

AN OVERVIEW



Poverty and Conservation Landscapes, People and Power



IUCN Forest Conservation Programme

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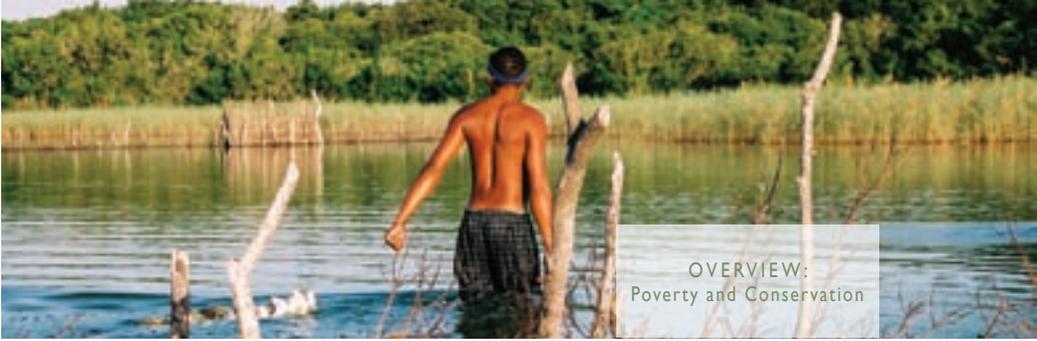
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This overview is an output of an IUCN project on poverty and conservation, led by the IUCN Forest Conservation Programme in close collaboration with IUCN's Asia Regional Office, Eastern Africa Regional Office and the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), and supported by the 3I-C Fund. IUCN has established the 3I-C Fund to provide a positive incentive system to help it adapt to a changing world and guide the course of its future programme work. The aim of the project on poverty and conservation is to explore the links between poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods and ecosystem management and to build effective partnership with social development organisations.

A book, *Poverty and Conservation: Landscapes, People and Power*, based on project findings and summarised in this overview, will be published in early 2005.



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Why has sustainable development proved so elusive?

Since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, progress towards sustainable development has been mixed at best. In terms of poverty reduction, World Bank figures show that performance on a number of poverty indicators has been very poor. While there is some improvement in the percentage of people living on less than one

Conservation can do more to address poverty without compromising its fundamental objective of maintaining the earth's biological diversity.

dollar per day (29.6 percent in 1990; 23.2 percent in 1999) there are wide regional disparities¹ and the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to spread at an alarming rate.² In terms of conservation, although nearly 12 percent of the earth's land area is now under Protected Areas (IUCN 2003), net forest loss

continues at 10 million hectares per year; wetlands continue to decline; one in three amphibians is threatened,³ the number of countries with water shortages continues to increase; and fisheries continue to be depleted.

These disappointing results force one to question whether too much emphasis is given to pursuing a development model that places almost exclusive attention on attaining strong economic growth, with little provision for ensuring positive social and environmental change. Equally, one needs to ask why most conservation strategies have still not adequately addressed the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development. Often, the result of these compartmentalised approaches to sustainable development is that national and global interests take precedence over those at local levels. Even if there is a net increase in benefits, it is the impoverished and the powerless who bear a disproportionate share of the costs. Sufficient attention has not been paid to

1. <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/mission/up3.htm>

2. <http://www.developmentgoals.org>

3. IUCN Red List 2004



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how conservation and development activities can maintain — if not expand — livelihood options, or whether these activities leave the most marginalised trapped in a condition of “sustainable poverty”.

Eradicating poverty, and more broadly, achieving sustainable development, is only possible if the ultimate interdependency of social development, economics and the environment is recognised and accounted for. More equitable approaches to conservation and development require that attention be paid to the poor with regard to the impacts of economic development and biodiversity conservation. It is important to note that conservation and development are not always in conflict. In the case of forest restoration, for example, there is often a direct relationship between improved conservation and poverty reduction and improved livelihoods.

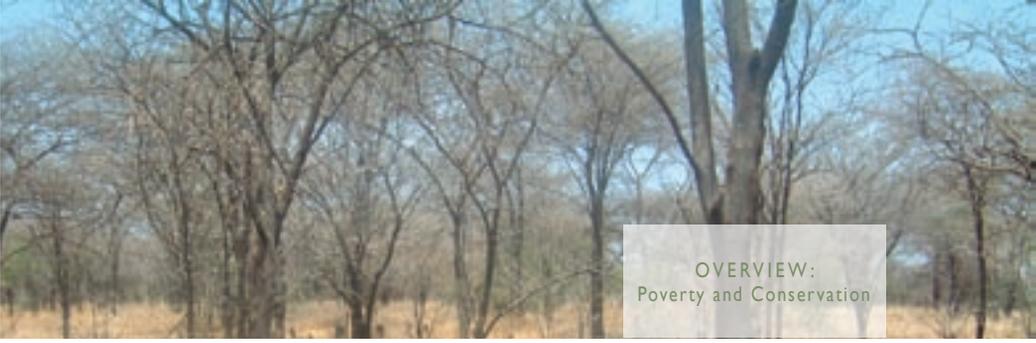
Forest Landscape Restoration in Shinyanga, Tanzania

The semi-arid Shinyanga Region used to be called the “Desert of Tanzania”. Over the last 15 years at least 350,000 hectares of *ngitili* (fodder reserves) were restored in 833 villages of the region by groups of villagers. “Trees gave birth to livestock,” says one villager, poetically referring to the fact that the sale of tree products allowed him to buy livestock. “I now only spend 20 minutes collecting fuelwood. In the past I spent between 2-4 hours collecting fuel,” says a local woman, who now uses fuel harvested from the family *ngitili*.

