

Links between poverty alleviation and conservation: the debate continues

Until very recently the subject of poverty as an impediment to effective conservation has not received a great deal of coverage in *Oryx*. The earliest mention that I have managed to locate dates from 1948, when *Oryx* was published under a different name (*Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the Empire – New Series*, 57, p. 30). This note, from *Uganda: Extracts from the game warden's report for 1946*, is worth quoting as it neatly summarizes some of the concerns that have brought poverty to the forefront in 2004:

'Game Guards have naturally been subjected to such temptations as arise from the presence of unusual quantities of wealth among a hitherto rather poverty stricken community. When a Game Guard was able by dint of hard bargaining to collect about Shs. 20/- from an illegally shot Buffalo, he often thought twice about whether it was a worthwhile proposition, but Buffalo bulls have fetched up to Shs. 200/- recently and guards find the proposition worth the risk involved.'

There is a single mention of poverty in the journal in each of the decades 1960–1969 and 1970–1979, and two mentions during 1980–1989. The topic was then mentioned 14 times during 1990–1999 and 17 times over 2000–2003. Clearly the relationship between poverty and conservation is receiving greater attention than formerly.

One of the occasions on which poverty received a great deal of attention was a recent *Oryx* Editorial by Sanderson & Redford (2003), in which they voiced their concern that '... achieving the goal of liberating half the world's poor from their poverty by 2015 will either mark the true beginning of sustainability or the end of biodiversity at the hands of the best-intentioned policies.' They further argued that there needs to be a more successful marriage of biodiversity conservation and rural development. Their concerns stem from the United Nations Millennium Declaration (Resolution 55/2 of 18 September 2000), the targets of which were subsequently consolidated as the Millennium Development Goals and of which halving the world's poor is goal number one.

In this issue of *Oryx* three groups of authors have responded to Sanderson & Redford's concerns. Roe & Elliott (2004) point out that biodiversity is not only the business of Millennium Development Goal number seven (Ensure environmental sustainability) but also

underpins other Goals. They also suggest that conservation agencies are partly to blame for not bringing biodiversity into mainstream poverty reduction efforts, and that innovative approaches to conservation are required, such as pro-poor conservation, which exploit the common ground between biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation for the benefit of both.

Roe & Elliott (2004) also argue that one of the cornerstones of conservation, protected areas, has had significant costs for the poor. In their response to Sanderson & Redford, Brockton & Schmidt-Soltau (2004) echo this point, and note that the Durban Accord of the recent World Parks Congress (WPC, 2003) acknowledged that many of the costs of protected areas are born locally. They further argue that '... protected area policies require a far greater understanding of their social and environmental impacts. . .', especially with respect to the relocation of people for the creation of parks.

Current approaches to biodiversity conservation have been labelled overly 'Northern-centric' (Roe & Elliott, 2004), and in the final response to Sanderson & Redford, Kepe *et al.* (2004) provide a Southern view – of current conservation policies and efforts in South Africa and how these attempt to '... reconcile biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation'. They point out that biodiversity conservation is enshrined in South Africa's Constitution, and that community-based natural resource management projects are being actively encouraged, with co-management projects being established between local people and government where protected areas already exist.

In this context, the pros and cons of community-based conservation have received considerable coverage in *Oryx* over the last few years. A measure of the acceptance of the concept as a useful conservation strategy, at least by some, is that it is now relatively common for authors to recommend closer community involvement when considering solutions to conservation problems (e.g. Hussain, 2003). The relationship between community-based conservation and pro-poor conservation, with the latter's greater emphasis on addressing people's needs rather than in just involving them, is that pro-poor conservation includes but is not limited to community-based conservation. The cynical may argue that pro-poor conservation or a similar term is simply replacing community-based conservation as the fashionable phrase of the moment. However, with the Millennium

Development Goals focusing on poverty, and with these goals being reinforced by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 and forming a key target of the World Parks Congress of 2003, it is clear that this is a subject on which we will be hearing more. Other bodies have also followed the lead of the World Summit. The XII World Forestry Congress, for example, in its Final Statement in September 2003 '... adopted a vision based on... seven points, the first of which was 'social justice, poverty alleviation and sustained livelihoods'.

In this issue Sanderson & Redford (2004), in *The defence of conservation is not an attack on the poor*, respond to their critics. They argue that although the '... relationship between poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation continues to vex conservationists and social analysts alike', conservationists have '... neither the legitimacy nor the power to redress... the damages of development...'. They further argue that any solution probably lies at the local scale, in the lives of the poor and of wildlife.

An example of how conservation management in a particular place may make use of some of these emerging ideas and concepts is provided in another paper in this issue (Polet & Ling, 2004). The conservation management of Cat Tien National Park, Vietnam, is taking a pragmatic approach, with strict preservation in some areas and engagement with local communities in others. Management includes not one but several strategies: re-demarcation of boundaries, resettlement of people, community-based initiatives, and excision from the park of heavily populated edge areas that will never realistically be a proper part of the Park. The aim is to develop a '... more viable Park as well as provide more secure livelihood conditions...'.

Undoubtedly arguments will continue to be made about what protected areas have or have not achieved, about whether traditional or community-based conservation approaches, or both, have failed to protect biodiversity, and about whether or not concepts such as pro-poor conservation can offer something new. Conservation organizations, however, have already started to consider the implication of the Millennium Development Goals for their work, and how addressing local people's

needs can be a means of achieving better conservation. Fauna & Flora International, for example, is a member of the UK-based Poverty and Conservation Working Group, which is a consortium of conservation, development and academic organizations concerned with the interface between biodiversity conservation on the one hand and poverty reduction and livelihood issues on the other. The Working Group held a meeting at the World Parks Congress in Durban and plans to hold a meeting at the forthcoming World Conservation Congress in Bangkok in November 2004.

If the Forum section in this issue of *Oryx* illustrates anything, it is that the debate about the links between poverty alleviation and conservation is still in its early stages. There will undoubtedly be further debate both at the World Conservation Congress and further afield. For now, the Southern perspective provided by Kepe *et al.* (2004) is a useful note on which to finish: 'What is needed is an acknowledgement that the linkages between poverty and conservation are dynamic and context-specific, reflecting geography, scale, and social and political issues among the groups involved.'

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