



COMMON GROUND, COMMON FUTURE

Consolidated Report of the Community Voices Meeting at COP17 on 1st October 2016

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INTRODUCTION

On Saturday 1 October 2016, the Common Ground Common Future meeting was held at the Sandton International Convention Centre, as one of the side events to the CITES 17th Conference of the Parties. This event brought together representatives of rural communities to:

- I. discuss and debate the representation of their voices in wildlife conservation decision making
- II. begin to articulate their perspectives on how wildlife can be a viable land use.

The meeting was co-convened by UNEP, Resource Africa, IIED and IUCN CEESP/SSC Sustainable Use and Livelihoods specialist Group (IUCN SULi)¹. Community representatives were approached to participate from the Anglophone SADC countries, Kenya, Canada, Pakistan and Tajikistan. The actual meeting was attended by 35 community representatives from 11 countries, as well as 36 people from donors, NGOs, IGOs and governments. It was managed by a team of facilitators drawn from the organizing bodies and priority was given to community speakers throughout the meeting.

The strategy to approach communities directly was designed to bring fresh thinking and voices from the people most directly affected by wildlife conservation on old themes that have resulted in stalemate in the corridors of global conservation. For most rural communities, their priorities around land use must emphasise economic livelihoods and socio-cultural needs first and wildlife conservation second. Their voices and perspectives on how wildlife can be a viable land use and its conservation reconciled with their needs are thus critical.

The following donors made the event possible - the organisers and participants wish to express their gratitude to all for their generous support.

- UNEP
- IUCN - SULi
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- Austrian Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management

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WORKSHOP SUMMARY

This document is a summary of discussions from a meeting entitled “Common Ground, Common Future” held on 1 October 2016, in the margins of the 17th Conference of Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). A total of 35 community representatives from 11 countries (Tajikistan, Canada and 9 African countries) came together to discuss their perspectives on living with wildlife, sustainable use and wildlife conservation at an event hosted by Resource Africa, IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULi) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The following statement was drafted during the meeting based on plenary and breakout group discussions, and read out to all participants at the end of the day for discussion and approval. We are confident this represents a general consensus of those present and participating in the meeting.

Communities and wildlife management - where are we now?

The world is concerned about biodiversity loss, particularly as evidenced by large-scale wildlife declines. Increasingly international and national government and non-government organisations are taking a strong stance and demanding that wildlife be better protected.

Much of the world’s remaining wildlife lives on land owned, used or managed by indigenous peoples and local communities, yet they are rarely involved in national and international decision-making processes that affect the future of land and wildlife. Consequently there is a democratic deficit in wildlife governance, with people at global and national level making decisions about land and wildlife, with those who actually live with wildlife and bear the consequences of those decisions, having no influence or voice. This democratic gap is growing and it needs to be closed.

There are examples of places where rights to use, manage, and make decisions about wildlife have been devolved to the local level. This is a necessary condition if people are to live alongside wildlife. But devolution of management authority is not sufficient. Local people need a platform to increase the legitimacy of their voices on the national and international stage discussing wildlife as a viable land use option.

How do policy decisions currently affect communities?

Decisions affecting the roles and responsibilities of communities in wildlife conservation are made at local, national and international levels. These decisions can have positive or negative effects on local communities depending on the governance structures that exist in the places where people share the land with wildlife, and on the ways local communities wish to interact with wildlife. From a local community perspective, however, international conservation policies are often a form of external imposition, with little consideration for the impacts that occur at the local level.

International conservation policy - including CITES and CBD - includes a number of commitments that recognise the roles, rights and responsibilities of communities in conservation. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reinforce these commitments which include:

- Sustainable use – consumptive and non-consumptive
 - Equitable benefit sharing
 - Full and effective participation
 - A strong voice in conservation debates
 - Respect for traditional knowledge and customary use
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At the national level, the degree to which these commitments are upheld is mixed:

- The enabling environment for community based wildlife management has strengthened in many places, but implementing them is still weak in some countries and in others there has been no meaningful devolution,
- Participation in decision making is getting stronger but it is not always meaningful participation.
- Benefit sharing exists in many places but often decisions on distribution of benefits are made about communities, not with communities,
- Indigenous knowledge plays a strong role in policy formulation in some places but is not used enough in others,
- Traditional social norms can provide powerful support for conservation but are often not embraced by mainstream conservation efforts.

