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Community-Based Natural Resources Management in Northern Pakistan

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Introduction

Northern Pakistan is noted for its mountains, rivers, green valleys and unique flora and fauna. The three magnificent natural ranges, the Hindu Kush, Himalaya and Karakorum, intersect in Northern Pakistan. Beside certain obvious differences in native flora and fauna, such mountain ranges have a long history of a variety of cultures, customs and traditions. Because of these variations, approaches to managing the natural resources of different areas, even those in close geographic proximity, often have to be quite different from each other within the overall umbrella principles of management, if any exists. Moreover, being a heterogeneous society from a cultural point of view, managers find they may have to twist the overall management plan and their approach to resolve specific conservation issues. As the most basic of resources, land, water, flora and fauna are the basis of life for local communities but, obviously, in different combinations and use patterns. Some of the uses may be nearly sustainable, but the majority are not; as a result, signs of habitat or environmental degradation and deterioration are quite obvious almost everywhere in these mountain ranges. In order to reduce, then stop and ultimately reverse the ongoing process of degradation, a large number of activities, both in the government and the private sector, will have to be initiated. These include the formulation of a natural conservation strategy, establishment of various government departments working at various levels, establishment of a large number of NGOs addressing different issues and problems, and so forth. However, when such needs are viewed against the magnitude of the problem, these seem quite insufficient. Some of the basic underlying reasons, of course, lie with insufficient input in terms of political commitment or the lack of funding required to resolve certain natural resource management issues. In this author's opinion, the major reason seems to be the lack of a proper approach and insufficient cooperation between different governmental agencies, NGO's and the public sector. This article summarizes WWF-Pakistan's experiences with community-based conservation initiatives in North Parkistan, and offers lessons for the future.

Planning for Community-Based Conservation Initiatives

Khunjerab National Park: Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis ammon polii*), snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*) and Tibetan wild ass (*Equus kiang*) are among the rare and endangered fauna of Northern Pakistan (Ahmad et al. 1989). In order to offer them adequate protection, the Government of Pakistan designated their habitat as a national park in 1975 and created an organization for the necessary supervisory activities. However, these steps did not prove effective for people from adjoining communities, who held centuries-old grazing rights to the area, and were neither compensated nor offered alternative grazing areas. A government-sponsored management planning workshop did not embrace local residents or community-based management (Bell 1989). This resulted in a long and tiring conflict between local communities and the respective governments, with the result that key or target wildlife species of the park were reduced even further in number. Thus, the park failed immediately as a primary conservation tool.

Bar Valley: Situated in Northern Pakistan, the Bar valley was once known for its large population of Siberian ibex (*Capra [ibex] sibirica*) which are major prey for the snow leopard. Although a wildlife department existed in the Northern Areas, wild animals were hunted in the Bar valley for food and pleasure, and the snow leopards were poisoned to avoid damage to livestock.

Lessons for Project Planning and Design: As indicated earlier, the infrastructure, including organizational and institutional arrangements, will not operate efficiently unless all activities deemed essential are planned in light of the

existing socioeconomic condition, local culture and tradition. Even these may not be practical if people do not see conservation as the basis for their economic development. In brief, a substantial part of any project that deals with natural resource management must be spent on planning and on the collection of data which relates to local community involvement and the target resource conservation initiatives. Some of the information deemed necessary follows:

1. Social Assessment: Community-based interviews and meetings are required to establish the status of the existing social structure, local village and user-group organizations and institutions. Among other things, social assessment will determine if the society in question is heterogeneous or homogenous in nature, and will better permit projects to ensure they respond to community needs and priorities and to ensure interventions are appropriately designed;
2. Local dependence on natural resources: Managers quite often forget that a particular resource is closely linked with the livelihood of the local community. In order to be effective, the conservation project must determine if local dependence upon the resource in question is heavy, average or low so that the question of whether to accommodate existing rights, substitute other rights, or offer compensation, can be addressed accordingly;
3. Legal rights and concessions: In most cases, necessary conservation measures are poorly adapted because of the existence of certain rights and concessions in critical conservation areas and the lack of a peaceful resolution to any conflict. The present and past history of such rights and concessions, if any, should be included in any project's fact sheets;
4. Nature of conflicts (if any): Natural resource conservation will remain just a pipe-dream if there is any unresolved conflict, either within the community, between different communities of the area, or between the communities and their respective government agencies over questions of ownership of targeted resources. The nature and seriousness of such conflict, if any, should be given due emphasis and consideration during the formulation of the overall conservation plan;
5. Existing level of awareness regarding targeted resources: Local or indigenous knowledge is sometimes taken for granted when conducting planning for the management of natural resources. However, precise information about such knowledge helps to avoid wasting limited resources by giving proper direction to the necessary action programme.

