

AFRICAN INDABA

9 Rural Communities And The Implementation Of CITES In Developing Countries

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About 70% of global biodiversity, most of it in developing countries of the southern hemisphere, exists outside of national parks and other protected areas, sharing space and resources with rural people. Based on a 2010 report by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a comparable percentage of the developing world's 1.4 billion extremely poor people live in rural areas, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. So it is the poor of the world who are and will continue to be among the main custodians of many threatened or endangered species. Conservation through rural communities, or "Community-based natural resource management" (CBNRM), or "Community-based conservation" (CBC), is a strategic response to the interconnected issues of biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation, and has been developed as a complementary strategy to Protected Areas like National Parks and Game Reserves. It generally involves the decentralization of ownership or user rights over wildlife, and of the decision-making processes, with the aim to maximize livelihood benefits from the sustainable use of species as an incentive to conserve wildlife, particularly outside of protected areas where governments have limited capacities to influence the sustainable use of resources. This may involve ecotourism and hunting tourism, both of which have the potential to significantly contribute to the income of rural people and the conservation of species. Equally, both can, of course, be unsustainable.

CITES is a trade convention that serves the interests of conservation by trying to ensure that international trade in specimens or products and derivatives is sustainable. Because poverty in exporting countries can be a primary cause of unsustainable trade, the effectiveness of CITES instruments to help conserve species listed in its Appendices is profoundly influenced by economic development in such countries. Effective implementation of CITES can therefore not be achieved if it goes against the economic interests of affected communities. Apart from moral considerations, it would thus be in the strategic interest of CITES to gain rural communities as real partners in our conservation efforts. This is supported by the fact that for many terrestrial, CITES-listed species, and particularly those of high commercial value, traditional measures to effectively conserve them have often not been very effective, both inside and outside on protected areas (e.g. tigers, rhinos, elephants). Rural communities would thus act as an additional strategy for the national implementation of CITES, supporting national legislation and enforcement.

Because the poor can not be expected to carry the burden of our conservation expectations in the absence of economic incentives, the sustainable commercial use of populations of wild species is central to the philosophies and strategies of international conservation organizations such as those of the CBD, the IUCN as well as CITES (e.g. CITES Resolution Conf. 8.3 Rev. CoP13; <http://www.cites.org/eng/res/index.shtml>). CBNRM provides a suitable vehicle to address both conservation and poverty alleviation goals, but remains controversial for a variety of CITES-relevant reasons:

- because of reservations about the achievements of CBNRM;
- because of insufficient, or even lack of, knowledge about the possibilities of community-based conservation;
- because the rural poor and the urbanized industrial west have different cultural and ethical

- values regarding the use of species (e.g. opposition to trophy hunting by some politically powerful animal protection NGOs where saving the individual animal, rather than the species, is their primary concern); or
- because of the argument that poverty amongst rural communities is irrelevant to CITES as it is not part of its mandate and is something that should more appropriately be dealt with by the Convention on Biological Diversity.

CITES is unique amongst Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Its decisions on international trade in species and their products made at CITES Conferences of the Parties are binding and legally enforceable. Because CITES has a strong compliance mechanism, its decisions are implemented and can therefore have an almost immediate impact on affected species and rural communities. Currently, the process of listing species on the CITES Appendices, allowing either less or more international trade, is based on the listing criteria of CITES Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP15), and these are restricted to population and trade data. While Res. Conf. 8.3 (Rev. CoP13) on “Recognition of the benefits of trade in wildlife” deals with minimizing detrimental impacts on rural livelihoods in the *implementation phase* once a species has already been listed, the potential effects of a listing on the income of rural people is not considered *prior* to a listing proposal at a CITES Conference of the Parties is voted on.

That CITES does not explicitly address the socio-economic consequences of species listings, or trade in general, is a serious flaw as it can profoundly hamper the effective implementation of the convention. The successful conservation of endangered species is expensive, particularly (low volume – high value) species involved in traditional use for artefacts (e.g. elephants/ivory) or medicine (rhinoceros/horn) where illegal hunting necessitates high levels of enforcement. Countries that have ratified CITES (currently 175) have had to bear the considerable costs of establishing and maintaining legal frameworks as well as management and enforcement authorities. While many donors have invested substantial financial resources to support national implementation in developing countries, such as the current European Commission CITES capacity-building project, many member states find it difficult to maintain effective enforcement and implementation of the convention. However, in the absence of effective enforcement (e.g. to control illegal hunting), unsustainable use and illegal trade, often involving members of impoverished rural communities, is frequently the inevitable outcome.

