

**African Wildlife Foundation
Discussion Paper CC-DP-13**

**COMMUNITY CONSERVATION - MYTH OR
REALITY?**



**Summary of Discussions from the Workshop
Held at the Global Biodiversity Forum 7 Meeting
In Harare, Zimbabwe
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1. Introduction from the Workshop Facilitators

Community conservation has evolved considerably over the past ten years, to a situation where it is now recognized as a vital element in most conservation programs. Experience shows that the implementation of community conservation activities and policies is difficult and risky and that real success stories are still hard to find. However, to ignore the community perspective has clearly not worked either.

This Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF) 7 workshop brought together over 100 people from different parts of the world, particularly from Africa, to discuss community conservation in the context of both the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The workshop proceedings were used to inform the deliberations of the Conference Of Parties (COP) 10 of CITES held the following week. The active participation and discussion of the workshop participants highlighted the wide range of perspective and viewpoints, complimentary and synergistic as well as conflicting and antagonistic, in terms of the range of issues discussed.

Recognizing the range of experience of the participants and their interest in debate and discussion rather than listening to papers, formal paper presentations were kept to a minimum - to introduce discussion sessions and to provoke discussion. This allowed the participants to explore the richness of experience and come to varying degrees of consensus and agreement on the issues. The key themes through the workshop were **"Conservation for whom? and Who should benefit from and who pays the cost of conservation?"**

A key conclusion from the workshop is the need for **resource users to be empowered and enabled to manage and benefit responsibly from their natural resources** in a sustainable manner. One important observation is that the community representatives attending the workshop were largely unacquainted with the content of the two conventions.

The workshop members agreed on a summary report, and a three paragraph summary of that report which was then compiled with the summaries of the other two workshops of the GBF-7 which were being run concurrently on sustainable use and intellectual property rights. This was presented to the delegates of COP 10 of CITES.

Clearly the scope of the content of the workshop could have occupied many workshops and conferences. To focus the workshop the first session explored the positive and negative linkages for community conservation with both the CBD and CITES conventions. While the last session pulled together a series of recommendations as to the synergies that do, and do not exist within the CBD and CITES conventions with respect to community conservation. It was broadly seen that CITES was regulatory, and then only for certain species and certain conditions, while the CBD has the potential to actively support the enabling framework which community conservation so badly needs both nationally and internationally.

What is clear is that the key to any successful community conservation activity is the generation of benefits of one form or other. Creating viable benefit streams demands an understanding of what benefits accrue, their extent, and how they accrue in terms of equity and accountability. This has to be related back to the resource base in terms of sustainable use, as well as addressing rural livelihood demands. For conservation to be integrated into rural livelihoods, rural people must benefit and those benefits should outweigh the associated costs.

Within the context of both CBD and CITES, being able to adequately monitor conservation status, use, and benefit flows is crucial. For community conservation this is clearly an evolving field. It has been easier to monitor the rural livelihood benefits of community conservation than the actual conservation impacts. Establishing functional impact indicators is still an important objective for community conservation

Community conservation has to have an appropriate and enabling institutional setting to evolve, together with supportive policies. This is an area, especially within the context of conservation authorities, which has lagged behind practice, though there are examples of government agencies embracing community conservation within a context of decentralization and empowerment

Ultimately successful community conservation centers on enabled and empowered rural resource users. Here the CBD provides strong support for real community involvement and for giving communities rights and responsibilities for their natural resources. The CITES convention provides a limited degree of regulation for certain endangered species at an international and trade level. Both the CBD and, to a lesser degree CITES potentially provide a strong international institutional framework for conservation benefits to accrue in a real, meaningful and sustainable manner to rural resource users. Yet the opinion of community representatives at the workshop is that to date neither convention has brought net benefits to communities, and that therefore they fail to address the need for conservation action at grass roots levels.