Lessons Learned: Some Successes and Failures

Wildlife Protection in the Khunjerab National Park: Upon request of the Government of Pakistan and as follow-up action to the recommendations of a management planning workshop held in Gilgit in 1989 (Bell 1989), the author was asked to develop a comprehensive management plan for the Khunjerab National Park (WWF 1994). A detailed survey of the park was a pre-requisite, and during these surveys, the author noticed that there was an extreme lack of understanding between local communities and park officials. Each pasture and grassland of the park was occupied by livestock from local communities, and subsistence or trophy hunting was done without any check or control. The core zone, comprising only a 12 square kilometer area of the park, was declared closed to grazing at the time the park was established. People were promised certain compensation for this loss, but these promises were never fulfilled. The people thus wanted to use core area pastures as usual, while park authorities were reluctant to allow them to do so. Not surprisingly, this initiated a conflict between the people and park administration which became quite serious with the passage of time.

Ultimately, the local people went to the court of law, demanding the decertification of the park. This, coupled with other mistakes and mismanagement, made it extremely difficult for park authorities to run the park and thus achieve the objectives of its management. It was even harder for the planning team headed by the author to go through its data-gathering process, as the local communities were not cooperating

and were not even willing to allow certain members of the team to enter their areas. The author thus decided to enter into a dialogue with community leaders, which took quite a long time and which involved a series of meetings to discuss the various options available. Several dialogues failed because:

1. These dialogues focused only on the importance of park resources from a conservation view point, while the local people were more interested in continuing their traditional use of park resources as the source of their living and subsistence;
2. The people were getting the impression that everything inside the park, including wildlife, was the sole property of park officials and that they were only responsible for protecting them. Consequently, most local people took no interest in protecting the wildlife;
3. Government - community dialogue avoided addressing anything related to the compensation of existing rights, while the people absolutely refused to even discuss any issue without receiving compensation. Since the success of the dialogues was dependent upon the attitudes of both parties (namely, government agencies and representatives of the local communities), constant consultation with them on major issues helped the author to propose a solution which was acceptable to all parties and which helped to resolve the underlying conflict.

The following lessons were learnt from the entire process:

1. Allow equitable sharing of benefits and responsibilities to increase "ownership": People are always happy not only with benefits but also with certain responsibilities that give them a sense of ownership. The park establishment had several vacant positions and it was decided that 80% of these would go to candidates from the local communities. In turn, it was the responsibility of the entire community to protect the wildlife in the park from local as well as outside hunters. In response to this decision, the local community has established a check post near the park's entry point and posted two guards on duty at all times. This has deterred poaching in the park and, as a result, wildlife can now be viewed from the KKH road side, a major highway that leads into China over the Khunjerab Pass;
2. Compensate for the loss of existing rights: Ways and means were determined to compensate those who must surrender their grazing rights and concessions in the interests of the park and its bio-diversity. Since it was not possible to arrange for cash compensation, several activities which could potentially yield income in various forms were identified in consultation with the local communities, and duly approved by the respective government agencies. Such income has then to be distributed by the local village council among those members of the community who have surrendered their grazing rights within crucial habitats of the park;
3. Accommodate legitimate uses: Not all human activities and uses are detrimental to the park and its natural resources. If certain uses are proved to be of no harm, they should be allowed in order to earn the goodwill of the people.

Sustainable Use of Wildlife Species in the Bar Valley (Nagar Subdivision): The Siberian ibex is an important animal species of the Northern Areas. This animal used to be plentiful in a number of places until a few decades ago, but because of uncontrolled and excessive hunting pressures, it has now been reduced to isolated and scattered populations found only in the more remote and inaccessible parts of the region. The Bar valley, covering about a 200 km² area, constitutes important habitat for ibex. In 1989, people from the valley decided to stop hunting ibex, provided they were assisted in obtaining certain economic benefits.

Since the wildlife rules and legislation of Pakistan have so far been silent on the sharing of any benefits from wildlife with local communities, the author was asked to conduct a feasibility study of this possibility (Ahmad 1994). The proposal was found to be valid as far as the preliminary surveys were concerned, but when it was implemented a number of problems emerged. Although the project could not be expected to work miracles, certain problems did lead to failures initially. These

are discussed briefly below:

1. Each individual was not a hunter: There were 44 hunters within a population of 1,100 people, and any decision to stop hunting directly affected 44 hunters and their households. However, since the project had to work for the development of the entire community and not for individual hunters, the latter were not happy with the arrangement. Several violations of the rules occurred in the beginning and, reportedly, some of the hunters were involved in these;
2. Suspicious nature of people: The majority of the people in the valley believed that if they signed a MOU (memorandum of understanding), their pastures and grazing lands would be annexed within Pakistan's protected areas network - to which they would never again have access;
3. Lack of confidence in the resourceful people in the community: Since the idea of protecting wildlife in order to get certain economic benefits in the future was mostly supported by the few resourceful individuals in the society, the remaining population assumed that such benefits, if any, would go directly to these individuals and not to others in the same community;
4. Success of the project was based only on the trophy hunting of ibex: The people were convinced that once the population of ibex increased in number, and trophy hunting took place, a new source of income would be generated which could meet their developmental requirements. However, there are many hurdles in the way of a successful trophy hunting programme. For instance, foreign hunters had to pass through several procedures before they could actually hunt an ibex, and many hunters became discouraged midway through this process. Secondly, the government of Pakistan had banned all hunting of large mammals and export of trophies. It was thus up to the government to determine whether such hunting should be allowed or not. It was agreed that a substantial portion of the resulting revenue should go to the local community, but there is no precedent in Pakistan's conservation history of the government ever paying any income from trophy hunting to a local community;
5. The elected committee was not sufficiently influential: In order to achieve the objective of sustainability, the project had to depend upon the elected board. However, later in the history of the project, it was realized that the board was not sufficiently influential and effective enough to stop hunting by a few individuals, nor courageous enough to report the matter to the project's administration.

