

Bio-cultural diversity conserved by indigenous peoples & local communities— examples & analysis

Companion document to IUCN/CEESP Briefing Note No.10, 2010



(Marc Foggin, personal communication 2010)

Several Tibetan communities in the headwaters of the Yangtze River, southwest Qinghai Province, have developed some hybrid forms of community conservation that incorporate traditional and modern elements. Traditionally, local herders used not to hunt wildlife in spaces recognised as sacred (e.g., near monasteries or designated mountains). More recently, local organisations approved by the government have established their own community conserved areas, usually dedicated to a focal wildlife species (e.g., the snow leopard, Tibetan antelope, Tibetan wild ass, black necked crane, etc.), with local regulations that define roles and responsibilities and penalties for poaching. This has been accompanied by environmental awareness initiatives in local schools and at community ‘wildlife festivals’.

Several community conserved areas overlap with the huge Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve under government governance (the reserve was created after the declaration of some of the community conserved areas, and some internal reserve boundaries were designed in part according to prior ICCAs). This raises a number of questions regarding governance, and even the rights of people to live in such areas. With the help of the international NGO Plateau Perspectives and several other partners, national and international, two cooperation models have emerged: 1. *Community Co-management*, and 2. *Contract Conservation*. A third response to concerns about environmental degradation is also being trialled in the region, namely *Ecological Migration* with its outright relocation of people away from the grassland to towns (under this policy, about fifty percent of herders in some communities have already sold their animals and relocated to new small towns or to the periphery of existing towns).

Under the co-management model, community members participate in the monitoring of wildlife, reporting instances of poaching and promoting environmental awareness. In so doing, they gain more respect than before (for instance, they may learn the ‘language’ of science and become less likely to be simply dismissed as backward or accused—generally with no evidence—of being the primary cause of observed or assumed land degradation), and participate in conservation and land use decisions. They are not, however, really in control of most conservation decisions (governance). Muqu community (Suojia township) was the first to develop a collaborative management setting in the late 1990s, and now seeks to expand its experience and draw additional financial benefit to the area (e. g., through ecotourism) based on the observed increase in wildlife populations. They are not, however, the primary decision-makers (cf. governance). Under the contract model, on the other hand, local communities are given greater autonomy on deciding how specifically to conserve wildlife and protect the environment; and for their work, as per a formal agreement with the government, they receive a financial contribution that they can use or disburse at their discretion. The first instance of this model is in Cuochi community (Qumahe township). This community, in fact, had already decided several years earlier that, for cultural and religious reasons, it wanted to protect its wildlife. Toward this end it had established the grassroots organization *Friends of the Wild Yak* in 2001. Additionally, it is only after significant investment (time and effort) by local people and a local organization, over a period of several years, that a formal conservation contract was developed and signed.

Both of the above models are endogenous. Overall, local people and communities in the Tibetan Plateau region appreciate the official recognition of their ICCAs. They would like to receive larger funding, however, and more support to carry out appropriate development efforts, including alternative forms of income generation through the work of newly established herders’ associations with voluntary membership.

The evident success of the contract model, which is the most ICCA-like in the Tibetan Plateau region, nonetheless also presents some potential pitfalls. The nature reserve staff, some policy makers and the provincial forest bureau (which is in charge of most wildlife conservation matters



in China) are discussing how to rapidly “go to scale” with this model in 2010-2011, possibly covering dozens if not hundreds of communities across the province. This could prove a disastrous decision. Many years have been devoted by local leaders to developing and refining the contract model in contexts such as that of Cuochi community. Without proper training and the committed involvement of respected community leaders, the contract model may simply not succeed, providing an inaccurate “demonstration” that herders are not good custodians of the land and wildlife resources, possibly fuelling other approaches such as the *Ecological Migration* policy. More moderate growth and extension, in-depth social studies, and time for the internal mobilization of communities are therefore recommended for the contract approach to conservation before it is spread widely.

E44 ▶ Conservation Incentive Agreements in Ecuador

(adapted from Speiser at al., 2009)

Since 2004, GTZ and Conservation International have been working with Chachi indigenous communities along the Rio Cayapas, in the northern part of Esmeraldas Province, Ecuador. Their joint project supports the conservation of 7200 hectares of forest through “Conservation Incentive Agreements”. Although the Chachi have legal ownership over their ancestral territories, they remain under threat from growing external pressures (unsustainable logging, expansion of palm oil plantations for agrofuels, encroachment by external farmers, presence of armed groups from neighboring countries, etc.). The Chachi can access some public services and regional markets, but their only source of monetary income is small-scale logging at the mercy of prices established by large logging companies.

