

## Addressing human needs in conservation



Jeremy Hobbes / FFI

FFI aims to take account of human needs in all its conservation work. Not only is there a good conservation reason for tackling poverty where it undermines people's ability to act sustainably, but there are also good reasons why conservation itself should not make poor people worse off (see the first briefing sheet in FFI's 'Livelihoods and Conservation in Partnership' series).

FFI endeavours to ensure that its conservation activities do not disadvantage or undermine poor, vulnerable or marginalised people that are dependent upon or live adjacent to natural resources, and wherever possible will seek to conserve biodiversity in ways that enhance local wellbeing and social equity.

Yet conservation and poverty are multi-faceted concepts and the linkages between them are complex and variable (see box 1 overleaf) – so achieving demonstrable change is challenging. As part of its Biodiversity and Human Needs thematic programme FFI has explored the linkages between livelihoods and conservation across its portfolio, reviewed the impacts its work has had on local people, and identified some key lessons.

This document summarises the findings of the analysis, which drew from annual reports of 88 projects, as well as a more

*Fishermen and fish pens on Lake Taal in the Philippines. Approximately a billion people – many of the world's poorest – depend on fish for their main source of animal protein.*

detailed review of 34 projects across 22 countries with a specific livelihoods focus.

### Key findings

#### 1. Livelihoods interventions are ubiquitous across FFI's portfolio

Over 85% of projects reported some kind of effort to address livelihoods in their conservation work in 2006. However, it is important to recognise that this is part of a wide suite of activities taking place in each project – focusing on livelihoods alone will not solve conservation problems. Conservation is a challenging pursuit that usually requires a mix of research, education, awareness-raising, appropriate policies, law enforcement and ecological management as well as local incentives.

#### 2. Livelihoods interventions are diverse in rationale and approach

Much of the academic literature on poverty and conservation assumes a simple, causal link: ease poverty and conservation gains will be made. This is oversimplistic, and in reality there are a range of rationales for engaging with livelihoods, and a range of approaches, all of which are perfectly valid in the right context.

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Across the projects there is a major focus on livelihoods and human needs, and in many cases there are multiple rationales for dealing with different parts of the poverty-conservation nexus. Some are about reducing pressure on biodiversity, some are about placing conservation at the heart of poverty reduction and development, some are about reducing the costs of conservation for local people, and some are simply about generating local goodwill and trust (see box 2).

Livelihoods activities are equally diverse. Projects are strengthening existing livelihoods, developing alternative livelihoods linked to biodiversity and/or protected areas (either consumptive or non-consumptive use) and developing alternative livelihoods not linked to biodiversity (e.g. sustainable agriculture) in roughly equal measure.

The majority of projects focus on improving people's knowledge and skills, as well as strengthening institutional



Juan Pablo Monera / FFI

structures and empowering local communities to have a greater voice. A range of livelihoods outcomes were intended from the interventions: increased income was only relevant in a minority of projects, with food security, reduced vulnerability and improved natural resource management equally important goals.

### 3. Livelihoods interventions are achieving something

Over a third of FFI project managers reported that their most significant project achievements in 2006 related to livelihoods and local communities. These fell into three broad categories: *i) changing government perceptions to accept the legitimacy of bottom-up approaches and embrace community participation, ii) seeing local organisations empowered to take action and influence others, and iii) generating local trust, support and behaviour change through local benefits.* There is evidence from a range of projects that these achievements result in reduced threats to biodiversity and improved conservation (see box 3).

## 1: Broadening concepts of poverty and livelihoods

Poverty is not just having no money, and livelihoods are not just about income and jobs. FFI, like the OECD, DFID and others, accepts broad definitions of these concepts.



Jeremy Holder / FFI

Poverty is disadvantage; it is a lack of voice, opportunity and ability to withstand shocks as well as a lack of money or food or other resources. And improving livelihoods means reducing vulnerability; building skills and understanding, opening doors to wider networks, and removing barriers so that people can secure their own wellbeing in sustainable ways.

In this spirit the term 'livelihoods intervention' is used here to encompass a wide range of activities and goals beyond those that address the ways that people make a living.

