Promoting Equity in the Management of Protected Areas:
New evidence of the need for action

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Recommendations for policy and practice:

1. *Protected areas should under no circumstances exacerbate poverty, and wherever possible should contribute to wider efforts to reduce and eliminate poverty**.** This principle should underpin social policy on protected areas.*
2. *Understanding of social impacts of protected areas, and specifically impacts on poverty, must take account of:*
   - *costs as well as benefits.*
   - *social, cultural and environmental costs/benefits as well as costs/benefits that have a clear financial value.*
   - *distribution of costs/benefits between and within communities, e.g. by well-being status, ethnicity, gender.*
3. *Efforts to avoid negative social impacts and promote more equitable cost/benefit sharing sharing arising from establishment/management of protected areas, should be monitored using appropriate indicators/standards.*
4. *Protected area governance types with potential to deliver more equitable sharing of costs/benefits (i.e. co-management and community conserved areas) should be more actively promoted by government authorities.*
5. *Sustainable financing and payments/rewards for environmental services that support protected areas should:*
   - *recognize and address costs incurred by indigenous and local communities in supporting protected area conservation alongside costs to government authorities.*
   - *adopt a differentiated approach that explicitly prioritises those within communities who bear the greatest burden in terms of costs incurred and/or contribute most in terms of stewardship services provided.*

Introduction

Protected Areas (PAs) are an essential tool for conservation, and will remain the cornerstone of national conservation strategies. The numbers of PAs continues to increase rapidly - a reflection not only of the large number of new PAs being established but also the expansion in the definition of PAs to include parks and reserves under community management.

There is growing awareness of the contribution of PAs to sustainable development from a national and global perspective but there remain widely diverging opinions on the impact of PAs on indigenous and local communities living in and around these areas. Whilst some believe that negative social impacts are overstated, a growing number of studies point to a widespread problem of the rural poor shouldering a disproportionate burden of the cost of conservation. Moreover, in terms of social impact it is frequently poorer households, women, and other marginalized groups who lose most in relative terms.

The World Parks Congress (WPC) in 2003 drew attention to this issue. A recommendation was approved proposing that areas protected for biodiversity conservation should under no circumstances exacerbate poverty ("do no harm"), and wherever possible should contribute to wider efforts to reduce and eliminate poverty. Building on this recommendation, the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted a new Programme of Work (PoW) on PAs with a substantial section (element 2) on equity that includes specific commitments on equitable sharing of the costs and benefits of PA establishment and management. But few of the reports from signatory countries report significant progress on this commitment. Indeed evidence from other sources suggests a worsening situation in some areas where access to resources has been reduced by stronger protection measures, and there has been no attempt to mitigate the negative social impacts[1].

This policy brief is based on the results of a four-country study of the impacts of ten terrestrial PAs on indigenous and local communities living within and around these areas. By including government-managed, co-managed and community-conserved PAs, the study explicitly explores how the nature and balance of local costs and benefits may be influenced by governance type.

Impacts have been assessed in terms of economic values using a unique combination of social impact assessment and participatory environmental valuation to value the full spectrum of social, cultural and economic costs and benefits of PAs from the perspective of the communities themselves. Costs and benefits at local level have then been compared with benefits at national and global levels determined using more conventional economic analysis techniques.

Drawing on the results of this study, this policy brief presents policy recommendations, directed in particular at the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas.

