

An equity framework helps ensure that protected areas are fair to people

There have been repeated calls to ensure that costs and benefits arising from protected areas are shared equitably. Yet a gap remains between policy and practice. The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme responded to a clear need for clarity and practical guidance to ensure that the benefits of conservation do not come at a cost for poor communities.

Key messages

- Protected areas (PAs) are at the core of efforts to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services. The Aichi Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) call for PAs and other area-based conservation to cover at least 17% of terrestrial areas and 10% of marine areas by 2020.
- It is recognised that environmental conservation has costs as well as benefits, and that these costs are often shouldered by the poorest local communities. In view of this, Aichi Target 11 also calls for PAs to be 'effectively and equitably managed'. Yet understanding of 'equitable management' – and how to achieve it in practice – remains elusive.
- Several ESPA projects have worked together to develop a framework to support fair, equitable management of PAs. The team responded to a clear policy need, and fed into CBD policy processes (including being directly cited in a CBD document), as well as the revision of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green List standards.

Background

Conserving natural diversity is essential for the future of humanity. Protected areas (PAs) – such as national parks, wilderness areas, community conserved areas, and nature reserves – are a mainstay of biodiversity conservation. They enable the survival of rare and endangered species, and play a key role in helping mitigate and adapt to climate change: it has been estimated that the global network of PAs stores at least 15% of terrestrial carbon.¹

Along with producing undeniable global benefits, PA conservation also comes at (often significant) local costs. Many PAs are established in remote regions with high levels of poverty, where local communities depend heavily on ecosystem services, and about half of them are on lands traditionally used



Women in Lake Mburo National Park, Uganda.

Photo credit: Francesca Booker, IIED – protected areas

by indigenous people.² The expansion of PAs can cause people to be evicted from their ancestral lands and can prevent them from accessing essential goods and services. Local communities can come into conflict with protected wildlife, which can destroy crops and endanger local people. Even when compensation measures are in place, these are often inadequate and may fail to reach the most vulnerable populations.

Equitable conservation is ‘the right thing to do’: countries need to respect global and national human rights norms. But equitable conservation is also ‘the effective thing to do’: if people are empowered and get a fair share of benefits, they will be more supportive of conservation measures.³ Frequent discussions on the need to ensure equity have taken place in the main international fora on protected areas, such as the IUCN World Parks Congress⁴ and the Conference of Parties (COP) meetings of the CBD.⁵

As part of the CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, Aichi Target 11 not only calls for an expansion of PAs, but also (importantly) requires that they be ‘effectively and equitably managed’.⁶ There is, however, a lack of agreement over what ‘equity’ looks like in the context of PAs, making it extremely hard for governments to assess (or report on) their progress.

ESPA research

The concepts of equity and justice, and their definition in relation to ecosystem services management, have been a focus of ESPA research from the outset. One project developed a framework for assessing equity within ecosystem services, while others looked at different local perceptions of justice, and how



There is growing acknowledgement that when conservation respects the values and practices of local communities, and when decision-making processes and outcomes are perceived locally to be fair, better conservation outcomes result. The equity framework promotes understanding of what equitable conservation means and the types of steps that may represent progress for both people and nature.



Neil Dawson, Steering Committee member, IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy



I have used the equity framework with its three interrelated dimensions in training sessions. It really helps for grasping the concept of equity and supports joint reflection on our development cooperation approaches in protected areas.



Barbara Lang, Adviser, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

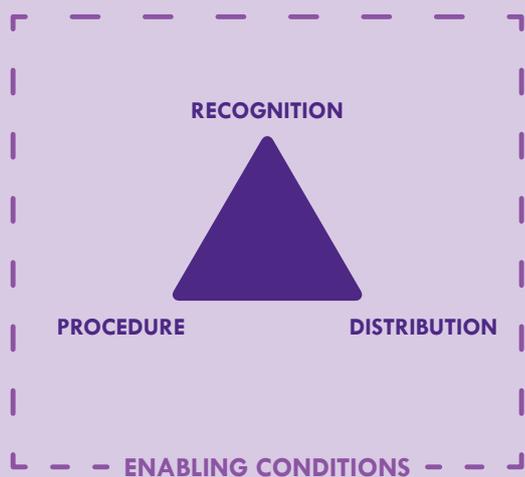
conflicting perceptions of fairness may determine the success of interventions to enhance natural resources and alleviate poverty. Finding complementarities among these areas of work, researchers secured ESPA funding to provide guidance to the CBD and the IUCN World Parks Congress on how PAs should be managed equitably.⁷

