

Linkages between Biodiversity, Land Rights and Poverty in Tanzania: Increasing incentives for unsustainable land use change through conservation policy

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Introduction

The Tarangire-Manyara ecosystem of northern Tanzania is a site rich in biodiversity and has the second highest abundance of migratory large mammal species in East Africa after the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem. In addition to the ecological importance of the area, Tarangire-Manyara is the keystone of northern Tanzania's rapidly growing tourism industry. Revenues from the two parks in 2004 earned an excess of US\$3.2 million in gate revenues alone. Despite the ecological and economic value of the Tarangire-Manyara National Parks, tension between wildlife management and local Maasai pastoralists is growing. Nomadic pastoralists, the Maasai livelihood depends on access to wide swaths of open grazing land. The increasing privatization of land that limits the necessary mobility, the increasing shift toward agricultural production fueled by sedentarization and conservation policies largely skewed in favor of wildlife had lead to increasing conflicts.

Though the national parks generate substantial amounts of revenue, the earnings have not had a significant effect on either poverty reduction or local sustainability initiatives. This breeds unsustainable natural resource practices with the Maasai increasingly turning key migratory routes into agricultural land and engaging in poaching for revenue or to protect their crops. Along the Kwakuchinja corridor that connects the Tarangire and Manyara National Parks, wildlife biodiversity has decreased by as estimated 72 percent between 1989 and 1998 whereas agriculture has increase by 130 percent.

To reverse this worrisome ecological trend, and mitigate wildlife-animal conflicts, efforts are currently underway to harness the economic potential of wildlife to help local pastoralist communities, through community-based natural resource management schemes (CBNRM). CBNRM seeks to negate the chain of cause and effect breeding conflict and threatening biodiversity by placing wildlife tourism programs in the hands of local communities, providing them with a viable and potentially lucrative stream of income and increasing their incentives to conserve and support the wildlife and natural resource base. This study highlights the key social and institutional issues that underpin CBNRM and analyzes the potential costs and benefits of various interventions.

Land Tenure and National Resource Management

Tanzania's legacy of socialism and nationalism is fundamental to understanding the unique challenges to CBNRM in Tanzania. Currently, all land in Tanzania is held in trust by the President. Individuals, communities and commercial entities are thus issued with 'rights of occupancy' for up to 99 years. As such, wildlife management on village lands has tended to lean towards being top-down and state-centric. Outside protected national parks, wildlife management is covered by the Wildlife Act (1974) which has limited provision for community-based conservation.

Game Controlled Areas (GCA) are the primary management mechanism supported by the Wildlife Act. GCA's are primarily divided into hunting blocks which are awarded competitively to tourism hunting firms. A single hunting block can overlay several villages, irrespective of village administrative boundaries. This has been a source of much conflict as village lands effectively have wildlife user rights allocated to the private sector with villages having minimal involvement in the decision-making process, management of hunting rights and revenue allocation. In a bid to alleviate the conflict and provide local incentives for conservation, new regulations were established in 2003 that support the creation of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) which offers legal support for local communities to reap the benefits of wildlife revenue in their area.

Essentially, WMA are protected areas specified by local communities in which wildlife utilization activities may be conducted in a policy environment which favors increased direct revenue flows to villages. Where the private sector previously entered into agreements with the state to invest in wildlife based enterprises on village lands, WMAs provide local communities with ownership rights that requires the private sector to contract directly with them. Direct economic gains can thus be obtained through resident game fees, tourist hunting block fees, concession fees, and more.

Biodiversity Based Enterprise Strategy

The primary vehicle for delivering conservation-based benefits in northern Tanzania is through the development of community based biodiversity enterprises such as eco-tourism facilities and cultural tourism facilities which generate benefits for local communities through partnerships with private sector investors. Viewed as a way of harnessing the economic potential of biodiversity into conservation initiatives and sustainable development opportunities, biodiversity enterprises are necessarily community-driven, providing economic incentives for conservation efforts at the grassroots level.

While institutions such as the Wildlife Management Areas provide a natural vehicle for local communities to initiate biodiversity enterprises, a major obstacle to community centered resource management options is weak community level governance and the potential for elite capture of the benefits. Successful grassroots conservation efforts require the development of effective community based organizations and advocacy groups that can ensure that opportunities and revenues resulting from CBNRM are widely distributed among community members.

One of the main policy challenges now is to harness the power of the private sector in making fair and lasting partnerships (which may include equity sharing, leases, management contracts and/or employment and supply/outsourcing contracts) with poor communities. This is particularly true in terms of attracting the lucrative international tourism market, which depends on specialized marketing and distribution channels that may be difficult for local communities to access.

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