

Forum

Time to move *Out of Africa!* – A response to Adams and Hulme

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Adams and Hulme (this issue) have provided a useful overview of the current debate regarding community based conservation in Africa. Their conclusion, that the question is not whether conservation should be done with people, but how this should happen, is important, and the points made regarding conservation by communities rather than for communities, and regarding the variety of community conservation (CC) initiatives, are vital. Having said that, however, Adams and Hulme's analysis is incomplete, and I wish here to make some constructive criticisms in order to encourage a more international perspective on this important issue.

The material and cases used are exclusively from Africa, and it should be acknowledged that this is not representative of CC initiatives across the world. If a global view is taken and, even for Africa, if a full spectrum of initiatives is considered, the following issues would emerge:

1. Although they occasionally mention other organisms, Adams and Hulme more or less concentrate on the 'big animal' definition of wildlife. Many of their 10 arguments detailing circumstances where CC will not work are dependent on this restricted definition. For instance, their assertion that CC will not work where the market for wildlife resource is not sustainable, is restricted to examples of tourism and hunting related to large mammals. In many regions of the world, however, CC is dependent on the use of wild plants, smaller animals, and habitats in general. There is now considerable material on such initiatives (Western & Wright, 1994; White *et al.*, 1994; Stevens, 1997; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2000; Kothari *et al.*, 2000; Ortiz von Halle & Mazzucchelli, 2000; Roe *et al.*, 2000), and they do not fit neatly into the conclusions reached by Adams and Hulme.
2. Many CC initiatives are generated by cultural factors (e.g. the conservation of sacred spaces), or for ecological functions (e.g. forests as water catchments). Although Adams and Hulme mention this, it is in passing rather than as a central theme, and hence the focus is on CC initiatives that are, to quote, '...util-

itarian, resource-based, revenue generation strategies.' The experience from non-utilitarian CC initiatives is widespread (see references in (1), and also Ramakrishnan *et al.*, 1998; Posey, 1999), and can add important perspectives that are different from those obtained from materialist CC initiatives.

3. The authors acknowledge that 'many' African CC activities are dependent on tourism or safari-hunting, implying that there are others that are not. However, they do not carry out a detailed examination of other resource-based strategies, leading to a limited range of conclusions.

Most of Adams and Hulme's paper concentrates on what could be considered 'externally' initiated projects, and it is therefore weak in developing lessons from efforts initiated by communities themselves. In such efforts the problems and their solutions are self-made, and part of a community's own dynamics and evolution. How these dynamics work out, and how the initiatives evolve when community-led, would provide fascinating and educational learning, but are barely touched upon. Other than material, cultural and aesthetic reasons, a critical incentive for conservation by communities is the sense of empowerment and political control that they derive from it (Kothari *et al.*, 2000; Roe *et al.*, 2000).

Based on the analysis of a somewhat limited range of initiatives, Adams and Hulme stress that community needs and biodiversity preservation objectives cannot be achieved simultaneously, except in rare circumstances. While this is undoubtedly true for many CC initiatives, it is not true for all. For instance, completely protected sacred groves may perform critical ecosystem functions, such as water conservation, that meet a community's development needs. Furthermore, resource reserves in which human activity is severely restricted and regulated by the communities themselves may achieve both conservation and livelihood security. Some such initiatives are mentioned in passing, but justice is not done to them by fully integrating them into the analysis.

For these various reasons I therefore caution against a strong conclusion that there are usually significant trade-offs between development and conservation in CC initiatives. The exceptions to this supposed rule are many and widespread, especially where habitat and

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ecosystem functions, or low-impact vegetation use, are the prime motivations for community action.

Although Adams and Hulme's Table 1 is an interesting presentation of the conditions for effective CC initiatives, some major conditions are weakly addressed. The first is that of non-financial, material or non-material stakes. Material benefits are listed by them only in the context of 'revenue sharing'. Non-material benefits, although mentioned as the final condition, seem in the context of the article to refer mainly to cultural aspects. But benefits can also be (and in the context of South Asia, for instance, primarily are) subsistence or domestic natural resource uses, and in these cases the condition would be that such benefits have to be adequate, sustainable and secure. Another key condition is the sense of empowerment, which is not only in terms of power-sharing, but often the *de facto* control that communities take back themselves. Finally, a condition omitted from the table is that of relative equity within the community itself: inequity in decision-making or benefit-sharing in a conservation initiative within the community can undermine the effort.

To conclude, Adams and Hulme have undertaken an interesting and useful review of Community Conservation, but have largely restricted themselves to literature from Africa, and mostly to examples of community based hunting and tourism, thus restricting their analysis. An expansion of their work would need to take into consideration the growing literature and experience of CC from around the world (Roe *et al.*, 2000). Most importantly, such a wider analysis would ensure that the international discussion on this vital issue goes beyond the African bias that it has unfortunately had for a long time.

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Biographical sketches

Ashish Kothari is a founder-member of the Indian environmental action group Kalpavriksh, where he has focused on community-based natural resource management for several years. He has taught at the Indian Institute of Public Administration, and is currently coordinator of the Technical and Policy Core Group that is formulating India's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. He also heads the IUCN Task Force on Local Communities and Protected Areas.