

Protected Areas, Equity and Livelihoods (PAEL) –

Summary Report of the full-day parallel session on PAEL during the Asia-Pacific Forestry Week, Hanoi, April 25th, 2008.

Background and overview

The full-day workshop on Protected Areas, Equity and Livelihoods (PAEL), which took place during the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Asia-Pacific Forestry Week (APFW), was jointly hosted by IUCN,¹ the Asia Forest Network (AFN), the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC), and the FAO. Its main purpose was to feed into the ongoing work of the global Task Force on PAEL by providing insights and highlighting key issues relevant to the social implications of managing Protected Areas in the Asia-Pacific (AP) region.

The day was divided into four main sub-sessions, focusing sequentially on (i) an overview of the Task Force and case studies highlighting some of the main issues related to PAEL, (ii) lessons learned from relevant projects in the AP region, (iii) potential policy options and tools for managing PAs in an equitable and socially sustainable way, and (iv) general recommendations on best ways of addressing the challenge of incorporating equity and livelihood concerns in the management of PAs.

Proceedings

Sub-session one – An Overview of PAEL

Close to 100 APFW participants were officially welcomed to the event by Mr. Nguyen Huu Dzung, Vice Director of the Viet Nameese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development's Forest Protection Department, who strongly affirmed the relevance of the day's topic to forest conservation efforts in Viet Nam and in the AP region.

Then, Mr. Ronnakorn Triraganon of RECOFTC provided a basic introduction to the workshop by providing some background information on the PAEL Task Force, and by highlighting the urgent need to integrate PA management into broader sustainable development objectives and to ensure that equity and poverty concerns are properly addressed.

Linkages between PA management and sustainable development objectives were further elaborated by Ms. Nguyen Thi Yen of IUCN Viet Nam, who drew from experience in her country to highlight some general limitations to pro-poor PA management, such as limited contribution of PAs to poverty reduction, unequal distribution of costs and benefits, and limited market access for marginalized communities.

Modesto Ga-ab, member of the Applai Sub-Tribe and Planning & Development Officer for the Besao Municipal Government in the Philippines, discussed further limitations to the equitable and socially sustainable implementation of PA management, and advocated for multi-stakeholder partnership processes that fully recognized the cultural diversity of PAs.

In the open forum discussion following the three presentations, participants debated various opportunities for a more pro-poor management of PAs. However, the issue of compensation to local communities was often seen as being complex, and risked being highly inequitable unless sufficiently equitable participation was assured. Eco-tourism in PAs was also presented as an opportunity, but it was cautioned that

¹ The PAEL session was made possible with a generous funding contribution provided by IUCN Economics and Environment in Gland, Switzerland.

large-scale enterprises could potentially marginalize local communities. The issue of land rights was also evoked as a significant hurdle to the equitable distribution of benefits from PAs management.

Sub-session two – Lessons Learned: Strategies & Methods

The second sub-session began with a presentation by Dr. Kadi Warner (IUCN) on the problem of 'paper parks' and 'paper partnerships' in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). Dr. Warner revealed findings from three case studies that bore witness to the cost to local livelihoods of the ongoing degradation of PAs in the GMS. Lessons learned from these experiences highlighted the urgent need to bring closer attention to the underlying institutional factors that undermine the effective and sustainable management of PAs.

The following presentation by Professor Shanta K. Hennayake (IUCN) drew from experiences with the Strengthening Voices for Better Choices (SVBC) initiative in Sri Lanka to show that effective and sustainable forest governance arrangements are a necessary condition for the enhancement of local livelihoods. Professor Hennayake highlighted strategies which aim to build trust among key stakeholders as a critical element of equitable and socially responsible PAs management planning. To achieve the requisite level of trust for effective governance arrangements in the Knuckles Conservation Zone, the SVBC project set up an office in a house at the project site and ensured that project staff were present to meet with community members and answer any questions about the project 24 hours/day. The project also employed local youth in the initial research component as a mechanism to build trust, while at once engaging young residents in the project and providing capacity-building. He also noted the important role of the private sector in supporting small-scale entrepreneurial activities. SVBC's partnership with Dilmah to support tomato production and marketing as an alternative source of livelihood is a good example of private sector engagement with direct livelihood benefits for farmers.