Building on ESPA research and related work by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the researchers developed a framework to enhance equity in PA management (at both ‘site’ and ‘systems’ levels) and endeavoured to operationalise these concepts for practical application by the global community of PA managers. The participation of IUCN’s Global Protected Area Programme (GPAP)⁸ in this project ensured that the outputs were appropriate to the needs of PA practitioners and effectively disseminated. The term ‘equity’ was used to respond to language used in the context of the CBD and the Sustainable Development Goals; however, the work drew heavily on existing research on environmental and social justice.

Bringing together researchers and practitioners from around the world, the project elaborated a basic framework, consisting of three dimensions (recognition, procedure and distribution – see Box 1), each entailing a number of principles, and enveloped in a set of enabling conditions.⁹ The framework was validated through field work in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. The cumulative findings were used to further refine the framework, highlighting some areas for clarification (e.g. around gender), but overall confirmed the strength and relevance of the framework.

The World Conservation Congress in Hawaii in September 2016 provided an opportunity to exchange ideas through knowledge cafes, workshops and individual meetings. The framework received positive and constructive feedback there.¹⁰ Further work by IIED, partly funded by ESPA, has developed tools for assessing social impacts and governance of PAs, which are both important dimensions of equity.¹¹

Box 1: Equity framework for the management of protected areas¹²



- **Recognition** is about acknowledging and respecting rights, and the diversity of identities, knowledge systems, values and institutions of different actors.
- **Procedure** is about participation of actors in decision-making, transparency, accountability and processes for dispute resolution.
- **Distribution** is about the allocation of benefits across the set of actors, and how the costs/ burdens experienced by some actors are mitigated.
- **'Enabling conditions'** are factors that are beyond the immediate control of the managers and other local stakeholders of a particular PA, but can have a significant impact on the way in which PAs are established, governed and managed at the local scale.

The three dimensions should be considered as parts of a whole rather than in isolation, and in relation to the enabling conditions.



ESPA animation: Protected areas for all – Ensuring better outcomes for people and the environment (www.espa.ac.uk/multimedia).

Photo credit: ESPA

Impact

PAs are managed by a range of actors – central and local governments, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and community-based groups.

A key route to reach government PA managers is through the CBD, which has been ratified by 195 governments. The ESPA equity framework has been used during trainings for officials who serve as CBD national focal points on PAs, and has been included in a CBD flyer on Aichi Target 11 distributed at the 2016 COP meeting.¹³ More recently, ESPA's research has been directly referenced in a document for the July 2018 CBD Scientific Body (SBSTTA), suggesting it recommends a COP decision that 'urges governments to apply voluntary guidance on ... governance and equity of protected areas'.¹⁴ This voluntary guidance draws significantly on the ESPA research.

Another important route for reaching both government and non-government PA managers is through IUCN's newly developed Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas – a voluntary mechanism that aims to encourage and achieve effective, equitable and successful PAs.¹⁵ ESPA researchers were invited to participate in a workshop in 2016, with many ideas from the framework integrated into a revised Green List.

Together, these two routes could contribute to a normative and cultural shift in PA management, ensuring that conservation is fair to people as well as the environment.



The equity framework is an important step forward in developing a process for evaluating and enhancing equity, and ultimately for ensuring that protected and conserved areas are governed equitably for both biodiversity and social outcomes. We are looking forward to taking the next steps to refine it, and to apply it in practice.