One way to assist implementation problems is (1) the effective involvement of rural communities in conservation programmes to provide them with a sense of ownership over resources and earning economic incentives to prevent alternative, unsustainable land-uses or illegal hunting, and (2) recognition by the international CITES community that while biological and trade data, based on sound science, are the principal criteria for the evaluation of a listing proposal, socio-economic considerations need to be formalized if the listing of a species (CITES Appendix I/no commercial trade or Appendix II/controlled commercial trade) can actually be implemented and hence result in real conservation benefits.

The symposium on CITES and CBNRM in Vienna

From the 17th to the 20th of May 2011, the Austrian Ministry of the Environment, and the European Commission, held a symposium in Vienna, Austria, on „The relevance of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) to the conservation and sustainable use of CITES-listed species in exporting countries“. It was the first international initiative of its kind that aimed at synthesizing the achievements of community-based conservation to CITES-listed species, with working groups focusing on strategic issues associated with community conservation and CITES implementation consequences. With the support of the Secretariats of the Conventions on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and on Migratory Species (CMS), the World Conservation Monitoring Center (UNEP-WCMC), the Convention on Biological Diversity, the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), as well as

FAO, TRAFFIC (Trade Records Analysis of Fauna and Flora in Commerce), IUCN-SSC, WWF and IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development), 80 participants from around the world gathered to inform, or be informed, about the global context of conservation conducted by rural communities, and on case studies from countries like Namibia, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and the Andean countries of South America. The focus was on terrestrial species, including the Crocodylians. The symposium included high-caliber speakers such as the Secretary-General of CITES, John Scanlon, the Director of UNEP-WCMC, Jon Hutton, and Hugo-Maria Schally from the European Commission and Rolf Baldus from the CIC. The aim of the symposium was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of CBNRM and hence to contribute to a better understanding of the EU CITES community whose positions at CITES Conferences of the Parties often determine success or failure of a listing proposal.

Four working groups had one and a-half days to synthesize issues around characteristics of successful CBNRM; income generation and conservation implications of CITES species listings; impacts of trade restrictions and other EU policy measures; and the relevance and interdependence for CBNRM of international goals, policies and biodiversity initiatives. Working group chairs included well-known experts like Rowan Martin (CAMPFIRE initiator) and Holly Dublin (Wildlife Conservation Society) to guide very mixed groups of participants. This included CBNRM experts, CITES representatives from the European Union, representatives from a range of species and nature conservation organizations, and, contrary to several claims in the local written media, animal protection organizations like IFAW, Humane Society International, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and ProWildlife, ensuring broad representation of positions on CBNRM and sustainable use of species. The symposium agenda, terms of reference for the working groups and working group reports can be accessed at www.umwelt.net.at/article/articleview/87449/1/8023.

Where to from here?

Symposium working groups provided conclusions on a wide range of relevant issues and have noted that conserving endangered species in developing countries in the absence of effective community involvement can not be achieved, and that many CITES-listed species have significantly benefited from CBNRM (including trophy hunting). CBNRM is no panacea, and many Governments have so far been unwilling to devolve economic power over natural resources, including wildlife. But it is now up to the international CITES community and relevant organizations, to provide the necessary support for CBNRM to become established, or to assist in its further development. Further, given adherence to other relevant (non-CITES) national legislation, the use to which species are put is not to be dictated by western ethics but, subject to meeting the criteria of sustainability, by local necessities and cultural traditions.

In preparation for the 62nd meeting of the CITES Standing Committee in 2012 (SC62), and the 16th CITES Conference of the Parties in 2013 (CoP16), the symposium has provided the necessary knowledge base for a broad, more balanced policy discussion within the European Union regarding the role of rural communities in CITES decision-making processes, as well as options to enhance the current CITES Strategic Vision once it will be extended beyond 2013. Working group reports will form the basis for an EU position paper which, once agreed on by the member states of the European Union, will form the basis for strategic steps for the EU to take at SC62 and CITES CoP16. Overall, the symposium output should allow for more informed positions of the European Union at CITES Conferences of the Parties on species listing proposals as well as on proposals to change the annotations of species listings (e.g. specifying trade options). In addition, it has identified important links between CITES and other relevant multilateral instruments, especially within the CBD, or the proposed Intergovernmental Panel for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), to further strengthen rural communities in developing countries. And it provides guidance on how best to proceed with existing Memoranda of Understanding between CITES and other organizations like the IUCN, CMS, FAO and UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development), to maximize relevant synergies with these organizations.

The emphasis should not so much be on how rural communities can serve CITES, but rather what CITES needs to do to better address the livelihood interests of rural communities and, by extension, to achieve more effective implementation of the Convention. In combination with international trade controls and national enforcement, this supports the spirit of the preamble of the CITES convention text where it states that “*peoples and States are and should be the best protectors of their own wild fauna and flora*”.

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