Overall, local communities do not feel that national governments have afforded them a central role in defining and executing conservation interventions. Furthermore, they incur considerable costs from wildlife, particularly in the form of human-wildlife conflict, but often there is no formal mechanism for mitigating these costs and/or for ensuring that the conservation benefits flow to those bearing the costs. Where conservation-linked benefits do not exist, or used to exist and now have been lost (as a result of national or international policy decisions on how wildlife should or should not be used) there is an incentive for illegal activity.

Increasing community voice in wildlife decision making

Communities need a level playing field on which their voices can be heard in national and international policy making on wildlife conservation. However, even if the opportunities to participate in decision making arise, communities do not currently have the capacity to negotiate fully with government (national and international). In some cases, external technical support for negotiation and capacity building is needed. In other cases, language and cultural issues act as barriers to their effective engagement

Capacity issues aside, communities feel the following structures at national and international levels would help increase their voice:

At the national level communities need to organize in a three-tiered pyramid structure. At the bottom of the pyramid, grassroots level organisations from across the country need to be better connected and better coordinated with each other. At the next level of the pyramid the grassroots level should choose one representative per region (or however best this works within individual country contexts) to represent them and to coordinate with other regions. At the top of the pyramid, the regional representatives should choose/establish one national organization to represent all communities at the national level. This national body at the top of the pyramid would provide the political voice of communities in national policy making-processes, as well as being the country's community representative in international policy making. It would also be the focus for capacity building efforts such as those identified above.

To make this community pyramid truly representative would require both upwards and downwards accountability between levels.

At the international level the community voice should not be left to national (government) delegations. If community representatives are part of national delegations they should be free to express their own perspectives. Ideally, the national bodies at the top of the pyramid in each country should represent local communities in international policy making processes. Different countries operate in different ways and some

may prefer to have an NGO representing community voices rather than a community organization, The critical issue, however is that the organization must truly represent the views of the communities on whose behalf it is acting and not be pursuing a third party agenda, or attaching conditionality to representation. Furthermore, whatever structures are agreed, they should be multi-purposed across CITES, CBD and beyond.

Once communities are organized, what are the key issues?

Landscape level approach

Wildlife conservation and land use management should be implemented through a landscape level approach in which community management is a critical component. Protected areas need to be seen in the context of the wider landscape. Any investments should come to the landscape as a whole not just to national parks. We need to move away from managing wildlife in an enclave to wildlife as an element of a diverse landscape. Such an approach is supported by the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) which emphasise integration between conservation and development. This has implications not just for management of conservation but also its funding.

Community voices must be heard nationally and internationally

Community voices must be included in national and international institutions for conservation decision making, and an appropriate structure for facilitating this inclusion agreed. It would be useful to explore current best practices for involving local communities in international decision making and determining the scope for their replication in the conservation sector. The CITES Decision to establish a working group to explore a structure for community representation is a useful starting point.

Role of communities as legitimate partners

Capacity building is needed to enable communities to participate as legitimate negotiating partners. But it is not just communities who need their capacity increased – there is a need to raise the awareness regarding the value of communities with governments at all levels.

Good governance

Good governance, including transparency and accountability, is required from all stakeholders involved in conservation – whether government, community, private sector or NGO.

Funding to safeguard offsets

Human-wildlife conflict, participatory planning and adaptation to climate change are issues that require additional support external to national conservation budgets.

Next steps

The community representatives present at the meeting stressed the urgent need for communities to get organized if they want to have a say in wildlife decision making before it is too late.

A mandate was given to the meeting organisers to continue to provide support in creating a community platform - not to represent community voices - but to help put in place the means and mechanisms to enable community voices to be heard in conservation decision-making.

ANNEX A: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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