In 2004, three “Centros Chachi” (about 600 families) agreed with GTZ and CI to establish the “Gran Reserva Chachi” and receive compensation for voluntarily conserving part of their territories (7,200 ha of a core zone within a total area 30,000 ha). The Chachi kept full autonomy over these areas, which were not integrated into the national protected areas system. They established their own rules for sustainable harvesting and conservation, and their own monitoring system. Yearly payments to the communities were calculated on the basis of the opportunity costs of not using their community conserved areas, and those payments went towards a multi-year development plan developed by them, involving cocoa production, training of rangers, etc.). The conservation agreements validated by the Chachi general assemblies foresee that they will maintain their forest resources (by not degrading or selling them) in exchange for technical and financial assistance to implement their own development plans.

The same model has later been adopted by the Ecuadorian Environment Ministry to implement the nationwide programme “SocioBosque”, with the goal of involving 500.000 to 1.500.000 beneficiaries to conserve over 3 million ha of primary forests, *paramo* and other ecosystems, and eventually benefit from international payments through REDD. The Chachi communities themselves were able to extend their conserved areas from 7200 to 16400 ha through the SocioBosque programme. Another 800 ha of their sustainably managed forest were FSC-certified with the support of the GTZ-CI project (the first FSC-certification with the involvement of indigenous peoples in Ecuador).

E45 ▶ Community Conserved Areas in Oaxaca, Mexico— research and action

(Gary Martin, personal communication, 2010)

The vast majority of Mexico’s forests are under collective tenure, providing indigenous peoples and local communities the opportunity of setting aside a large number of conserved areas in their *comunidades* and *ejidos*. A recent survey in the state of Oaxaca conducted by the Global Diversity Foundation, for instance, revealed 126 sites of community conservation covering more than 375,000 ha (this is approximately 15% more than the state’s official Protected Areas). One exemplary site comprises the voluntary conserved areas (VCAs) of six Chinantec communities in the Papaloapan river basin, whose territories span between 200 and 2,900 meters above sea level and contain highly diverse tropical cloud forests and lowland forests. Thousands of plant species



This companion document to IUCN/CEESP Briefing Note 10 was prepared for the ICCA Consortium, GEF SGP, GTZ, IIED and IUCN/CEESP by Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend with Barbara Lassen, Stan Stevens, Gary Martin, Juan Carlos Riascos de la Peña, Ernesto F. Ráez-Luna and M. Taghi Farvar, with most appreciated insights and contributions by Abdellah Herzenni, Abdul Karim Sall, Andrea Finger, Aroha Mead, Arthur Hoole, Ashish Kothari, Bas Verschuuren, Blama Jalloh, Carolina Amaya, Cristi Nozawa, Christian Chatelain, Colleen Corrigan, Datu Tinuy-an, Dave de Vera, Dermot Smyth, Fadzilah Cooke, Francisco Chapela, Fred Nelson, Gonzalo Oviedo, Harry Jonas, Holly Shrumm, Hugh Govan, Janis Alcorn, Jannie Lasimbang, Jason Morris-Jung, Jeremy Ironside, Jessica Campese, John Stephen Okuta, Jorge Nahuel, Josep Maria Mallarach, Juanita Cabrera-López, Justine Vaz, Kail Zingapan, Li Bo, Marc Foggin, Marc Poffenberger, Marie Roué, Maurizio Farhan Ferrari, Michael Carroll, Michel Pimbert, Mike Ferguson, Mike Jones, Neema Pathak, Nigel Crawhall, Nigel Dudley, Nobuyuki Yagi, Nonette Royo, Onel Masardule, Olivier Hamerlynck, Ricardo Ramírez, Rob Wild, Salatou Sambou, Seema Bhatt, Shinikiro Kakuma, Simon Nancy, Simone Lovera, Stefano Lorenzi, Sudeep Jana, Terence Hay-Edie, Thora Amend, Thora Martina Herrmann, Tilman Jaeger, Trevor Sandwith, Tristan Tyrrell, Vololona Rasoarimanana, Yves Hausser and Zelealem Tefera Ashenafi.

Artwork and layout: Jeyran Farvar (jeyran@cenesta.org)

Production: CENESTA, Tehran, 2010.

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