

Chapter 1:

Introduction to the PARTNERS Principles

Conservation amidst people

Biodiversity conservation efforts aim at perpetuating the survival and functioning of wild species and ecosystems. Today, they form important – though often compromised – elements of national and global laws, policies, and conventions.

Biodiversity conservation usually involves trading off short-term and direct resource use and socio-economic benefits in exchange for more diffused, longer-term societal gain such as maintaining biodiversity, ecosystem services, and other economic, aesthetic, or spiritual benefits.

Over the last several decades, the establishment and management of Protected Areas by states has been the standard approach to biodiversity conservation globally. In practice, these efforts have generally entailed, and, indeed, expected, diminished resource access as well as reduced economic development of individuals in order to achieve larger societal conservation goals.

In large parts of the world, the main costs of conservation continue to be borne by the relatively poor, living in and around Protected Areas or generally important biodiversity areas. The cost of conservation to local communities due to curtailed access to natural resources, ecosystem services, and developmental programs are further aggravated by wildlife-caused damage, including injuries or loss of human life, and economic and psychological impacts (Madhusudan and Mishra 2003). Such damage results in retaliatory killing of wildlife and erosion of support for conservation efforts. It also leads to resentment among local people, in part due to the inability to take retaliatory measures without attracting punitive legal action.

Such costs lead to disenchantment among local communities and their political representatives regarding conservation efforts, and to serious disagreements with conservationists and managers. The resultant protracted conflicts have been generally referred to as human-wildlife conflicts, and more recently and perhaps more appropriately, conservation conflicts (Redpath et al. 2013). The lack of local community support for conservation is one of the most important factors undermining global efforts to protect biodiversity today.

Yet, the predominant measures to achieve biodiversity conservation continue to be state-imposed and focused on law enforcement, with little space for meaningful local community participation. Conservation, especially the management of Protected Areas, is therefore often perceived to be discriminatory by local people (Mishra et al. 2003a, Bhagwat and Rutte 2006).

On the one hand, conservation efforts have tended to be top down, coercive and perceptibly unjust. On the other hand, conservation is considered to have a relatively strong moral basis, and appeals to human value systems. The irony of real world conservation is hard to miss.

Community-based conservation: complicated but necessary

Hardin (1968) formalized the idea that degradation of natural resources was the predictable outcome of an increase in human population and per capita resource consumption, interacting with rational human self-interest. In a system where the individual derives a direct, immediate benefit from exploiting natural resources while suffering only delayed costs of collective over-exploitation, Hardin's model predicted the inevitability of degradation of natural resources, or the tragedy of the commons; "Ruin is the destination towards which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest..." (Hardin 1968 p. 1244).

In Hardin's scheme, centralized government control or privatization of natural resources were the two institutional arrangements that could prevent the inevitable degradation of natural resources (Hardin 1968, Ostrom 1990, Dietz et al. 2003). Others also proposed related ideas, such as Olson in 1965, in the logic of collective action. Here too, rational self-interest was predicted to prevent individuals from achieving group interests unless the group was very small, or there was coercion (Olson 2009).

Notwithstanding the rationale – and the abundant examples – of the commons' tragedies, societies have also repeatedly and sometimes effectively responded

to natural resource scarcity, and have developed self-governing systems of resource management. In contrast to the views of Olson and Hardin, they have done so without the need for coercion. They have done so without centralized governments or blanket privatization of natural resources; the only two institutional arrangements capable of sustaining the commons in Hardin's model.

Elinor Ostrom, an influential figure in the research program which developed in Hardin's wake – and which questioned the universality of the models of commons' tragedies – examined both functional and failed self-governance systems. She identified fundamental characteristics of common-pool management, and distilled them into a set of eight design principles that presumably influence the success of self-governing local institutions (Ostrom 1990). In Ostrom's view, tragedy of the commons was not the inevitable consequence of common-pool characteristics interacting with individual self-interest. On the contrary, the tragedies of the commons, common as they may be today, may be viewed as signs of unstable institutions.

Yet, the models of commons' tragedies have been highly influential. It is perhaps no mere coincidence, for example, that today's paradigm of biodiversity conservation is founded on the idea of Protected Areas, that governments currently manage the majority of existing Protected Areas, and that setting up Protected Areas has often involved the coercion of local people.

Where, then, is the space for community-based conservation? Community-based conservation approaches recognize the important role of local communities in biodiversity conservation. Through direct involvement and empowerment of local people in conservation and conflict management, and through indirect efforts such as helping them improve their quality of life, community-based efforts try to reduce the disproportionate burden of conservation costs that the local communities bear, and thereby seek their support for conservation. Community-based conservation efforts try to assist people in self-governance of natural resources and biodiversity. The importance of local community involvement in biodiversity conservation is increasingly emphasized in policies and environmental rhetoric.

Community-based conservation usually involves assisting local communities in maintaining or strengthening their conservation-friendly practices, changing their conservation-unfriendly practices or internal threats, and collaboratively addressing external threats to biodiversity. They also try to promote the ownership and accountability of natural resources among local communities.

