

Report on the Regional Workshop on Community Conserved Areas in South Asia, 4th -7th Aug'09, Kathmandu

In the last few years, initiatives relating to the conservation of biological diversity have begun to increasingly focus on the involvement of local communities and their conservation efforts. Through a few sporadic documented examples it appears that such efforts are fairly widespread, and include both the traditional forms of conservation as well as new forms initiated by communities on their own or with help from NGOs and government agencies. Such efforts, have now been globally recognized as Community Conserved Areas (CCAs), and are acknowledged to play a significant role in the conservation of biological diversity. There is an urgent need to understand what this role is and how best these areas can be supported. Towards this understanding, Kalpavriksh in India has been documenting CCAs in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the same. This has included a study entitled **“Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) in South Asia, Towards an Understanding of their Conservation and Livelihood Security Values”**. This study was undertaken in Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka through 2008-09 and has been supported by Swedbio. The general objectives of the study included:

- Deepen the understanding of the CCA phenomenon with respect to the types of CCAs that can still be found in the South Asian region, or are newly emerging, and their status.
- Analyse these initiatives, distil and discuss lessons learned and policy implications.
- Bring together community representatives, government officials, NGOs, and individual experts to discuss the case studies and lessons, and work out a regional plan of action.

One of the main activities of this study was to organize a workshop at the regional level to bring together at a regional scale the various learnings that have come out of this study and to plan for the way forward.

The workshop was also part of another project of Kalpavriksh entitled “Recognising and Supporting Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas in South Asia and Globally”. The main objectives of this project are:

- to build on existing ICCA documentation and processes in South Asia with a series of consultations on issues of national recognition, and international databases;
- consolidate the ICCA information at a South Asia level;
- coordinate a series of legal assessments of national measures for ICCA recognition; and
- provide technical inputs to the development of a ICCA registry at the World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

Towards this end Kalpavriksh, India and Forest Action Group, Nepal co-organised a regional workshop on Community Conserved Areas in South Asia, on 4th-7th August 2009, under the sponsorship of Swedbio and GEF/UNDP Small Grants Programme. This workshop aimed to bring together community representatives, non-government organizations and government representatives from different South Asian countries.

A total of 40 participants attended this workshop. Participants ranged from government representatives; members from relevant NGOs, both national and international, to local community representatives from all the relevant countries. There were a total of 15 local community members. Important government representatives included the Forest Secretary from the Balochistan province of Pakistan and the Secretary, Forests (now Secretary, Environment) from Nepal. The main language of communication at the workshop was English with parallel translations in other regional languages.



The agenda of the workshop covered the following topics (See Annexure A for the detailed agenda):

- An opening presentation about CCAs (the overall demystifying/understanding CCAs). The presentation covered some of the key aspects and criteria for CCAs; challenges; the IUCN PA matrix and governance types; benefits arising from recognition; and key needs to be

addressed.

- An introduction to the CCA South Asia survey.
- An orientation relating to the international scenario that included international agreements such as the CBD Protected Area Programme of Work and UNDRIP, and ongoing work happening in international networks like TILCEPA.
- Detailed presentations from the various countries (Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka). The presentations included case study scenarios; the overall CCA status; laws and policies; key issues and the proposed way forward for each of these countries. These presentations were made by country partners and community representatives attending the workshop. The presentations were followed by an open discussion.
- A presentation was made listing the progress of implementation of the CBD Protected Area Programme of Work vis-à-vis accepting CCAs legally in the countries. The listing was commented and revised with the inputs from the various participants.
- Key issues emerging from various countries were discussed in detail.
- A presentation and discussion on the proposed WCMC Global Database on CCAs.
- A discussion on taking the work forward through an action plan, regional and country networks, linkages with other projects etc.

Key Emerging Issues from Country Presentations and Discussions

1) Legal and policy Issues



The need to ensure that the rights and access of communities would remain intact while providing legal recognition was highlighted. Some participants felt that putting community initiatives into a structured system could threaten these initiatives. The issue of tenure rights came up repeatedly, and some local communities agreed that CCAs need to be endorsed by government to be effective. The need to recognise different kinds of indigenous institutional and management structures, along with traditional knowledge was acknowledged. It was pointed out that some systems already in place lack the devolution of power originally envisaged.