*Above: a child from an impoverished community in Cambodia's Cardamom mountains, where FFI is working to improve livelihoods as an integral part of biodiversity conservation. Left: a beekeeping enterprise in Kyrgyzstan, one of many recipients of a small grants scheme to relieve pressure on wild resources.*

## 2: Five different reasons for focusing on human needs

- i) Biodiversity underpins local livelihoods – so poverty reduction is a rationale for conservation
- ii) Poverty damages biodiversity – so poverty reduction is a tool for conservation
- iii) Conservation inflicts disproportionate costs on poor people – so conservation hinders poverty reduction
- iv) Development fuels biodiversity loss – so conservation is hindered by poverty reduction
- v) Local support for conservation is necessary – reducing poverty helps build goodwill and trust

# Lessons, Challenges, Recommendations

- There is no 'one size fits all' model of the relationship between poverty and conservation. Direct causal relationships are rare, and pragmatic or ethical reasons for engaging with livelihoods (to build local support, or reduce local conservation costs) are widespread. However, care must be taken to ensure that livelihoods interventions are part of a broader conservation strategy and do in fact contribute to conservation goals.
- Just like in business, not everything in conservation succeeds or lasts. This may be a result of changing external factors, changes in the people or organisations involved, insufficient resources or inadequate planning. Setbacks can be valuable if we learn from them, adapt to them and use them as a basis for improving performance elsewhere.
- Even where things do succeed this can be difficult to demonstrate. Timeframes over which impacts emerge are long, and separating out the effect of project interventions from other causal factors is difficult. Outcome and impact monitoring is rarely

given the attention it deserves, and some types of project (including policy work and organisational capacity-building) are difficult to monitor. Social impacts are diverse and not always fully understood and traditional quantitative indicator-based approaches are not always relevant.

Efforts to build awareness and capacity building amongst staff and partners, and improvements to reporting systems, have greatly improved FFI's ability to demonstrate change. A key lesson has been to not underestimate the value of anecdotes and stories of change. We have been working closely with the development sector to adopt new tools and processes, and with others in the conservation sector to share lessons and improve practice.

- Just as there are trade-offs between conservation and development, so there are trade-offs between different livelihoods benefits and costs, and between different groups of winners and losers: the 'community' is not a homogenous entity.

## 3: Outcomes of livelihoods interventions for conservation

In Kilwa District, Tanzania, villages have been assisted to secure land tenure and sustainable use rights of hardwood Mpingo forest. This has led to increased voluntary set-aside of village forest reserves and co-ordination of local efforts to patrol and protect forest reserves from illegal loggers – outsiders have been turned away and local miscreants fined. Villagers have benefited from land security, increased skills and capacity, improved social networks and a tripling of the price paid for their sustainably harvested timber.

In Cao Bang Province, Vietnam, fuel-efficient stoves have been provided to people living adjacent to forest containing one of the last known populations of the Eastern black-crested gibbon, the most endangered ape species on earth.

These stoves, costing as little as \$10-\$20, have reduced fuel wood consumption by 40-60%, and with it the time spent collecting wood. The fuel-efficient stove programme seems to offer a win-win-win solution for reducing forest degradation, improving local livelihoods and combating global climate change.



*Above: A craftsman working on an Mpingo carving in Tanzania. This beautiful hardwood fetches extremely high prices in developed-world markets, where it is used to make clarinets, oboes and traditional woodwind instruments.*

Conservation may mean reducing or eliminating some livelihoods options, and replacing one set of assets (such as access to specific natural resources) with another (such as support to enhance human, social or physical assets or to diversify livelihoods strategies). Understanding these trade-offs and their implications, and ensuring that local stakeholders themselves understand them, is vital.

- ‘Successful’ projects are generally small-scale, locally based, and relatively long-term. Taking a participatory, people-centred approach is rarely a fast track route to conservation, but taking the time to understand people and their interactions with biodiversity, to build local trust, support and capacity, to meet local needs and to influence the socio-political environment in which people live lays a solid foundation for lasting biodiversity conservation.
- Livelihoods interventions will not be relevant in everything that we do, particularly in emergency situations where a rapid response to save populations or habitats is required.

FFI will continue to learn from its ongoing work in this area in order to improve its own performance, whilst sharing those lessons with others.

*Above left: a farmer in Cambodia's Cardamom mountains bangs a tin drum to ward off crop-raiding elephants. FFI has been developing initiatives to help protect rural livelihoods without causing harm to wildlife. Below: Ecotourism schemes are being developed to benefit local communities on the island of Ometepe in Lake Nicaragua.*



Matt Wappler / FFI

## About FFI

FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body, active in over 40 countries around the world, developing, implementing and managing biodiversity conservation projects in partnership with host country organisations, to protect and conserve species and ecosystems. FFI's guiding principles are to work through local partnerships, to act as a catalyst for change, to make conservation relevant and to base decisions on sound science.



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**Contact:** This is one of a series of leaflets produced by the Biodiversity and Human Needs team at FFI. For more information and a detailed report of FFI's livelihoods work contact [livelihoods@fauna-flora.org](mailto:livelihoods@fauna-flora.org)