

# Landowner perspectives on Partnerships with local communities for long-term forest conservation

By

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## Talk outline

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- Challenges for conservation
- Local people should be part of the solution
- Why aren't there enough partnerships with local communities?
- How could partnership be effective?
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## Introduction

- Achieving effective conservation of our forests is a global concern but implicates **local people**
- Despite considerable emphasis on local participation for the past 20 years, the vast majority of conservation initiatives continues to be devised and controlled by small group of powerful external voices
- What is widely overlooked is that local people often have positive conservation goals and preferences

## Introduction

While as yet unfamiliar to many conservationists, **partnerships with local people** are working in other natural resource sectors

Strong partnerships entail **shared decision making, shared risks** and **balance of rights between external conservation agencies and local interest groups**

Real commitments to partnerships offers conservation outcomes that are more ethical and often more practicable than current models

## Introduction

- Most international conservation continues to be devised and directed by a small group of conservation organizations, donors and advisers while local consultation and democratic approaches remain largely absent
- Although specific priorities may differ, there is often much more common ground between externally defined conservation priorities and local practices than commonly assumed
- Such shared interests provide opportunities for building tactical partnerships to achieve conservation with other agendas, such carbon reduction

## Introduction

- Therefore, here, I argue that applying similarly high standards of partnership to relationships between conservation agencies and local community-based groups will increase potential for more effective and sustainable conservation outcomes.

## Introduction

- **Partnership** is defined as a lasting agreement actively entered into on the expectation of net benefit by two or more parties.
- **High standards of partnership** mean commitments to sharing decisions, rights, responsibilities and risks equitably among partners (Vermuelen and Sheil 2007)

## Introduction

- Partnerships are strengthened when both sides perceive an improved return on their investment in the relationship, in turn stimulating further investment and cooperation.
- Such cooperative relationships, founded on existing shared conservation values, may provide one of the best mechanisms for sustainable conservation.

## Challenges for conservation

- **Motives** –The concern that short-term development options take precedence over local conservation: tropical forests are still 'worth more dead than alive' (Terborgh, 1999).
- **Costs** – Protected areas often override long-term land and resource rights. While benefits accrue globally, tropical conservation often entails major local costs that are seldom adequately compensated or mitigated

## Challenges for conservation

- **Implementation difficulties** -although conservation priority setting occurs in a global setting, conservation outcomes represent the result of numerous local processes which can hinder implementation
- **Conflicts** - Projects are often designed without local input or consultation and efforts to gain local acceptance are sought later. I argue that local cooperation should be central, not peripheral, as **local objections can override the best conservation intentions**. Joint objective-setting, planning and implementation can decrease conflict and thus reduce costs

## Local people should be part of the solution

- Rather than viewing local people as part of the conservation challenge, to be educated, compensated or given economic alternatives, I propose that local priorities for conservation should be placed at the centre of joint conservation strategies.
- I believe partnerships offer a much broader scope and greater opportunities than commonly recognized.

## Local people should be part of the solution

- **Shared conservation values** - Destructive impacts on nature are unexceptional in both modern and traditional societies
- The commonplace pessimism about the inevitable decline of nature in the face of human selfishness must not blind us to the common opportunities offered in the fact that **delight in nature, and conservationist sympathies, do appear to be near universal human characteristics** and that concerns about the natural world are remarkably consistent across cultures

## Local people should be part of the solution

- Hostility towards specific conservation initiatives is frequently encountered among local communities but this usually results from the **neglect of their own concerns, or from perceived abuses by executing agencies**, rather than any genuinely anti-nature sentiments (Sharpe, 1998).
- Similarly, those who rely on wild products do not wish to see them decline
- People will often welcome regulation of their own use of species and ecosystems **if administration is seen to be necessary, just and fair**

## Local people should be part of the solution

- **Strong basis for practice** -There is evidence of societies maintaining regulatory systems that aid living within ecological limits. **Example, it is a taboo in my village not to hunt wild fowl – “you can only take the eggs but not the mother”**
- **Tactical alliances** - Working with local people makes the most of both insider and outsider knowledge and can provide conservation agencies with greater legitimacy and greater ability to influence policy.
- Partnerships can nurture better informed and sympathetic partners more receptive to the insights and benefits of conservation

## Local people should be part of the solution

- Successful community scale conservation projects may be more widespread than commonly recognized
- Such projects can operate on **low budgets**, with **little external support** or opportunities for publicity.

## Why aren't there enough partnerships with local communities?

- **Mindset reasons** - Many influential conservation organization still hold onto the apparently deep-rooted assumptions that in tropical countries local people seldom hold significant conservation values, that conservation must be imposed, and that strict protection works best
- Unfortunately, many success stories to contradict such claims are poorly recognized and are typically viewed as exceptions

## Why aren't there enough partnerships with local communities?

- Yet, elsewhere (example Costa Rica) engagement is seen as the key to effective practice.
- **Practical reasons** - Conservation professionals are now expected to incorporate community participation into their projects but there are often academic biologists who may not be well versed in relevant methods and approaches and illplaced to develop and oversee them
- Low numbers of rural extension staff in poorer tropical countries compound these problems

## How could partnerships be effective?

- **Apply high standards** - Partnership implies equity and freedom of choice between two parties. Most contemporary conservation projects include community participation but to varying degrees
- Higher standards of partnership involve more explicit and equitable sharing of decision-making powers, rights of access and use, investments of land, labour and money, the risks and costs associated with these investments, and financial and other returns.

## How could partnerships be effective?

- **Allow enough time** - Building effective cross-cultural partnerships poses various challenges. Local language and cultural barriers can be obstacles to communication
- It takes time to build understanding and trust – social capital

## How could partnerships be effective?

- **Recognize costs and trade-offs** -Joint institutions will work well only if the costs of partnership are less than the perceived benefits for each stakeholder, local and otherwise.
- Benefits may not be readily perceived from the outset. Even with widely shared goals, incentives to engage will vary widely among local people depending on factors such as their gender, education and livelihood, posing a challenge to community-based approaches

## How could partnerships be effective?

- **Recognize and build on examples** - Without rigorous analysis we cannot know whether partnerships really work
- Some mainstream agencies have experimented with building stronger community partnerships.
- Some long-running examples are successfully improving conservation outcomes and gaining local support
- Alliances between indigenous peoples and conservation organizations in Brazil, for example, have already supported official recognition of approximately one million km<sup>2</sup> of indigenous Amazonian territories

## Conclusion

- Authoritarian approaches to imposing conservation may claim some success in the tropics but are becoming increasingly indefensible.
- Partnerships provide a more democratic approach to decision making in conservation and ethical justifications.
- The ethical rationale is that natural resource governance should be legitimate and subject to democratic control; conservation's costs and benefits should be distributed equitably.

## Conclusion

- Conservation agencies recognize that broad-based public support is needed for effective conservation
- Most people are willing to support some form of local conservation.

## Bottom line

- More than 97% of land in PNG under customary ownership
- Enforcement of laws regarding use/protection of forest is not effective in PNG, especially in rural communities - needed local partnerships
- The communities are the ones who decide if projects continue or cease at the end of the day
- Therefore partnership with local communities on projects should be considered seriously in any natural resource use and management

