

## **Annex 3**

### **Synthesis of the e-forum outcomes**

## Summary and commentary on the E-forum discussion on Lessons and Best Practices in linking wetlands conservation with poverty reduction

### Poverty and environmental degradation

Overall, it was recognized that environmental degradation was the result of several factors, of which poverty was one. Others include the very opposite of poverty (over-consumption), over-exploitation of resources by elites for economic gain (greed) through commercial land uses, sheer human numbers, and market and regulatory failures. A significant distinction that emerged between poverty and other drivers however was that poverty often became a driver due to the lack of choice, and in some cases, due to the actions of others who monopolize access to the resources. In Burundi for example, the Rusizi Delta that is part of the Rusizi Nature Reserve, population pressure in the face of a dearth of livelihood alternatives have caused the reserve to be degraded. It was pointed out that local communities have self-managed local resources for centuries without causing their degradation, and that it has been the disruption of these practices and their disenfranchisement as government control and policy has spread from centres of power to the countryside, that have caused them to over-exploit. In some instances, poor people may exploit unsustainably as agents of other actors to whom the vast majority of economic benefits of that exploitation will go, whilst the poor bear the greater risk of being penalized if caught by the authorities.

The lack of awareness of causal relationships between livelihood activities and resource degradation at the local level was also mentioned, although it was recognized that awareness alone will not always change behavior in the absence of alternative means of securing basic needs or the ability to afford making alterations to the resource used method. For example, livelihood activities may be unsustainable because of the use of inappropriate methods, such as the use of fishing nets that result in bi-catch or catching of juveniles, and education on their adverse impacts will only bear fruit if the users can afford to purchase the less damaging net types. This also means that poor people will engage in unsustainable resource use despite knowledge of its consequences to the environment and their long-term asset base if they are unable to find alternative livelihood activities.

An interesting observation made was that *“(s)ome communities have an abundance of biological diversity, and others have scant resources, yet both still seem to struggle.”* The reason offered was that communities with access to resources are often under great pressure to make available those resources for external development projects. The poor are thus both drivers as well as victims of environmental degradation.

Another aspect mentioned was the need for clear formal or informal resource use frameworks especially in open resources where unregulated access by all will become unsustainable. Especially where human population is high, the resource base will be unable to support the needs of everyone, and a regime for controlling access in line with its carrying capacity will be critical. Security of tenure and access to markets were offered as more effective drivers of good environmental practices as they both improve the conditions for people to benefit from resources, thereby creating a vested interest in maintaining this asset base.

Another important aspect of the poverty-environment relationship, with significant implications for the time horizon applied to understanding this relationship, is the observation that poverty eradication should not be assumed as the answer to stopping environmental degradation. Although poverty has come to be viewed more broadly than as a measure of personal or household income, the aspect of income is an appropriate vehicle to illustrate this point. From an income standpoint, poverty reduction, while resulting in a better quality of life for the individual or household, is essentially one step in a process of moving from one income level to the next and so on. The realization of this aspiration at the individual and household levels also involves parallel changes (generally increases) in consumptive patterns as each material target is met as incomes increase. Thus, while negative environmental impacts of poverty is addressed through poverty reduction, new sources of environmental degradation are liable to emerge as the consumptive capacities of the formerly poor households continues to expand. Rather than being an argument against poverty

reduction, the point illustrates that the process of good environmental governance transcends the poverty issue both in causal and temporal dimensions.

### **Wetland conservation-Poverty reduction links**

It was recognized that wetland management has been approached from a predominantly conservation angle, with inadequate understanding of and consideration for the socio-economic realities of local communities, and the impacts on these people's well being of a purely conservation agenda. The most common conservation approach till recent times has been the formation of often restrictive laws and regulations with regard to a specific wetland that require local people to refrain from using natural asset bases that had hitherto supported their livelihoods and other aspects of well-being for many generations. Whilst the necessity of such regulation was not in question, it was pointed out that where restrictive measures are used, they needed to be accompanied by effective alternatives in the form of other livelihood options or access to other resources. Many initiatives in the past, it was felt, only focused on awareness creation and law enforcement, with an implicit assumption that rules will be adhered to simply because they were rules. Experiences have shown such presumptions of governments and other actors to have been unrealistic.