The third case study was presented by Mr Ho Manh Tuong of the Vietnamese Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (FIPI). Mr Tuong discussed the integration of local communities in the establishment of PAs, showing how they were effectively included in the consultation process while acknowledging their limited participation in the ensuing conservation activities.

The open discussion with the participants was very much focused on the relationships between PA managers and local communities. The existing 'disconnect' between PA policy and practice was often mentioned as a reality in the AP region, where local communities are often unaware of existing restrictions and regulations.

Sub-session three – Policy Options & Implementation Tools

Dr. Arvind Anil Boaz of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) was the first to present during the third sub-session. He discussed the feasibility of regional collaboration in environmental management by drawing from experience with wildlife trade and showcasing how measures to control illegal trade in wildlife can help empower local communities and provide livelihood opportunities when combined with better management of legal trade at sustainable levels and related capacity-building. Some examples include providing technical and capacity-building support at the village level for legal and sustainable alternatives, such as processing Mahul leaves to make food wares and manufacturing sticks of incense from bamboo, as part of the Network of People's Protected Areas initiative in India.

Kimberly Marion Suiseeya (IUCN, Lao PDR) discussed various policy interventions for a more sustainable approach to managing PAs in Lao PDR, including

participatory management, sustainable financing and clarifying the current management system by designating specific management categories to different PAs depending on the appropriate conservation objectives. Ms. Suiseeya highlighted the need for policy-makers and managers to begin 're-thinking' PAs in a way that prioritizes not only effectiveness, but efficiency and equity criteria as well.

David Huberman (IUCN) presented Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) as a potential tool for integrating conservation objectives into rural development. Mr. Huberman stressed the importance of having incentive-based instruments fit into a broader landscape-level strategy of sustainable development that fully addressed the 'equity-efficiency' trade-off.

The final presentation, by Grace Villamor (CI/ICRAF), elaborated further on the use of economic incentives by discussing how optimizing the delivering of ecosystem services could help to conserve biodiversity in multi-functional landscapes.

The issue of participation was the central topic of the following open discussion. What exactly is participation? What is its purpose? Different approaches to increasing participation in decision-making related to land-use and PAs, as well as the value of participatory processes were questioned and discussed. It was generally acknowledged that there was a need to bring the focus down to the household level to address problems such as elite capture and equitable benefit sharing (e.g. gender inequality).

Sub-session four – Recommended Actions

In the final session, moderated by Ronnakorn Triraganon, the discussion highlighted some of the key issues that need to be addressed by the PAEL Task Force. Firstly, the urgency of action was emphasized. The sustained loss of biodiversity despite the increase in PAs in the AP region was seen as an indication that PAs could become 'dinosaurs' (as illustrated by the widespread existence of 'paper parks'). On the livelihoods side, the urgency of action was seen as being no less significant, demonstrated notably by the fact that most of the Millennium Development Goals are highly unlikely to be achieved. It was acknowledged that PAs were currently in a period of crisis, and that new approaches and initiatives were needed to ensure that PAs are not merely expanded, but enhanced and made consistent with the livelihood needs of local communities. Or else, they will simply be made obsolete.

One potential avenue discussed for generating new opportunities for local livelihoods in PAs was to encourage greater private sector involvement, although it was acknowledged that such interests risk undermining the equitable sharing of conservation benefits. On the subject of equity, it was strongly stated that this is a very context-dependent issue, and cannot be addressed through a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. PES and new opportunities through carbon finance were also seen as potential opportunities for the pro-poor management of PAs. However, without proper recognition of traditional land tenure and ownership systems, such incentive-based mechanisms were seen as being 'out of reach' for many local communities.

In conclusion, it was reminded that forest-dwelling communities ought to be recognized as the owners of the resources around them, and that any effort to manage these resources sustainably must fully recognize their importance for local livelihoods. Acknowledging that many local communities wish to preserve biodiversity simply because they depend on it for their livelihoods, it was generally agreed that greater empowerment at the local level could go hand-in-hand with wider conservation efforts.