At first glance then, the models of local self-governance of common-pool resources come across as useful frameworks for community-based conservation. And while they are indeed very useful, they may not be sufficient; today's reality of commons' tragedies cannot be ignored. The rate of depletion of biodiversity and natural resources has increased catastrophically, due to large-scale industrial exploitation, climate change, and commons' tragedies. While local human institutions that sustained natural resources over considerable periods of time still exist in places, the conditions for effective governance of common-pool resources are increasingly rare (Dietz et al. 2003).

It is therefore in this divergent, complicated space of human behavior and its correlates that the idea of community-based conservation must be conceptualized and explored. Even as theory develops around them, it is not one, but both of these influential bodies of work – the tragedy of the commons on the one hand and the self-governance of the commons on the other – that provide the conceptual foundations for examining and informing global efforts to conserve biodiversity. Indeed, Ostrom herself reported how self-governing institutions that were successful in resource management were '...rich mixtures of public and private instrumentalities' (Ostrom 1990). While such an academic exploration is not the purpose of the present book, recognizing these underlying conceptual dichotomies at the outset is a necessary acknowledgement of the complexity of conservation with communities.

This complexity isn't restricted to the underlying social science models. Ecosystems function in intricate, often non-linear ways. Human behavior, similarly, is highly variable across time and across individuals, as are human aspirations. Then there is the political ecology of accessing common-pool resources. The social institutions relevant in biodiversity conservation are diverse and operate at multiple scales, from the local community to provincial and national governments, to international organizations. Biodiversity conservation is thus a multi-level commons problem with complex issues of ownership and control (Berkes 2007). Community-based biodiversity conservation, even more so. These complexities surrounding biodiversity and natural resources, and the dynamism of human behavior and societies make community-based conservation a complicated undertaking.

However complex it might be, conservation practitioners must engage with communities. Not only because resource use by local communities impacts biodiversity, or because they can be very useful and influential partners in conservation. Nor just because an exclusive focus on Protected Areas is

ecologically inadequate to conserve landscape species like the snow leopard. Conservationists – especially those who find themselves not able to morally reconcile with the unfairness of top-down conservation efforts – have little choice but to get involved in community-based conservation.

The need for community-based conservation frameworks

The management of Protected Areas worldwide has been formalized and standardized in terms of governance, categorization, and administration (e.g. Dudley 2008) to quite a significant extent. The approach is largely in line with the models of commons' tragedies. The situation with community-based conservation, whether in Protected Areas or otherwise, is different. Despite academic foundations being available – especially of self-governance of natural resources (e.g. Ostrom 1990) – there are no clear-cut frameworks or universally accepted guidelines for conserving with communities.

Because community-based conservation encompasses a diversity of scales, institutions, and perspectives, it is considered a complex systems problem, and therefore, pluralism in approach is both to be expected and valued (Berkes 2007). Recognition that there may be multiple pathways to achieving the same goal is an important aspect of working with communities. But this is perhaps not the only reason why we lack universal guidelines for community-based conservation.

An important motivation for community-based efforts is the acceptance that in democratic systems, conservation efforts are less impactful and difficult to sustain without the support of local people. Often, it is also the role of personal values, dilemmas, and empathy of the conservationist that propels individual practitioners towards community-based conservation. This has implied a considerable influence of individual interest, values and worldview of the practitioner on the approach and the interventions employed in community-based conservation efforts.

As conservation practitioners engaging with communities, we learn from experience, from trial and error. Important though that is, it doesn't take away the need for some practical and general guidelines or frameworks for community-based conservation – or at least for some resources that one could consult in order to learn from the experiences of others. To adopt, adapt, or, at the least, to consider their best practices. To avoid making the same mistakes they made.

While pluralism in community-based approaches is to be highly valued, the

paucity of efforts to consolidate the learning and experiences in community engagement remains a constraint in conservation thought and practice.

This work

What this book is about

The present book is a response to this lacuna. It is aimed at sharing experiences in community-based conservation efforts focused around the snow leopard in Central Asia, but is expected to have wider relevance. It is an attempt to distil our experiences – together with insights from various disciplines such as ecology, sociology, social psychology and negotiation theory – into a set of principles that together constitute an approach to community-based conservation.

The Snow Leopard Trust and its partners have been involved in working with local communities in the Himalayas and Central Asia for many years to promote the conservation of the snow leopard and associated biodiversity. We use the term community to denote a hamlet or village, a collection of individuals or households who identify themselves as a community, live in the same area, and share systems of local resource use, traditions and governance.

