

# Working with communities at Important Bird Areas: Seeking “genuine participation” as a principle for conservation and development in practice



## Policy recommendation:

**BirdLife International recommends more effective implementation of the various CBD articles on participation so as to provide an effective mechanism through which poverty reduction can be mainstreamed into biodiversity conservation.**

## 1. The Right to Participate

Decisions affecting people’s lives are made every day, including by multi-lateral agencies, governments, NGOs, companies, community-leaders, influential individuals and land-owners. There is widespread acceptance that individuals should have the right to participate in decision-making, for example through democratic process involving election of representatives, or a voice in planning and decision-making processes that affect them. Statements of principle regarding the rights of local people to participate in decision-making are contained within various rights based international conventions and declarations, some examples of which are included in Box 1.

### Box 1: International declarations and participation.

#### International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OHCHR – 1976)

- All peoples have the *right of self-determination*
- By virtue of that right they ...*freely pursue* their economic, social and cultural development.

#### ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, (1991)

- [Indigenous peoples] shall have the *right to decide their own priorities* for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to *exercise control* ... over their own economic, social and cultural development....
- They shall *participate* in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes for national and regional development....

#### UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)

- Article 18: Indigenous peoples have the right to *participate in decision-making*

## 2. Participation, biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction

These rights are applicable to local people’s participation in decisions on the use and management (including conservation) of land, wetlands, seas and their resources. There are also several ‘pragmatic’ reasons given for ensuring meaningful local participation in conservation (Box 2).

### Box 2. Pragmatic arguments for seeking people’s involvement in conservation<sup>1</sup>

- The essentially economic argument states that local people who are participating as beneficiaries of conservation, so that they are better able to meet their needs and achieve their development objectives, are more likely to change behaviours that damage the environment through overexploitation.
- Local and indigenous people often have knowledge, skills and organizational capacities that are useful and relevant in resource management.
- People are more likely to follow resource management agreements and rules if they have had input into these agreements. Participation in decision-making makes it more likely that the agreements will meet their needs and will reflect what is achievable.

Being deprived of the right or ability to participate in decision-making has also been identified as a core dimension of poverty (Box 3). It is clear then that effective participation: (1) respects people’s rights, (2) can help achieve more effective conservation, and (3) directly addresses an element of multi-dimensional poverty.

<sup>1</sup> Fisher, R.J., Maginnis, S., Jackson, W.J., Barrow, E. and Jeanrenaud, S. (2005) *Poverty and Conservation: Landscapes, people and power*. Landscapes and Livelihoods Series No. 2. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK

### Box 3: Rights, participation, and the DAC Guidelines to Poverty Reduction (OECD 2001)

An adequate concept of poverty should include all the most important areas in which people of either gender are deprived and perceived as incapacitated in different societies and local contexts. The DAC guidelines identify 5 core dimensions to poverty, including the following:

- **Political capabilities** include human rights, a voice and some influence over public policies and political priorities. Deprivation of basic political freedoms or human rights is a major aspect of poverty.
- **Socio-cultural capabilities** concern the ability to participate as a valued member of a community. They refer to social status, dignity and other cultural conditions for belonging to a society which are highly valued by the poor themselves.

### 3. Participation and the CBD

Participation of indigenous and local people is a fundamental principle of the CBD, implicit in Article 8(j), and built upon and operationalised in various guidelines and other documents, including the Programme of Work on Protected Areas, the draft ethical code of conduct to ensure respect for the cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous and local communities, and the Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines for the Sustainable use of Biodiversity (Box 4).

### Box 4. Local Participation and the CBD

#### Article 8(j): Traditional Knowledge, Innovations and Practices

Each contracting Party shall ... respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities ... relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits .....

#### Goal 2.2 of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas

To enhance and secure involvement of indigenous and local communities and relevant stakeholders  
Target: Full and effective participation by 2008, of indigenous and local communities, in full respect of their rights and recognition of their responsibilities....

### CBD (Article 8j): Draft ethical code of conduct to ensure respect for the cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous and local communities.

