

Conservation news

EXCITED: Expanding Conservation Impacts Through Enterprise Development

Fauna & Flora International, together with Practical Action Consulting, and the University of Cambridge's Department of Geography and the Centre for Social Innovation at the Judge Business School, recently published two key outputs from the EXCITED project. This action learning partnership ran from October 2015 to March 2017 and was funded through the Cambridge Conservation Initiative Collaborative Fund with support from Arcadia. The published outputs are a Learning Brief that captures reflections from early experiences in using a Participatory Market System Development approach as part of a conservation strategy, and a Market System Selection Tool that provides guidance on how to identify which market systems have the most potential to make positive contributions to both livelihoods and biodiversity.

Over the years, conservation organizations have made significant investments in alternative livelihoods to try to compensate people for restricted access to natural resources and/or to incentivise behavioural changes to reduce threats to biodiversity. However, rigorous evidence for positive impact on both well-being and biodiversity is lacking. Anecdotal information indicates interventions are often poorly targeted, lack understanding of the dynamic complexity of rural livelihoods, and put vulnerable communities at risk. Such efforts are also often small scale, providing short-term inputs and services that act as subsidies, distorting markets, and resulting in any well-being benefits failing to endure once the project has ended. The rationale for the links between a project's livelihoods interventions and intended conservation impacts is often weak, and poorly understood by stakeholders. To address the latter issue, conservation projects frequently target handicraft or eco-friendly niche markets. However, in such markets supply often exceeds demand, or poor, marginalized producers face high barriers to entry (such as requirements for complex and/or costly independent certification to international standards).

To date, little attention has been paid to taking a market systems approach to benefit both livelihoods and biodiversity. Through action learning and peer exchange, the EXCITED project has sought to break new ground by taking such an approach, combining the skills and expertise of a biodiversity conservation organization, an international development agency and academia.

Participatory Market System Development is about facilitating transformations in market systems to make them more sustainable, efficient, inclusive and equitable. In this approach a market system comprises the chain of actors

that trade a particular product or service, the supporting markets that provide the chain with inputs and services, and the enabling environment of rules and norms that shape the way the chain functions. In an economic development context, this transformation aims to have positive impacts for a large number of poor or otherwise marginalized people. In a conservation context, the scale of impact could be measured by the number of hectares of land or sea of high conservation value under sustainable management, or by how important the conservation target is, regardless of its size. For example, the EXCITED project aims to facilitate the emergence of sustainable business models for communities to sustainably exploit non-timber forest products in high conservation value forest landscapes. In this way, incentives are created for the communities, buyers and government agents to use forest resources sustainably and conserve biodiversity.

Although it is too early yet to see biodiversity and well-being impacts at the pilot sites, this collaboration has enabled partners to build the capacity of their own staff and local partners, and of a number of MBA students, to take a more systemic approach to linking livelihoods and conservation. We hope that by sharing project outputs more widely, other conservation organizations and the communities they work with will also benefit from our learning.

For further information see <http://cambridgeconservation.org/collaboration/expanding-conservation-impact-through-enterprise-development-excited> or contact Dr Helen Schneider.

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Myanmar endorses its first Locally Managed Marine Areas

Myanmar's 2,278 km coastline has a diversity of habitats, including coral reefs, seagrass beds, mudflats and mangrove forests that are home to rare and threatened wildlife of global significance. In March 2017 the Myanmar Government endorsed the creation of three Locally Managed Marine Areas, a joint initiative between the Myanmar Department of Fisheries and three fishing communities.

Poverty rates in Myanmar are high and, as a result of the many years of political isolation under the previous military government, education levels are low and there is limited capacity for managing natural resources. The new democratic government has little budget for biodiversity conservation, yet there are many threats to the marine environment, including illegal, unreported and unregulated