Some participants felt that the recognition of CCAs may cause conflict with existing PA system in some cases (e.g. where law specifically excludes community settlements from PAs).

Key points that emerged were:

- Various forms and mechanisms/processes of legal recognition need to be recognized.
- Whether CCAs should be considered PAs in the first place or they should be incorporated in the PA systems.
- Tenure, benefits of legal recognition, kind of structure, spaces for customary law, jurisdiction issues etc.

2) The Appropriateness of CCAs in Different Contexts

While CCAs are important for acknowledging the role that communities have been playing in conservation, the need for creating awareness about role of CCAs came up strongly. It was clarified that that not all community-based initiatives are CCAs and the local context/situation is important. It was further discussed and clarified that CCAs may not necessarily promote “hands-off” protection.

Conservation may not be the primary objective. The objectives may be cultural or spiritual. The need for clearly defined indicators that can be used to relate or compare CCA characteristics with the existing protected areas was discussed at length. Demanding recognition of CCAs should be dependent on the interests of indigenous/local communities, i.e. whether they want it or not. Another important perspective was that of the possibility of reconciling traditional with modern institutions to improve the efficacy and functioning of CCAs. Fleshing out the



incentives and disincentives for local communities to participate in CCAs was also highlighted.

The key points under this section can be summarized as follows:

- The manner and process adopted to give recognition to CCAs needs to be defined.
- Differentiating between different community-based natural resource systems which can/cannot be qualified as CCAs is important.
- The governance structure and the power of deciding the form of the governance structures themselves is critical.
- Documentation of the kind of ecological conditions amenable to CCAs.
- Assimilating the immense diversity in the community initiatives including origins, practices, and objectives.



3) Criteria/Procedures to Identify CCAs (in addition to the three main criteria proposed by the IUCN).

It was felt that general (international/national) criteria identified could be problematic because of wide variation in local contexts. To work around this a set of criteria should be put down to streamline the process of recognition of CCAs

and eliminate ambiguity as far as possible.

Key points from this section could be summarized as follows

- Identifying specific criteria and indicators for determination of suitable CCA sites to avoid misunderstanding and conflicts.
- Distinguishing between criteria for selection or definition of a CCA and needs for ongoing support.

4) Additional Support Possible for CCAs Beyond their Identification and Legal Recognition (i.e., financial, technical, economic/livelihood, political, etc.).

A number of points were highlighted within this section, including the different kinds of recognition possible; the support to be provided and by whom; and the role of the government in the entire process. It was suggested that value addition of CCAs be analyzed in detail. It was also suggested as a strategy that, support should be linked with the challenges and threats faced by CCAs in general.

Some of the support mechanisms discussed were:

- Legal status for CCAs
- Framework for joint implementation
- Human resource development
- Document and reaffirm cultural dimensions of conservation
- Involve indigenous communities in conservation policy and planning

- Clarify and protect international property rights of local/indigenous communities

5) Determine if CCAs are Achieving Biodiversity Conservation (both scientific and institutional dimensions)

Emerging points from this section are:

- What does it mean for a CCA to have potential to achieve biodiversity conservation?
- Is there a particular set of criteria or indicators that can be used?
- How do we as practitioners and advocates deal with uncertainty in CCA biodiversity outcomes, in terms of planning and assessment?

6) Institutional Mechanisms for CCAs

Key points raised on this issue included who determines governance arrangements in the first place. Relevant points brought up were in regard to the conflict resolution mechanisms in place - both for the community and for the government. Some felt that it that it would be better to work with the government to get its support for initiatives to be effective. On the other hand it was felt that there should be ways and means devised contextually to ensure that the government is taking appropriate action. On the issue of punitive action, some participants felt that communities should have authority for deciding the same.