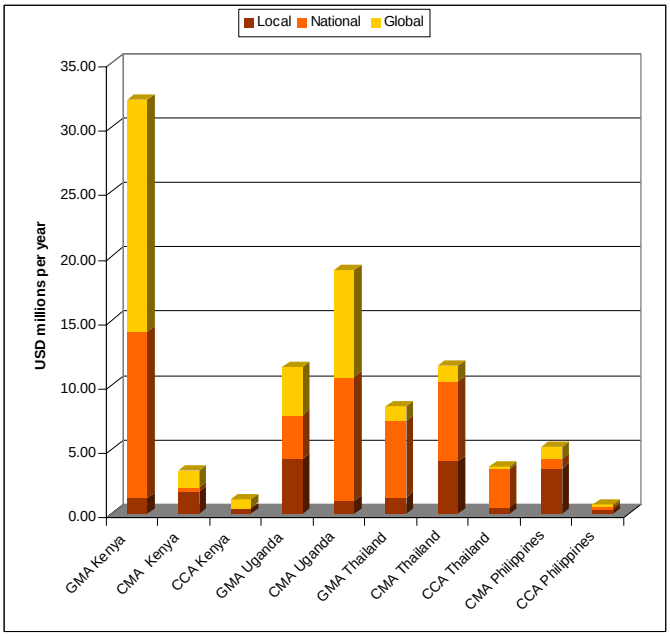
[1] The GEF Local Benefits Study reported that of 72 GEF projects that restricted access to PA resources only 40% tried to address the negative social impacts, and only 20% reported success in doing so.

How are the benefits of PAs distributed between local, national and global levels?

The chart below shows the benefits accruing at local, national and global levels (expressed as economic values) of the ten different PAs that were included in the study, including three community conserved areas (CCAs), four co-managed PAs (CMAs) and three government-managed PAs (GMAs).[2]

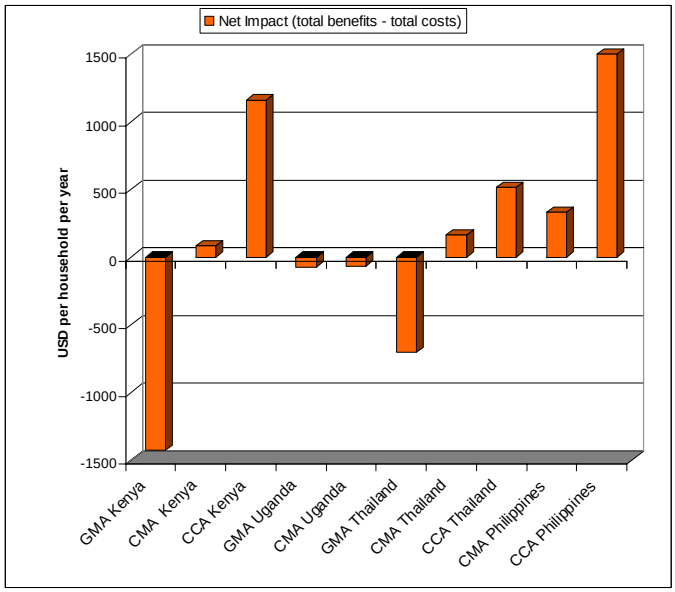
The most significant factor in determining national-level benefits is tourism. At global level tourism is also a dominant factor along with the carbon value associated with avoided deforestation. The study does assess biodiversity conservation values at national and global levels, but this valuation is based on investment in conservation initiatives which, in most cases, is low compared to tourism and carbon values.

High values at national and global levels relative to local level do not necessarily imply inequity since a win-win-win scenario is possible. Whether or not local communities perceive there to be inequity appears to depend more on the balance of costs and benefits at local level (see next sections). However the distribution of benefits along the local-national-global axis is crucial to understand as it shows where to look for resources to finance local level costs, and identifies the ecosystem services that should be the focus of financing strategies.



How are the local costs and benefits of PAs distributed between communities, and within communities?

The first step in answering this question is to look at the net impact of the PAs on the community as a whole, that is as the average impact across all communities living within and around the PAs (see below, and not that these figures are not adjusted for purchasing power parity).



Looking at this average impact across the community, three PAs stand out as having much higher positive or negative impacts (>$1000/HH/year). The two in Kenya are distinguished by the fact that they are the only two PAs in the study that are rangelands with pastoralist communities (all others being primarily forests with small grazing potential). Although these two areas are nearby within the same ecological landscape, the impact on local communities is dramatically different reflecting how much of a difference governance type can make (GMA vs CCA). The other PA with very high (positive) impact is the Philippines' CCA which has been owned and managed for many years by the Banao indigenous people who have a strong cultural association with the area. In fact more than 75% of the total benefit relates to intangible social and cultural benefits, which shows how significant intangible benefits and costs can be[3].