Includes elements on:

- *Subsidiarity and decision-making* (All decisions regarding activities related to biological diversity ... ought to be made at the lowest possible level to ensure community empowerment and effective participation ...)
- *Effective participation/participatory approach* (This principle recognizes the crucial importance of indigenous and local communities effectively participating in all phases of planning and development of activities related to biological diversity and Conservation ...)

### The Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines for the Sustainable use of Biodiversity

- *Practical principle 9:* An interdisciplinary, participatory approach should be applied at the appropriate levels of management and governance related to the use.

### 4. BirdLife's Approach: Local Conservation Groups

BirdLife International is a global Partnership of national organisations, with a mission to conserve birds and biodiversity, working with people towards sustainable use of natural resources, and promoting the links between conservation and sustaining livelihoods. BirdLife Partners nationally identify priority sites for biodiversity conservation using internationally agreed criteria. These priority sites – Important Bird Areas (IBAs) – form the focus of site-based conservation action.

For both pragmatic and rights-based reasons, and in alignment with the principles and guidelines described above, BirdLife Partners work in partnership with local communities, to achieve outcomes which have the support and participation of local people. Through support to Local Conservation Groups, BirdLife's strategy is to empower local institutions, provide them with information, build technical knowledge and skills, and bring them into national and international networks. These measures help them to make informed choices, plan for the long-term, use resources sustainably, and, through linkages to the wider BirdLife Partnership, have a greater role in resource use, management and decision-making at all levels from district to national and international.

### Characteristics of BirdLife's approach

Characteristics of BirdLife's approach to working locally are that the supported institutions are

community-based, comprised predominantly of volunteers, and are networked with other local groups at IBAs, and with the national BirdLife Partner. Apart from this, the approach is flexible, and Partners address the issue of local participation through approaches suited to local cultural, legal, economic, social, and historical norms and practices. This has led to a wide diversity of approach with supported institutions (called Local Conservation Groups) varying greatly in composition, size, origin, focus of activity and legal status. Nevertheless, BirdLife Partners apply a set of shared principles to the structure and running of these institutions (Box 5).

#### Box 5: Shared principles of the Local Conservation Group approach

*Underlying principle = genuine local participation*

##### **Democratic**

- driven by the voices of the majority of their members
- attentive to the views of the community from which they are drawn.

##### **Accountable and transparent**

- accountable to members
- governed through clear and transparent mechanisms.

##### **Empowering**

- able to make their voice heard in decision-making at local, sub-national, national and supra-national levels.

##### **Inclusive**

- open to representatives from all the relevant components of local society which share the group's conservation objectives

LCGs are, however, only an entry point to the wider community. They represent a special interest group with which the national BirdLife Partner has overlapping objectives and agrees to work together. However, from the outset BirdLife Partners aim to ensure that LCGs are supported by the community, and activities aim to ensure that representation is legitimate. However, there will always be different stakeholders within a community (e.g. based on age, gender, ethnicity, land-ownership) and existing inequalities will exist that aren't addressed simply by working with an LCG. Therefore there remains a need for an iterative process of engagement with the wider community to ensure that participation is genuine and representative. BirdLife is achieving this by working through LCGs as its local link to the community.

## Outcomes of genuine participation

In BirdLife's experience, one of the outcomes of a genuinely participatory approach is that it has the potential to address many other issues and principles of relevance to the CBD. For example:

- It ensures ownership and hence sustainability
- It increases the chances that decisions will be made at grassroots level (subsidiarity)
- It increases opportunities for livelihoods improvement of members and the wider community
- It supports empowerment and the strengthening of rights
- It shows respect for local culture and institutions and local social structures
- It implies an equal partnership for conservation
- It helps to ensure that plans are based on local people's decisions: their institutions, their efforts; their voice (heard locally, nationally, regionally); their governance - planning