We have been running several community-based conservation interventions, supported by education and awareness initiatives wherever possible. These have included a collaborative corral improvement initiative that, together with the local people, aims to reduce livestock losses to predators. When livestock depredation does occur, our community-based livestock insurance program aims at sharing and offsetting economic losses to local people (see Chapter 11: Livestock Insurance). We also run interventions that aim at improving the social carrying capacity for predators by linking livelihood enhancement to conservation action, or conservation friendly behavior. Our program Snow Leopard Enterprises (SLE) is an example of this approach (see Chapter 10: Snow Leopard Enterprises). SLE involves training local people to produce handicrafts that are marketed regionally or internationally. The livelihood opportunity is provided in exchange for community support in preventing poaching in their area. A built-in reward system, where the community is entitled to a bonus on all purchases if the conservation commitment is met, creates a positive incentive for wildlife protection. Another intervention to promote tolerance of predators, called the Ecosystem Health Program, involves a snow leopard friendly livestock vaccination program in areas where local communities do not have access to

adequate veterinary healthcare (see Chapter 11: Livestock Vaccination). Our intervention portfolio has also included a system to establish informal village wildlife reserves (Mishra et al. 2016a). This involves collaboratively curtailing grazing and natural resource harvest from selected areas on local community land to enable wildlife recovery.

In the course of running these interventions, we have had many positive experiences. But we have also made mistakes. There are several things we would do differently if we did them again. While our experiences have been mixed, one thing has remained unchanged. We continue to remain strong advocates of local community involvement in conservation.

This book aims to articulate the approach that we believe should be followed when working with local communities. The approach is crystallized in the form of eight broad principles, which, for simplicity and retention, are acronymed the PARTNERS Principles for Community-based Conservation. The acronym is more than a catchword. It underscores our deep conviction that local communities must be equal partners in conservation.

The second part of this book includes detailed descriptions of three of our community-based interventions, viz., Snow Leopard Enterprises, livestock vaccination program, and community-based livestock insurance program. These are written in a manner that would be useful to the conservation practitioner. Each of the initiatives is discussed in the context of the PARTNERS Principles.

The book is expected to be useful for the conservation practitioner involved in community-based efforts. It will also be pertinent for those practitioners who feel the need and the value of community involvement in conservation, but are unsure of how to proceed, or hesitate to do so for fear of making mistakes. This work might also be of use for grant-making organizations and professionals to consider some of the lessons we have learnt. And it might even interest those who do not believe in the value of community-based conservation, if nothing else, at least for taking the debate forward.

In some sense, this work has relevance to all who care for biodiversity conservation. Especially for those who would like our magnificent wildlife and biodiversity to be conserved, but for whom it is important that conservation is achieved in a just and equitable way – those for whom it is not just the end that matters, but also the means.

What this book isn't

Measuring the impact of community-based conservation efforts is an important issue that deserves much attention, but it's not the subject of this book. Several critical questions need to be answered. What are the impacts of community-based conservation action on biodiversity or focal species populations? What are the impacts on the threats they face? How do community-based conservation efforts influence peoples' conservation-related behavior? What are the larger social impacts of community-based conservation actions?

Perhaps an even more important question to tackle is: what are the correlates or determinants of performance of community-based conservation efforts? The models of self-governance of the commons, especially Ostrom's design principles, provide a highly useful conceptual space for such analyses. This book, however, does not attempt to tackle these critical questions, integrally related and much needed as they are. I do believe that a more in-depth and critical analysis of the PARTNERS Principles from the perspective of self-governance models would be highly insightful, and should be a subject for future work.

My goal here, however, is more humble: to provide a framework that distills some best practices for community-based conservation based on our experiences. Indeed, some of these best practices do have a critical influence on the performance of community-based conservation efforts. Others address issues of fairness and basic human dignity. The PARTNERS Principles are a blend of the practical and the ethical.

The PARTNERS Principles



Figure 1.1 A detailed visual representation of the eight PARTNERS Principles for effective and respectful community-based conservation.

The PARTNERS Principles underscore the critical importance of a set of 8 criteria for effective community-based conservation programs (Figure 1.1). In the following chapters, each of the principles is described in detail, with relevant examples. They include:

- 1) Relationship-building through the sustained and long-term Presence of conservationists amidst the local community (Chapter 2).
- 2) The Aptness of specific community-based interventions with respect to addressing the main threats to biodiversity, the underlying science, the

- local culture, socio-economics, the available or potential social capital, and the value of multi-faceted programs (Chapter 3).
- 3) A relationship that views the community with dignity and Respect, and interactions based on beneficence and non-maleficence (Chapter 4).
 - 4) High Transparency in interactions with local communities with truthful and open communication regarding each other's interests, and visible equitability in program benefits to community members (Chapter 5).
 - 5) Integrative Negotiations with local communities and interventions based on formal agreements and conservation linkages (Chapter 6).
 - 6) The ability to view problems, constraints and opportunities from the community's perspective with a high level of Empathy (Chapter 7).
 - 7) The ability to adaptively improve the programs and address emerging problems and opportunities with a high level of Responsiveness and creativity (Chapter 8).
 - 8) Strategic support (Chapter 9) to increase the resilience and reach of community-based conservation efforts through partnerships with governments in management planning and implementation, and policy and legal support.