2. Background to the Workshop

The 7th session of the Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF7-CITES) was convened in Harare on 6-8 June 1997, immediately prior to the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (Harare, Zimbabwe, 9-20 June 1997). The Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF) provides for an independent, open and strategic mechanism to foster analysis and unencumbered dialogue and debate among interested parties to address priority ecological, economic, institutional and social issues related to the options for action to conserve biodiversity, and use biological resources sustainably and equitably.

GBF is designed to contribute to the further development and implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other biodiversity-related instruments at

the local, national and international levels. It complements intergovernmental processes by: 1) providing a broad spectrum of perspectives, proposals and experiences from all stakeholders; 2) looking for innovative approaches to enrich national policies and inter-sectoral positions; 3) building diverse partnerships among stakeholders (for example, governments, indigenous groups, local communities, NGOs and the private sector); and, 4) identifying areas of agreement and points of conflict on different biodiversity issues.

GBF7-CITES focused on three themes, each of which was discussed in parallel workshops: a) non-detrimental export and sustainable use; b) access to floral resources; and c) community-based resource management. This Discussion Paper presents some of the key proceedings from the third workshop, called "Community Conservation – Myth or Reality?".

The workshop was attended by 90-120 participants, only nine of whom had a good working knowledge of CITES and eight of CBD, illustrating the need to increase the level of awareness of the two conventions. Representation was wide-ranging: primarily community representatives and other natural resource managers, as well as students, widely diverse NGOs and government departments. Participants came mainly from Africa but also from Asia, Europe and North America.

The workshop was organized around five sessions:- i) Current linkages between CBD, CITES and community conservation - positive or negative?; ii) Conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits through community conservation: implications for CBD and CITES; iii) How to measure and monitor the success of community conservation and equitable sharing; iv) Identifying key institutional arrangements needed to bring about equitable sharing of benefits: implications for CBD and CITES; and v) Recommendations for ensuring CBD/CITES synergy's work effectively for community conservation.

During the initial sessions personal testimonies were given by five community representatives from different countries to illustrate how conservation affects, or is affected by rural people, and to help ensure the community focus of the forum. For the workshop, community conservation was defined broadly to include protected area outreach, collaborative management, and community based conservation & natural resource management.

Each session had 1-2 plenary presentations to set the scene, and stimulate discussion. Then to maximize opportunities for participation, participants worked in four groups for at least half of each session. Groups were assigned pre-arranged themes, and were encouraged to air a diversity of views rather than attempting to reach consensus. A brief group report, reflecting the lessons, observations, richness of the discussion was then presented in plenary

This Discussion Paper presents some of the product of this process. While consensus was broadly reached on most issues, it was not possible all the time.

3. Identifying the Linkages

Participants identified the main linkages between community conservation, CITES and CBD. Among the positive linkages, participants noted that both conventions stress "conservation" as a goal; though in practice CITES places emphasis on "preservation", whereas the CBD focuses on "sustainable living", and equitable benefit sharing - though this needs to be fully incorporated into the CBD. The CBD acknowledges the value of local and traditional knowledge (though actual operationalisation of this principle is yet to begin), while CITES has the potential to protect communities from destructive commercial use and trade. Both conventions allow space for local influence through national processes (though these often do not function effectively), and NGO influence is possible (though usually limited). The operations of CITES has provided opportunities for interested parties to come together to discuss issues of trade and conservation. However, the participants noted that few countries have working mechanisms for involving local communities in CBD and CITES related decision making. Community representatives present felt that local people have been largely excluded from these processes, particularly CITES but also from CBD.

Among negative linkages, participants drew attention to the fact that CITES does not stress or incorporate local and traditional knowledge. There is no local community participation in CBD or CITES scientific bodies. There is no process of feedback to CITES of its impacts on local communities.

4. Opportunities for Positive Linkages

In CITES the key opportunities for creating positive linkages lie in **fostering local community participation in CITES processes**. There is also a need for formal recognition of the critical role that local communities play in species conservation. Some participants recognised that CITES has brought positive benefits to some local communities and certain species (e.g. by buying time for the establishment of sound management practices or by protecting access to resources that would otherwise have been traded internationally).