What links conservation and poverty reduction?

The relationship between conservation, environmental degradation, poverty and wealth is complex. Contradictory assertions, often backed up with good evidence, are frequently used to demonstrate one-way causal linkages such as:

- Poverty leads to increased environmental degradation either because rural people don’t know better or because they have no choice but to overexploit natural resources.



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- ✦ Wealthy people have a heavy impact on natural resources because they consume more and this often leads to environmental degradation.
- ✦ People who are dependent on resources for their livelihoods are likely to protect them more carefully.
- ✦ Conservation adds to poverty by excluding people from resources.

Each of these is a valid interpretation of what is happening in particular cases but none is universally true. A range of situational and contextual conditions shapes the relationship between conservation and development; a unifying concern should be whether the rights of local people are being equitably addressed in light of national and global demands. It is also important to recognise that both conservation and development are affected by intermediary factors such as institutional arrangements. Such arrangements often determine the degree to which poverty reduction and conservation, or environmental degradation will occur. For example, a constitutional change which affects access to resources by the poor can act as an incentive for conservation as well as for poverty reduction.

Reinvigorating sustainable development requires improving linkages to, and balancing the impacts of, poverty reduction strategies, economic development and biodiversity conservation on the poor.

Why should conservation address poverty reduction?

Conservation can lead to increased costs being imposed on the poor, as in cases where the poor are excluded from access to resources in protected areas. There is an ethical imperative for conservation approaches to be socially just in the sense that they avoid or mitigate the “actual and opportunity costs” of conservation for the poor and reward the poor for their contribution to national and global conservation. Social justice can be used as an operating principle, a filter to assess a minimum standard for conservation in areas where high levels of



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poverty persist, combined with a strong ethical commitment to support poverty reduction as a fundamental human right and development goal. The same principle should apply to the pursuit of economic growth.

In addition to this ethical imperative, there are practical reasons why conservation can and should address poverty reduction. Although integrated activities may not always result in optimum outcomes, many — such as forest landscape restoration initiatives — can produce positive results for both conservation and poverty reduction.

Focusing on landscapes

Conservation has often been narrowly interpreted as requiring either complete exclusion of people or, at a minimum, limited access to resources. This has particularly been the case within protected areas (PAs). While PAs are important for implementing conservation, a broader range of tools and strategies is necessary to address conservation needs across the larger landscape.

The underlying causes of environmental degradation and poverty often originate far from where the effects are evident. Therefore solutions need to address root causes at the appropriate geographical and institutional scales in addition to the site level. Applying conservation and resource management objectives at a landscape scale creates opportunities for multiple objectives to be realised.

In practice, working at landscape levels will involve balancing those trade-offs inherent in land-use decision-making. Land-use outcomes need to be the result of negotiation in order to account for different actors' objectives for the same resources. Moreover, it is essential to gain a more thorough understanding of how livelihoods dependent on natural resources can be secured by guaranteeing access to natural resources. In many cases, this will imply assuring that poor people have secure, devolved control over those lands and resources that they have traditionally used and managed.



This paper is based on *Poverty and Conservation: Landscapes, People and Power*, a book to be released by IUCN in early 2005. The book argues that conservation can do more to address poverty without compromising its fundamental objective of maintaining the earth's biological diversity.

There are many cases where community action, motivated by livelihood needs, has led to improved conservation outcomes. People clearly benefit from the availability of natural resources.

Local action may not lead to perfect conservation outcomes, but the results are often better than any existing alternatives. It is often the failure of government policies and actions that leads to environmental degradation in the first place.

In order to understand the effects of development and conservation activities it is necessary to disaggregate affected populations, as different groups are affected differently (i.e. "women" is not a homogenous category). Poor people are poor for different reasons and their poverty may need to be addressed differently.

Improved conservation and poverty reduction outcomes are more likely to result from institutional changes at different levels (resource, tenure, policy, development of appropriate local organisations and networks, etc.).

The book suggests strategies for linking poverty reduction and conservation. These include the following:

- ✦ focus on removing institutional constraints, building supporting institutions that expand locally-adapted livelihood options;
- ✦ identify causes of environmental degradation and poverty beyond the site level; and
- ✦ address problems at appropriate geographical scales and institutional levels.



High levels of rural poverty in many of the world's most biodiverse regions makes it an ethical and practical imperative to find more equitable and realistic ways of achieving conservation. Livelihoods of the rural poor and options for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity are so intimately entwined that they are better addressed through an integrated approach irrespective if the primary motivation is one of development or one of conservation.

The question is not about promoting poverty reduction over conservation, but about acknowledging that both poverty reduction and conservation are important objectives and that it is often necessary to address both in order to achieve either.

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