

# **ITTO/IUCN International Workshop on Increasing the Effectiveness of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Tropical Forests**

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## **Induced population movements and transboundary conservation: Dealing with the issue rather than the problem**

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### **Introduction**

The management of natural resources at the transboundary level is increasingly being appreciated as a viable means of national and regional development. This is seen as an important step towards reducing poverty levels and promoting sustainable livelihoods, as well as being a positive contributor towards biodiversity conservation and, in certain cases, conflict resolution and avoidance.

The planning, creation and management of transboundary conservation areas (TBCAs) is, however, a fragile process fraught with challenges. As with many protected areas such as national parks or Biosphere Reserves, the social dimension is a vital consideration in the TBCA concept, probably even more critical in the latter situation. Not only must TBCA management deal with indigenous populations living within or adjacent to the designated regions, but there is also an established and possibly increasing trend of outside population movement to many of these regions – a feature that distinguishes these areas from most traditional protected areas. Some such movement occurs naturally, but much more is imposed.

This paper summarises some of the main concerns arising from the induced movement of people into, or within reach of, existing or intended TBCAs, the potential impacts of such movements on the local environment, and some implications for future management.

### **People on the move**

Natural disasters are perhaps one of the main causes behind sudden, large-scale movements. During the 1960s, some 28 million people were affected by natural disasters (UNDP, 1989). This figure reached 64 million during the 1980s, while evidence suggests that the past decade alone has seen a further substantial increase in the number of people in the move, but perhaps this is also a reflection of increased awareness and media coverage of such events. Current best estimates (UNHCR, 2002a) suggest that there are 11 million registered refugees (see below for definition) in the world – of which one-quarter are in Africa – added to which there are at least 25 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Earthscan, 2002). Countless others have also fled their homes for one reason or another but this part of society is not recognised by any official agency.

Some population movements are predictable (e.g. following the construction of a reservoir or the continued exploitation of land or forest resources), while many others are spontaneous. Among the latter is movement following the outbreak of war (which itself is sometimes induced by competition for natural resources) or the result of perceived opportunities in a new development, which might even include a TBCA.

Reasons for settling within or close to transboundary conservation areas are many, ranging from a conscious decision on the part of a rebel group to establish bases within striking distance of another country's border, to a conscious decision by governments to establish refugee camps close to neighbouring frontiers. Advantage is also taken of developments (or opportunities) within the reserve or region – a form of magnet attraction. Whatever the reason, however, there are likely to be increased demands on natural resources – as well as on existing communities – with obvious extensions to longer term ecosystem functioning.

Such outpouring of people – and there are many reasons behind this – can, in turn, effect the environment in the receiving countries. Countries like the Sudan, Tanzania and Malawi experienced serious impacts at the onset and for much of the duration of refugee camps. Others such as Rwanda witnessed significant ecological damage upon the return of tens of thousands of refugees. With the return to peace, Afghanistan, Angola and Eritrea may now witness similar circumstances, undermining the possibility of ever establishing some degree of sustainability for these peoples' livelihoods. In countries such as Nepal and Thailand, where strict rules confine refugees to within a few hundred metres of the camp boundaries, there is a noticeable containment of environmental degradation. This, however, requires that all resources such as building materials, foods and fuelwood are brought in from outside. Even under such conditions, however, the collection or harvesting of bamboo, poles for shelter construction and fuelwood can – unless tightly controlled and monitored – have serious repercussions elsewhere, on other communities. Forested protected areas are commonly targeted for supplying such needs: TBCAs could easily face similar threats.

In the current context, the situation becomes more serious when one looks at the physical location of refugee and IDP camps and settlements, many of which are in close proximity – some within sight – of international borders. This obviously has serious potential implications for TBCA.

### **Who is on the move?**

The following broad categories can be mentioned:

- **Refugees** – the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”.
- **Internally displaced people** – people who take flight within the boundaries of their home countries: some may be unable or unwilling to move to another country.
- **Voluntary migrants** – persons who for economic, cultural, personal or other reasons leave voluntarily the country of their habitual residence. They include poverty migrants in search of better economic and social opportunities.
- **Returnees** – refugees (mainly) who are able to return home following, usually, political changes in that country.

Reference is also made to a loosely defined group known as “**Environmentally displaced persons**” a definition of which is “those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life” (El-Hinnawi, 1985).

Clearly there are different issues behind such population movements, some of which are forced while others are voluntary. While it is important to understand with who one might be dealing, especially in the context of protected area planning and management, it is more important to realize that all such forms of population movement have the potential to impact on natural resources (as well as social and economic norms).

### **From problem to solution**

Managing displaced groups of people – refugees or IDPs – requires enormous skills and resources. With regards the use of natural resources, the issue is currently treated to varying degrees, but largely inadequately

A common problem experienced with the establishment and management of many protected areas has been that decisions taken have often excluded local systems or needs. Collaboration is needed at each stage between all actors – from individual community members to decision-makers, from development and humanitarian agencies to donors.

Greater attention should be given to identifying successful examples of community involvement – including displaced populations – in natural resource management in the PA or TBCA context and to carrying out fresh studies on current TBCA initiatives to see how this issues can be integrated into the overall longer term framework. Accompanying this is a clear need for appropriate training and awareness raising packages for all involved in the process.

If consideration is given to the above, and as long as the enabling environment permits displaced persons to engage in activities that allow them to manage resources in an appropriate manner, situations like uncontrolled forest clearance can be controlled and even avoided. Many positive social, economic and environmental benefits can result.

### **Opportunities and recommendations**

Experience has shown the vulnerability of single protected areas and transboundary complexes to population movements.

Opportunities for involving IDPs or refugees should be examined in a positive light, viewing their presence as an opportunity for development rather than as an unnecessary burden on a particular country or community.

Specific recommendations for improved TBCA planning and management include:

#### **Preparation/Scoping:**

- Identify **priority conservation areas** at risk from existing/potential population movements
- Elaborate a **vulnerability Index** for TBCA systems
- There is **no blueprint**, but there could be a “manual” to address population influxes
- Identify **target audiences** and all authorities and agencies likely to be involved. If refugees or IDPs are already present, examine current practices regarding environmental management and see how these might be altered, if necessary.

#### **Planning:**

- Operate on the principle of “**prevention before cure**”
- Facilitate and ensure **dialogue and co-ordination** between all interest groups and agencies

- When planning, take account of such issues as: the potential **scale of movement**; the likely **speed of events**; the expected **duration**; and the **nature of the movement**, whether national (internal) or international.

#### **Implementation:**

- Improve **preparedness** of PA managers and practitioners to deal with population influxes
- Establish clear **camp management policies**: make sure that all displaced persons are aware of government policies and local restrictions
- Ensure that if camps or settlements are necessary that only **small camps** are developed – spread the impact
- Locate camps more than **15km from border and 15km from ecologically sensitive sites**
- Boost **protection** ability of TBCAs through increased staffing, the provision of equipment, training and establishment of co-ordination and monitoring bodies.

#### **Cross-cutting:**

- **Broaden focus of TBCA** from environment and development alone to social, political and economic
- Elaborate the WCPA **Code of Conduct**
- **Monitor** situation continuously
- Retain **flexibility** in planning and management.

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