are also embodied in the reform process itself.

SOURCE

Taylor, L and Griffiths T (2007) *A Desk-Based Review of the Treatment of Indigenous People's and Social Issues in Large and Medium-Sized GEF Biodiversity Projects (2005-2006)*. Forest Peoples Programme, Moreton-in-Marsh.

The report is available to download from

http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi_igo/gef/gef_biodiv_proj_review_feb07_eng.pdf

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BIOSOC

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