Evolution of the Strategy: A number of important observations and conclusions for community-based conservation initiatives arose during the design and implementation of WWF-Pakistan's programmes in the Bar Valley Project:

1. Creation of Awareness: The project kept close contact with all individuals in the community to educate them and assure them on certain issues. No one ever believed that ibex, if hunted for trophy purposes, could bring enough money to the village. Furthermore, the people were still suspicious that once the ibex population grew in number, the valley would be declared as a National Park or Wildlife Sanctuary and they would be asked to vacate it. It took a long time, using constant contacts with individuals and groups, to wash this idea away and to convince the local community;
2. Organization of the community: Prior to the project, the people of Bar Valley had certain traditional organizations for undertaking various social activities. However, since the nature of this wildlife protection project was different from more ordinary and routine village activities, the people had to be organized in a different way. Each individual had to be involved and to make a personal commitment to abide by the rules. In order to do this, existing inter-communal conflicts had first to be searched out and then resolved, and certain incentives provided in order to keep the community intact and united in its resolve;
3. Flexibility of the targets: The project over-emphasized trophy hunting from the beginning. It was, however, soon realized that in view of the possible problems in reaching a successful trophy hunting programme, alternate development activities and sources for the generation of income should be explored and advocated equally. This was essential because if one programme failed, then there would be others in hand or in operation. The project thus started work on the development of eco-tourism in

the valley, improvement of agricultural crops, the establishment of fruit orchards, etc.;

4. Vigilance: The project initially relied totally upon the community for watch and ward activities. However, when a few instances of rule violations were reported to the project, it was necessary to be more strict on certain occasions. This strategy worked well initially but it created a general feeling of "bossing the project." The strategy was thus modified to a rather flexible approach of keeping eyes open and discussing any violation in the village meeting to allow the people themselves to decide on a reasonable solution to the problem at hand;

5. Transparency: Villagers often think that a project is very rich, having lots of funds that can be shared with them. Such a belief is quite detrimental to the overall cause of conservation, and it is thus useful to keep issues related to funding of the project as transparent as possible and the funds available for development within locally realistic limits;

6. Leading role: It is true that the initial guidance has to come from the project, but if this process continues, the village community will fail to take over the project subsequently, and its overall sustainability will be in serious doubt. After a series of such mistakes, the project confined its help to certain areas, and the major leading role was given to the community.

Problems of Snow Leopards in the Northern Areas

The snow leopard population of the Northern Areas is reasonably good, but it is subject to continued depletion by graziers and skin traders. WWF-Pakistan has been trying to develop certain approaches that would help the graziers better understand the situation and refrain from killing snow leopards. These proposed approaches for addressing the graziers are described in the following paragraphs.

Facts and Figures: Because of the reduction in the natural prey population, snow leopards have certainly increased hunting pressures upon domestic livestock. However, predation by snow leopards is not as high as is usually claimed by the graziers themselves. At four distant locations in the snow leopard range, statistics were collected from graziers on various types of losses to their animals. Almost all graziers agreed that their animals were not getting enough food or nourishment, and as a result were weak and more susceptible to various kinds of diseases (from which about 40% of the herd may die each year). Against this fact, the average loss attributed to snow leopards is around 1%. Apparently, the losses to snow leopards are not high; however, the root of the problem lies in the fact that only a few graziers suffer such loss, which is not being shared by others.

Proposed Solution: WWF-Pakistan proposes a number of actions for testing and evaluation:

- (1) Include all graziers in a watershed in the snow leopard conservation programme;
- (2) Keep a record of all animals being killed by diseases, accidents, starvation and snow leopards;
- (3) Develop programmes and interventions to control diseases, improve pastures, reduce the amount of animals to the carrying capacity of their pastures, and educate graziers to improve animal care and improve the design of cattle sheds.

The fur trade represents another important threat to the snow leopard, which is an endangered species that is protected by law in many countries, especially those which are parties to CITES (including Pakistan). WWF-Pakistan's approach is to encourage government agencies to fulfill their international obligations, and organize communities against skin traders. This involves three steps: providing incentives under certain conditions, encouraging reporting to the law enforcement agencies, and publicizing such activities to deter skin traders.

Conclusions

Because of the reduction in the prey population and the increase in livestock numbers, predatory losses

of domestic animals have increased within the snow leopard's range. The graziers, being a poor community, always try to kill predators and thus reduce the losses of their valuable livestock. Although the snow leopard is a protected species by law, they are killed whenever possible by graziers as well as fur traders. The problem, although serious and difficult, could be solved, provided concrete efforts were initiated which focused equally on the conservation of snow leopards as well as the economic uplift of the grazier community.