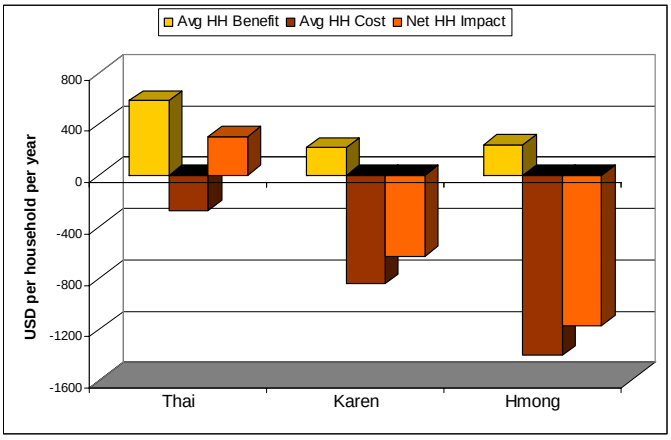
The correlation between net impact on communities and governance type is also very evident in Thailand where three PAs in the study are again within the same landscape – in fact immediately adjacent to each other. Here we see a transition from substantial negative to substantial positive net impact moving from the state-managed area to the community conserved area, with the co-managed area in between (slightly positive).

However, assessment of average net impact at community level masks an extremely important issue – differences in how PAs impact different communities living within/around a PA and different socio-economic groups within these communities. Of particular concern are impacts on poorer, marginalized groups. Ob Luang NP in Thailand (CMA) presents a good example of the importance of this issue with respect to ethnicity. Although the overall impact averaged across the whole community (dominated by the lowland Thai ethnic group)

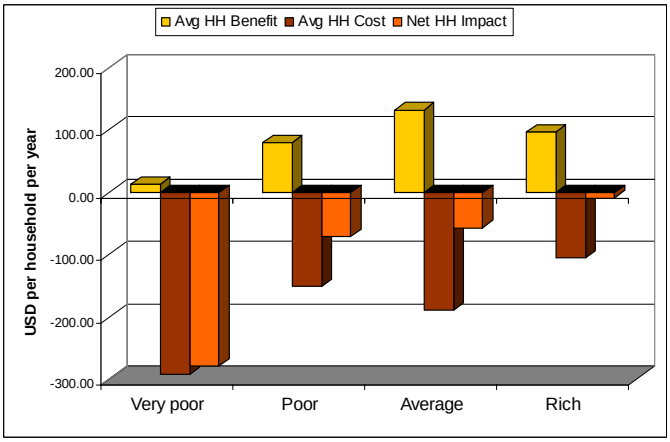
[2] GMA Kenya = Samburu Game Res., CMA Kenya = Arabuko Sokoke Forest Res., CCA Kenya = Lekurruki Conservancy, GMA Uganda = Queen Elizabeth NP, CMA Uganda = Bwindi NP, GMA Thailand = Doi Inthanon NP, CMA Thailand = Ob Luang NP, CCA Thailand = Mae Khong Kha community-managed forest, , CMA Philippines = Mt Isarog NP, CCA Philippines = Balbalasang-Balbalan NP.

[3] Benefits and costs for which there is not market that enables direct determination of a financial value.

appears to be positive, we come to a very different conclusion if we look at impacts on the three main ethnic groups in the area (see below).



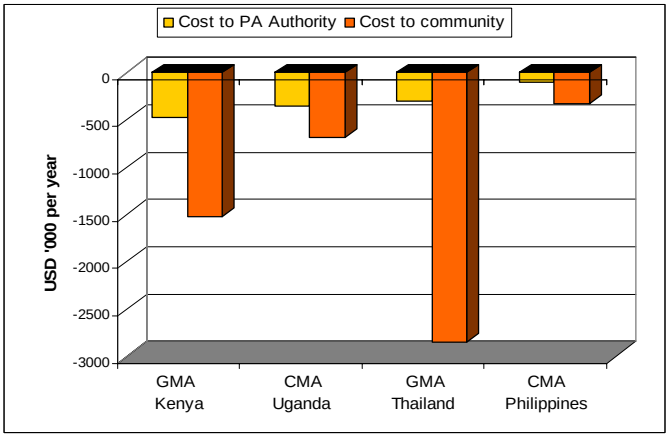
The importance of understanding the differentiation of impact within communities applies equally to well-being groups, as illustrated by Bwindi NP in Uganda where the small overall negative impact is very far from evenly distributed with the community (see below). As is the case with several other PAs in this study, it is the poorest group that bears the greatest burden, which in this case includes the marginalized Batwa indigenous people.