In the CBD the key opportunities arise from the principles already established in the convention. These include the fact that the CBD acknowledges and recognises the need for sustainable utilization, the value of local and indigenous knowledge, and the need for equitable benefit sharing between stakeholders. The CBD acknowledges that poverty eradication, one of the stumbling blocks for conservation efforts. It fosters local intellectual property rights and acknowledges the key role played in biodiversity conservation by women. The CBD has put in place a financial facility for conservation in the form of the GEF. **In practice the benefits of the CBD to local communities have yet to be realized.**

5. Impediments to Realizing the Synergies

Participants noted that there are some major impediments to enhancing the linkages between community conservation, CITES and CBD. These include the conventions' reliance on "experts" who have little practical knowledge of real conditions on the ground, and their focus on macro and global-level issues. The lack of coordination between CITES and CBD, which work through different government departments at national level, contributes to the lack of public understanding of the two conventions. There is also a lack of information about the conventions at national and local levels.

The majority of participants have found CITES to be a practical disincentive to conservation. It has prevented local communities from earning benefits from the resources that they manage, and has no mechanism for sharing the costs of living with the consequences (e.g. through death and injury to people and livestock, and crop raiding).

A broad understanding of sustainable utilization is needed, one that addresses the needs and roles of local people in achieving conservation goals.

Nations need to foster an enabling policy environment in terms of access to resources which reflect the different types of access: lease, concession, ownership. Awareness needs to be created so that people know their rights of access.

Appropriate, practical and realistic indicators need to be put in place, or where they exist, used and built on. Indicators of sustainable use and benefit sharing should be developed at local, national, and international levels, with good information flows between the different levels. They should not just be biological but include socioeconomic indicators. Indicators should incorporate traditional knowledge, be scientifically robust and simple and involve communities in design, monitoring and analysis. They should link benefits with use and be culturally relevant.

One of the main impediments to finding and exploiting synergies between the international conventions and community conservation is the **inability or unwillingness of national governments to set in place mechanisms to ensure local participation in the design and implementation of conservation strategies**, including decision-making about CBD and CITES. Furthermore, benefits from conservation tend not to be allocated to those who bear the cost of conservation, leading to local level conservation disincentives.

There is a large gap between national level input to international conventions and feedback and consultation with the local level within nations. Rural people need a voice for real participation in decision-making. This needs to be addressed in the context of capacity, timing, negotiating skills and the dominance of certain negotiating styles.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations were drafted by the workshop participants:

- i. Both conventions, but particularly CITES, should develop appropriate mechanisms for participation by local people in national and international processes and should encourage national governments to ensure that participation actually happens. Indigenous resource use for **subsistence and sustainable rural livelihoods** should be acknowledged, as must the rights of groups particularly dependent on specific resources. Specifically, national governments should be encouraged to involve local communities in the development and implementation of CBD and CITES strategies. National governments should provide information, training and education about international conventions, and related processes and their implementation to local communities affected by them. However mechanisms need to be put in place to protect locally based people against exploitation, or from being hi-jacked by other agenda.
- ii. CITES should be developed to incorporate the value of local and traditional knowledge along-side modern science for better decision making. Participants found that **traditional resource use** was largely sustainable resource use, and therefore should be built on and used as a management tool. Participants urged the CBD and CITES to recognise the role of traditional structures, rules and regulations in sustainable resource use. Indigenous technical knowledge complements conservation, and should be integrated within the processes of the national scientific bodies, which stand to benefit from local community knowledge of species, ecosystems and management systems. However it is important to be cautionary about the blind use of indigenous technical knowledge, in the face of human demography and population growth. Participants noted with concern that important information, skills and traditions are being eroded, and/or appropriated by government and the private sector.
- iii. Testimonies during the workshop continuously reminded all participants that those who live with the resources bear the primary **costs of conservation** but seldom receive an equal or greater proportion of the benefits.
- iv. The **benefits** from wildlife have tended to go to outsiders and elite's, rather than to local communities who bear the costs. CITES and the CBD need to recognise that. Local communities' stake in ensuring sustainable resource management needs to be recognised.
- v. In addition, all parties should be encouraged to include assessments of the potential impacts (positive and negative) on local communities, including economic, social, ecological and cultural impacts, when proposing developments within the existing conventions.

