

Human Communities and Transboundary Protected Areas: Bringing Social Issues into Transboundary Conservation

Social aspects of transboundary conservation are considered of primary importance by IUCN and the use of participatory, inclusive approaches to integrate and agree on issues relating to human communities is likely to be decisive in the success of transboundary conservation.

Most of the world's protected areas are inhabited by human communities, either under traditional occupation or through more recent population movements. The conventional protected area paradigm, still supported legally and politically in many countries, promoted protected areas free from human interference, but this has proven both inequitable and impracticable, and there is growing consensus within the protected areas community that a more flexible and realistic concept of "parks with people" is required.

Natural areas suitable for a transboundary approach often have particular patterns of human occupation. They sometimes overlap with traditionally occupied territories or human migration corridors. One ecological reason for transboundary conservation, the establishment of corridors for migrant animal populations, is also often the reason for human occupation, as traditional communities often follow animal migrations, or use similar corridors for seasonal grazing. National borders often break these routes and split communities. In other cases, border areas have been settled by displaced human communities, either because national policies encourage colonisation of frontier lands to assert sovereignty, or as a result of forced migration due to armed conflict and hostility. Increasingly, the refugee problem affects transboundary protected areas, and the world's current conflicts will probably generate even larger movements of refugees in environmentally sensitive areas, including frontier regions and protected areas, in the future.

Because border areas are often atypical, human communities in transboundary areas usually also have particular relationships with national and local institutions, including the military, and thus conventional participatory approaches to nature conservation need to be adapted to this special institutional context, as well as to the particular socio-cultural conditions of people inhabiting and using those areas.

Human communities often support transboundary protected areas (TBPAs), if they are given a genuine voice in deciding their structure and management and if they receive tangible benefits from them. Because transboundary conservation initiatives help to break down borders between countries, they can revitalise traditional land and resource use affected by borders and militarization, especially for traditionally mobile peoples. TBPAs have also helped to achieve: demilitarisation of such areas; reunification of communities and recuperation of community bonds that had been lost across borders; additional participation in local decision-making; and further participation in national and multinational policies for the management of frontier territories.

Some existing policy instruments and guidance on TBPAs and human communities

- **IUCN Guidelines on Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Co-operation:** Suggests that transboundary protected area planners and managers should: "work together with communities from the beginning, incorporating their objectives in transboundary conservation plans; strive to provide security to people in every sense; support actions with healing effects on communities divided by boundaries; and support strengthening of local institutions and cultures."

http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/pubs/pdfs/Transboundary_guide.pdf

- **IUCN/WCPA Guidelines on Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Protected Areas:** Identifies that: "The rights of indigenous and other traditional peoples in connection with protected areas are often an international responsibility, since many of their lands ... cross national boundaries and overlap with conservation areas: Where trans-frontier protected areas include traditional lands and resources, governments should adopt instruments to



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guarantee that protected area management respects and supports the integrity of the communities and their resources; and indigenous and other traditional peoples' lands within protected areas should be treated as zones of peace and reconciliation”.

<http://www.nrsm.uq.edu.au/wcpa/anz/docs/IndigenousPolicy.pdf>

- **The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169: Protection of Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Across Borders:** The only international legally binding instrument on indigenous peoples issues identifies that: “The rights of ownership and possession of the peoples concerned over the lands which they traditionally occupy shall be recognized... Particular attention shall be paid to the situation of nomadic peoples and shifting cultivators in this respect; governments shall take steps as necessary ...to guarantee effective protection of their rights of ownership and possession” and: “Governments shall take appropriate measures, including by means of international agreements, to facilitate contacts and co-operation between indigenous and tribal peoples across borders...”

<http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/62.htm>

- **Protected areas and indigenous and local communities within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):** Identifies that: “... protected area managers should incorporate customary and indigenous tenure and resource use and control systems as a means of enhancing biodiversity conservation...” and “knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and other traditional peoples have much to contribute to the management of protected areas”.

<http://www.biodiv.org/default.aspx>

- **The Dana Declaration on Mobile Peoples and Conservation:** In 2002, a group of specialists discussed mobile peoples and conservation in Dana, Jordan and issued a declaration, identifying that: “...the interests of mobile peoples and conservation converge, especially as they face a number of common challenges. There is therefore an urgent need to create a mutually reinforcing partnership between mobile peoples and those involved with conservation... Conservation approaches ... must recognise mobile peoples' rights, management responsibilities and capacities, and should lead to effective empowerment... Beneficial partnerships between conservation interests and mobile peoples should be based upon mutual trust and respect...”

<http://www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/dana.htm>

Peace and cooperation building among communities separated or affected by conflict is a fundamental priority that cannot be separated from conservation of nature and natural resources in areas where communities live. In conjunction with their biodiversity conservation objectives, transboundary protected areas should therefore also be understood and implemented as *tools for social and cultural reconstruction*.

This theme paper is based on a paper by Gonzalo Oviedo of IUCN.



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