With respect to gender equity, discussions with focus groups at the end of the study confirmed that it is very often the women who bear more of the PA-related costs whilst benefits tend to go disproportionately to men.

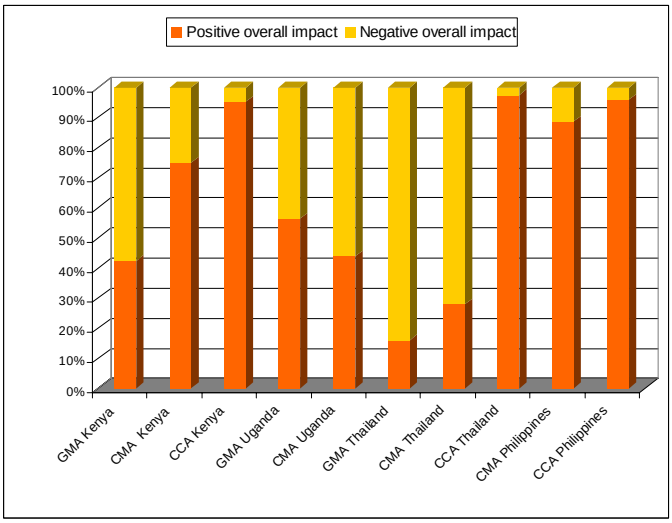
What is the significance of any net negative cost of PAs to local communities versus costs incurred by PA management authorities?

Sustainable financing for PAs focuses on establishment of long term funding arrangements to cover the real costs of effective conservation measures. But usually such initiatives focus on only one side of the cost equation – costs to the PA management authority. Despite growing evidence of the costs to local communities, this issue has been largely ignored. This study clearly illustrates the injustice of such a one-sided approach. For one PA in each country the following chart shows the cost to PA Authorities versus the cost to communities living in and around the PA (counting only those households that experienced a net negative impact). It is important to note here that this chart compares financial values (from the annual accounts of the PA) with economic values from participatory environmental valuation which are always likely to be larger since they capture social and other intangible costs). However, at the very least, we can conclude that the cost to communities is at least similar to, if not greater than, the cost to PA Authorities.



How do local people perceive equity in the context of PA's?

The following chart shows the percentage of community members who believe that the PA has an overall positive impact on their livelihoods, taking into account all the different impacts, versus the percentage believing that the overall impact is negative. The pattern in this chart correlates much better with the pattern of net impacts than the pattern of local/national/global benefits (page 2) from which we can conclude, not surprisingly, that equity is perceived largely in terms of local cost and benefits.



However, as with the analysis of costs and benefits, disaggregation of the results by social group shows major differences within communities. For six of the ten PAs the opinion of the poorest was less favourable than the average. Of the remaining, two showed no discernable trend, whilst two showed the opposite trend (i.e. richer households had a less favourable view of the PA); these were again the two PAs with predominantly pastoralist communities where the richest who owned most cattle felt most disadvantaged.

In what ways, and under what circumstances, can PAs contribute to reducing poverty?

Using the sustainable livelihoods framework, the analytical framework of this study adopts a holistic model of poverty, and in many cases the cost/benefit equation at local level is dominated by intangible factors such as cultural values, increased knowledge and skills etc.

Referring to the chart of net impact on page 2, we might conclude that PAs that show a net positive impact are contributing to poverty reduction, but this is not necessarily the case. The first question to ask is where are the benefits going? In many cases we see the net positive impact of the PA accruing disproportionately to richer households, and men within these households, (varying degrees of elite capture), with averages at community level hiding the fact that poorer, marginalized groups are being further impoverished by the PA.