## Examples

**Improving incomes from fisheries: Musambwa Islands, lake Victoria, Uganda.** Msambwa Islands off the shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda are home to a breeding colony of grey headed gulls as well as many other bird species. They are also a convenient site for a fisherman's camp – fisherman stay there rather than return each day to the mainland, smoking or drying their fish to preserve it. When Nature Uganda (BirdLife in Uganda) started working with the fishermen there was no sanitation on the island leading to a high incidence of disease (dysentery, cholera); use of woody vegetation for smoking fish was severely depleting the vegetation cover; unregulated collection of bird eggs was limiting breeding success; and a major concern for fishermen was the high cost of transporting their catch to the mainland. Nature Uganda worked with the fishermen to organize the formation of an LCG (or 'Site Support Group'), and various conservation and development issues were discussed. An ecological toilet ('Ecosan') was constructed; facilities for keeping fish on ice were provided; regulations on collecting eggs were introduced. As a result, incidence of disease has dropped dramatically; refrigeration means less frequent trips to the markets on the mainland are necessary; vegetation is recovering; and the gull population has increased from 30,000 to 100,000.

**Empowering indigenous communities at San Marcos, Bolivia.** The indigenous community at San Marcos in Bolivia is remote both geographically and in terms of voice and influence, from the centres of decision-making. Association Armonia (BirdLife in Bolivia) has been working with the community to

support their involvement in the conservation of their forest and the creation of sustainable livelihoods based on its resources. A key part of this has been efforts to engage the community in decisions that affect them, and also ensure their *de jure* rights to the forest. Changing institutions and attitudes is a slow process. Nevertheless, there are some promising indications that the project is having an impact. For example, representatives from the SSG now participate in municipal meetings and the community is beginning to receive development assistance. The community is now combining with neighboring communities to petition for the creation of a new municipal department dealing exclusively with the affairs of indigenous forest communities. Armonia is also supporting the community in its claim for the creation of a 240 km<sup>2</sup> ‘Tacana III Indigenous Territory/Communal Protected Area’, and is supporting the community with development of a community-owned ecotourism enterprise, focused on the flagship species the Wattled Curassow.

**Strengthening communities’ role in forest resource management in Indonesia.** Decision making on Natural Resource Management under previous regimes in Indonesia was highly centralised and top-down, including declaration and management of forest reserves and conservation areas. As a result local communities have been disempowered and have lost access to (and responsibility for) forest lands and resources. In some cases the demarcation process also meant that communities lost farmland which led to antagonism between the community and national park authorities. Burung Indonesia (BirdLife in Indonesia) has supported the creation and strengthening of LCGs under the framework of Community Forest Protection Groups (Kelompok Masyarakat Pelestari Hutan – KMPH) at 22 villages around the two national parks on Sumba and has supported them in complex negotiations with government and other stakeholders. As a result, various recommendations and requests made by the KMPH have been implemented by government, including the realignment of the park boundary, provision of housing support, and regulation of limits on timber harvesting.

## 5. Lessons

From its approach to working with local communities at IBAs, BirdLife Partners have had many successes in linking conservation and development and emerging best practice is starting to be documented and disseminated<sup>2</sup>. With respect to ensuring genuine local participation, some of the key lessons are summarized in Box 6.

### Box 6: Lessons on participation from BirdLife’s Local Conservation Group approach

Genuine participation is supported by:

- **Long-term** commitment (not project-based)
- Facilitation by **national** Partner NGOs
- **No hidden agenda** – be open about purpose and interests
- Upward/downward **accountability** (e.g. an MoU)
- **Communication and information access** – local voices, local language, local issues (bridge cultures)
- Presence of **key individuals** (genuine, trusted, charismatic)
- Involvement of the **elderly and the young** – local, traditional knowledge transfer (in danger of being lost)
- **Flexibility** (diverse approaches, local contexts, local social awareness) – recognising great local complexity
- Requires substantial investment into **capacity building**

## 6. Policy recommendation

In April 2002, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Biodiversity (CBD) committed themselves to “*achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth*”. The second part of this objective – the alleviation of poverty – is often forgotten. BirdLife’s experience suggests that more effective implementation of the various CBD articles on participation would provide an effective mechanism through which poverty reduction can be mainstreamed into biodiversity conservation.

**BirdLife International recommends more effective implementation of the various CBD articles on participation so as to provide an effective mechanism through which poverty reduction can be mainstreamed into biodiversity conservation.**

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<sup>2</sup> Conserving Biodiversity In Africa: Guidelines for applying the Site Support Group Approach <http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/03/EnglishDOC.pdf>