- vi. The forthcoming review of CITES should take cognizance of developments in community conservation since the convention was drafted in 1975, and particularly of voices who were excluded from the drafting of the original convention, such as African nations still under colonial rule at the time. The effect of historical injustices, such as the usurpation of local resource management systems, and expropriation of lands must be considered.
- vii. CITES should be seen as one element rather than an overall instrument for resource management and species protection - as a powerful convention, it has tended to obscure the bigger picture
- viii. Within national government there is a lack of communication between government branches, concerning CITES/ CBD; lack of commitment to issues; training is too formal; bureaucracy; a refusal or inability to decentralize; community conservation is not adequately recognized. Further there is lack of communication between government structures and community; a poor understanding of traditional knowledge; and a poor involvement of local interests in policy development.
- ix. Roles which NGO can play include facilitating information flow and dialogue between communities at local level and national level; being demand-driven and act as "honest brokers"; have a broad understanding of local situation, so that can network with other NGO s to link complementary programmes to foster conservation; and simplify language and materials from CBD and CITES for local people to understand, taking time factor into account
- x. Regional and international institutions tend to be too top down in their approach. This could be improved by understanding communities better and encouraging self-sustaining support; international bodies should listen to local agencies; focus effort on national decisions; international institutions push their own agendas; donor coordination; international researchers need to have respect for local capacity to do research. There are a range of trans national issues which need to be considered including the need to harmonize, and coordinate legislation on migratory species; in absence of coordination role for international institutions, communities on borders need to be given some authority
- xi. To foster complementarity with community conservation, CITES and the CBD should recognise and cater for the known **diversity** of conditions, cultures and systems. The challenge is to build flexibility and responsiveness into the convention mechanisms.
- xii. The use of existing local institutions, which include government sponsored, community initiated and traditional institutions, should be function for effective and efficient conservation thereby encouraging local rights and responsibilities

7. Summary of Recommendations to CITES COP10

The following summary was circulated to all participants at CITES COP10:

- i. Participants noted that the potential benefits of **the CBD** have yet to be realized, particularly in terms of community participation and rights. CBD recognizes the fundamental principle of sustainable use together with acknowledging the value of indigenous and traditional knowledge and the need for equitable distribution of benefits from the conservation of biodiversity. In principle, the CBD addresses the poverty issue, fosters community intellectual property rights, and addresses the role played by women. Because the CBD facilitates the exchange of experiences and information at all levels, it offers the potential to address these key issues in practice.
- ii. Participants noted that the focus of **CITES** on regulating international trade in threatened species is necessary and important, and can help to protect local-community and national interests from destructive and unsustainable international demands. However CITES also fails to recognise that trade in wildlife can be an important incentive for community-based conservation and development, and in so doing it can undermine conservation of species itself. **CITES mechanisms therefore need to be developed to incorporate local and traditional knowledge and participation in decision-making at all levels, including in the national scientific bodies and at international fora.**
- iii. Recognizing that **CITES and the CBD** are agreements between governments, participants noted that improvements are possible, at both national and international levels, to ensure that the conventions' processes reflect the rights and aspirations of local communities. Specifically, national governments should be encouraged to involve local communities in the development and implementation of CBD and CITES strategies. In addition, all parties should be encouraged to include assessments of the potential impacts (positive and negative) on local communities, including economic, social, ecological and cultural impacts, when proposing developments within the existing conventions. All parties should take cognizance of the important role that incentives play in encouraging communities to conserve their natural resources.