Key emerging points under this section are:

- Level of community participation in decision making
- Conflict resolution mechanisms
- Ensuring government is active and taking appropriate action,
- Ensuring effective overseeing at all levels by the community

7) Role of CCAs within a larger landscape

The need for transboundary landscape-level initiatives that incorporate ICCA concept was articulated. Communities can play a key role in the evolution of larger landscape institutional arrangements.

Discussion on the proposed WCMC Global Database on CCAs

There was a very intense discussion on WCMC database documenting ICCAs. Participants raised a number of concerns both about what it would mean for the communities and how this process would be operationalised. Questions were varied. Would the database favour communities which have contact with people like us and thus a skewed representation? What would it mean for CCAs trying to seek national recognition? Would it lead to conflicts with the national governments (considering that we discussed in detailed how CCAs could get support from government agencies)? Would it create conflicts among communities? What would be the process of verification and so on. After much discussion it was felt that there is

a need to have a more widespread, inclusive and in-depth discussion on these issues within South Asia before we move ahead with the database. It was decided to have a time bound e-mail discussion (first two weeks of September) with some of the participants and others suggested by the participants.

The Way Forward



Both speakers and participants from the various countries noted that theirs was a preliminary documentation, and much more needed to be done to identify and document CCAs. A plan of action was worked out by the participants. Some of the follow-up action includes

- a) Dissemination of the reports and participant listing.
- b) Finalising the national reports by the end of August.
- c) Organizing national workshops on CCAs in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.
- d) Furthering documentation work on CCAs at the national level in the countries.
- e) Having a focused e-discussion group on putting CCAs on the Global database (WDPA)
- f) Continue the discussion on the key issues that have come out from the workshop, to improve understanding and communication of on-ground situations for various countries.



Site Visit

The workshop was followed by a one and a half day site visit to Rupa wetland or Rupatal

spanning 115 Ha being the third largest lake in the Pokhara Valley¹ of Nepal. This site has been documented as part of the Nepal country survey. The wetland has been conserved and managed by Rupa Lake Restoration and Fisheries Cooperative (*RLRFC- Rupa Tal Punar Sthapana Tatha Matchya Palan Sahakari*). Conservation also extends to the surrounding catchment forests through the community forestry groups. Here the co-operative provides resources to the respective villages to encourage conservation. The participants of the workshop were able to interact with the members of the cooperative. There were some pertinent questions on the management practices of the cooperative

¹Ramji Adhikari, executive committee member was interviewed by Rup Narayan Dhakal, Himalayan Times, Pokhara Bureau.

vis-à-vis conservation objectives but a more detailed study and discussion would be needed for this, to analyse Rupatal as a potential CCA.

Annexure A

Regional Workshop on Community Conserved Areas in South Asia, 04-07 August, 2009, Kathmandu

August 04, 2009

9.00 – 9.30 am - Registration

9.30am– 10.00 am - Welcome and Introduction of Participants

10.00am - 11.00 am - Brief Introduction and Background to CCAs

11.00am-11.15am - TEA

11. 15am-11.30 am - Introduction to CCAs South Asia Project

Country Presentations

(Presentation for each country, 1.00 hr followed by discussion for 1.00 hr)

11.30am-1.30pm - Nepal

1.30pm-2.30pm - LUNCH

2.30pm-4.30pm - India

4.30pm-4.45pm - TEA

4.45pm-6.45pm – Pakistan

August 05, 2009

Country Presentations (Contd)

9.00am-11.00am - Bangladesh

11.00am-11.15am - TEA

11.15am-1.15pm - Sri Lanka

1.15pm-2.15pm - LUNCH

2.15pm-3.15pm - Bhutan

3.15pm-5.15pm - *Key Emerging Issues: Major issues common to all countries at the regional level*

August 06, 2009

9.00.am-10.00am - *International recognition and database – opportunities and concern for CCAs in SA*

10.00am-11.00am - *Laws and policies including PA POW and CCAs at the regional level*

11.00am-11.15am - *TEA*

11.30am-1.00pm - *The Way Ahead (Includes climate change- opportunities and concerns for CCAs; linking with country and regional networks etc.)*

1.00pm-2.00pm - *LUNCH*

Departure for Pokhara