Even where most households in the community report a positive net impact, does this positive impact actually help to lift them out of poverty? In many cases no. The PA may have a crucial role to play in sustaining their current level of livelihood security, and in helping households avoid sinking into deeper poverty during difficult times (i.e. reducing vulnerability), but this study suggests, at least for the majority of PAs which are government or co-managed, that it is only in rare cases where benefits are very substantial that poverty reduction at household level may be attributed to a PA.

That said, the significance of PA ecosystem goods and services in helping to sustain livelihoods must not be understated. In all of the sites, loss of these goods and services would have a major negative impact on local livelihoods. Seen in the wider context of the dynamics of poverty within rural society, where there may be many other non-PA related factors helping to reduce poverty, the crucial role of PAs in helping certain households avoid greater poverty can be seen as contributing to poverty reduction at the level of society as a whole.

Discussion and Conclusion

Questions of equity in conservation, and more specifically the impact of PAs on poverty, are far from simple to answer. This study of terrestrial PAs suggests that only a small proportion of households/communities experience a net positive impact that is sufficient to significantly reduce the poverty of that household or that community. Conversely a high proportion of poorer households report a net negative impact on their livelihood. But we can't immediately conclude that this is increasing poverty since a part of the negative impact is opportunity cost (a lost opportunity to benefit), some of which may relate to actions that took place a generation ago. Nevertheless, this study does reaffirm the view that the burden of PA conservation falls disproportionately on the poor, and, all too often, on the poorest of the poor. At least this appears to be the general pattern for the terrestrial PAs included in this study. For marine PAs where wildlife "spillover" has largely positive rather than negative impacts, the pattern may well be different.

The study confirms that governance type has a major impact on the distribution of costs and benefits. The protected areas showing the highest net positive impact were the three CCAs, whilst the two showing large net negative impacts were GMAs that have paid relatively little attention to community interests. The co-managed areas fall in the middle with the most positive outcome being from Mt Isarog National Park in the Philippines which, amongst the PAs in this study, has the highest degree of devolution of authority to communities.

The methodology used in this study values local costs and benefits from the perspective of the community, including their perception of opportunity costs. Arguably a weakness of the methodology is the lack of any explicit "before PA" or "without PA" reference. Clearly the respondents must have a reference point against which they judge the significance and value of a particular impact, but is this anything more than a general sense of fairness/equity? Does this lack of an explicit reference point matter? Arguably not. If we seek to promote equity in conservation then we have to work with perceptions of equity. Furthermore, the idea that there is a genuinely objective alternative is perhaps an illusion. Every methodology is, to a greater or lesser extent, subject to bias related to underlying assumptions and values. Most obvious is the bias that comes from using a "without PA" reference. Frequently this assumes that all the benefits of the ecosystem associated with the PA are attributes of the PA that would not exist without the PA. So the PA in its existing form justifies its existence by claiming all the benefits of the ecosystem that it seeks to conserve. But in many situations the reality is that you could substantially change the PA management regime and still maintain most, if not all, the ecosystem services.

In terms of the impact of PAs on poverty reduction, we see in this study relatively few opportunities for a government-managed or co-managed PA to make a significant contribution to poverty reduction at the local level. However, these PAs play a crucial role in helping communities, and individuals within these communities, to avoid further impoverishment; in the broader context of development processes in society, this can make a real contribution to poverty reduction at national level.

In terms of the way forward, this study suggests that the PA social agenda would make better progress if it focused less on the overall issue of PAs' contribution to poverty reduction (important as this is), and more on how changes in PA management regimes might deliver more equitable outcomes from a community perspective.

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Acknowledgements: This study has been funded by the Howard G Buffett Foundation. The four country study involved the following team: Delphine Malleret King, Richard Hatfield (AWF), Washington Ayiemba (Nature Kenya), Titus Mbuvi (KEFRI), Glenn Bush, Richard Mwesigwa, Barry Flaming (Raks Thai Foundation), Dr Penporn Janekarnkij (Kasetsart University), Rina Rosales (REECS), Alex Nayve & Angel Uson (CARE Philippines), Mikkel Kallesoe (IUCN), Phil Franks (CARE)