About the projects

The project 'Safeguarding local equity as global values of ecosystem services rise' (2010-2012) was led by Kate Schreckenber at the University of Southampton (NE/I00341X/1). The project 'Just ecosystem management: Linking ecosystem services with poverty alleviation' (2010-2013) was led by Thomas Sikor at the University of East Anglia (NE/I003282/). A follow-up project, also led by Professor Sikor from 2013 to 2016, looked at justice and wellbeing in the context of a protected area in Laos ('Ecosystem services, wellbeing and justice: developing tools for research and development practice', NE/L001411/1). These strands of research were brought together in the project 'Developing a framework and tools for enhancing equity and justice in protected area management', led by Kate Schreckenber in 2015-2016 (www.espa.ac.uk/projects/espa-rof-2015-16-02). A project led by Phil Franks (IIED) consolidated ESPA's leading work in supporting implementation of the equitable management element of the CBD's Aichi Target 11 ('Advancing equity in protected area conservation: From theory to practice', IAF2017-18-004, 2017-2018).

Credit

This briefing was written by the ESPA Directorate based on information provided by the project teams.

About the ESPA Programme

ESPA is a global development research programme established in 2009 with funding from the Department for International Development (DFID), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). ESPA is one of the most comprehensive research programmes exploring the linkages between ecosystem services and human wellbeing. ESPA aims to provide new worldclass research evidence demonstrating how ecosystem services can reduce poverty and enhance wellbeing for the world's poor.

Programme enquiries:
support@espa.ac.uk

Endnotes

1. IUCN describes PAs as a 'clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values' (www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/about).
2. Stevens, S. (ed.) (2014) *Indigenous people, national parks, and protected areas – A new paradigm linking conservation, culture, and rights*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
3. Martin, A. (2017) *Just conservation: Biodiversity, wellbeing and sustainability*. London: Earthscan.
4. The world's premier global forum for setting the agenda for PAs, taking place approximately once every ten years. The last two took place in Durban, South Africa (2003) and in Sidney, Australia (2014), and both included calls for equitable conservation.
5. The COP is the governing body of the Convention, and advances implementation of the Convention through the decisions it takes at its biennial meetings.
6. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2010) *Strategic plan for biodiversity 2011-2020, including the Aichi biodiversity targets* (www.cbd.int/doc/strategic-plan/2011-2020/Aichi-Targets-EN.pdf).
7. In March 2015, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) hosted an expert workshop on 'Equity, justice and wellbeing in ecosystem governance', which highlighted the urgent need and opportunity to translate academic ideas on equity and justice into operational tools for use in PA governance and management. IUCN representatives in attendance recognised the high relevance of the emerging ESPA equity framework to their ongoing efforts to ensure equity in PAs.
8. The GPAP acts as the focal point for the 1,500-member IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas and, through project partnerships in the regions, is intended to influence and support IUCN's wider membership for scaled-up implementation.
9. Franks, P. and Schreckenber, K. (2016) 'Advancing equity in protected area conservation'. London: IIED (<http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17344IIED.pdf>).
10. An article was also published in *PARKS* journal, which has a large readership amongst PA practitioners. See Schreckenber, K., P. Franks, A. Martin and B. Lang (2016) 'Unpacking equity for protected areas conservation', *PARKS* 22 (2): 11-26.
11. Franks, P., F. Booker and D. Roe (2018) 'Understanding and assessing equity in protected area conservation: A matter of governance, rights, social impacts and human wellbeing'. London: IIED (<http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/14671IIED.pdf>).
12. <https://www.cbd.int/pa/doc/flyers-2016-en.pdf>
13. Schreckenber, K., P. Franks, A. Martin and B. Lang (2016) 'Unpacking equity for protected areas conservation' *PARKS* 22 (2): 11-26 (DOI: 10.2305/IUCN.CH.2016.PARKS-22-2KS.en).
14. The information document 'Protected and conserved areas governance in the Convention on Biological Diversity: A review of key concepts, experiences and sources of guidance' (CBD/SBSTTA/22/INF/8) is available at: www.cbd.int/doc/c/75d4/07a8/95d2c59b0963a9845fd40d3d/sbstta-22-inf-08-en.pdf.
15. www.iucn.org/protected-areas/wcpa/what-we-do/green-list

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A research programme co-funded by DFID, NERC & ESRC