There was thus agreement that future initiatives should place natural resource-poverty linkages at the centre of wetland management strategies together with a balance between outright protection and sustainable resource use to maximize the tangible benefits to communities from the resources they are expected to help conserve. In other words, if communities are expected to refrain from or control the use of a resource or to volunteer a portion of their productive time to conservation measures, then some tangible benefit or compensation for their sacrifices is a necessary incentive. This relationship was also described as a process of trade-offs.

It was also pointed out that whilst conservation may appear as a burden to communities, proper resource management will provide overall benefits in the long-term through the maintenance of ecosystem services, including the reduction of people's vulnerability to some natural hazards. However, the fact that many such services are not explicit and operate on a long timescale makes them an inappropriate basis for negotiating tradeoffs with local resource users. Hence the need for more economically measurable and immediate benefits.

On the question of to what degree wetlands could influence poverty reduction, the discussions, while recognizing that income was not the only dimension for understanding poverty, focused on the degree to which wetland resources could enhance income. The size or scale of the wetland was recognized as a key consideration in determining the impact on household income as well as the number of households it could assist through sustainable use. The larger scale and more dynamic wetlands (generally in excess of 10,000 hectares) were seen as more able to provide the resource bases needed for a meaningful number of households. Many coastal wetlands have self-destructed because they were small and were situated in ecologically vulnerable positions. Conservation of such wetlands requires investment by the state on a scale that cannot be met by local communities. Ecological restoration of Segara Anakan-Cilacap in Indonesia had an allocation of US\$ 400 million (ADB). A similar restoration of the Negombo Lagoon in Sri Lanka has an allocation of about US\$ 200 million (ADB, CRMP).

On the other hand, the high productivity of larger wetlands such as the Sunderbans Delta (about 5,000 km<sup>2</sup>), enables harvesting at levels that enable significant savings at the household level, which can then be invested in other aspects such as health care and education. This natural productivity may also be further enhanced through investments such as fish culture. Such investments, and optimal ecological functioning is ensured, the income and savings of dependent populations can increase despite some human population increase.

An overarching issue was continuing human population growth which is exceeding what most wetland system, irrespective of size, can support in a meaningful way.

It was also recognized that the significance of a wetland's role in poverty reduction was partly determined by the existing income levels in the communities. Where these are already relatively high in comparison to the standard dollar a day poverty line, then perhaps the contribution will be

less significant. This would be the reverse in areas where poverty level are high, with considerable potential for improvement through better resource exploitation. The poverty-wetland scenario also suggests an assumption that local communities will be content with being dependent on natural resources in the long term. This was challenged in the discussions where it was suggested that natural resource users aspire to move away from a dependence on these often fragile resources if the opportunity arises.

The role of broader national policy decisions on a wetland's use was also recognized. Whereas development and increasingly conservation practitioners view wetlands as natural systems with roles to play in supporting local livelihoods and other aspects of their well-being, most governments continue to view them in terms of their greatest (macro) economic potential, which may require their conversion from wetlands to another land use. In other words, most policy makers view wetlands as simply land to be assigned to the most economically productive use as viewed in terms of contribution to the national (as opposed to household) economy. This disconnect between how governments and local people view wetlands also went some way to explaining why local agendas feature poorly in land and resource use decisions. Work towards recognizing wetlands as a land use class was therefore seen as an important activity for securing their integrity.

### **Participation**

While the opportunity to participate is itself an important milestone, what was stressed was the nature or degree of participation. It was noted that this term can have various manifestations in practice, from the mere presence of stakeholders at forums (the 'tick box' attitude) processes that create ownership of decisions and actions being taken by empowering the stakeholders themselves to define priorities and work programmes. In other words, participation should not be seen as an end in its self as it is in the 'tick box' approach mere to satisfy a project/donor condition, but as a means for enabling especially marginalized stakeholders to at least influence decisions over issues that affect them and preferably take action on their own behalf. It is thus the qualitative aspects of participation that will 'make a difference'. This would involve, for instance, ensuring that opportunities for participation are provided throughout the decision making process. This distinction was also described as the difference between viewing participation as an externally imposed requirement to be fulfilled and one borne out of a genuine desire to represent those whose voices are normally not heard in the governance system. The challenge today is therefore not the recognition of the need for participation, but its implementation in a meaningful way that moves from head-counting to creating impact on resource governance processes.

Another key element identified in ensuring effective participation was the need to avoid the oversimplification of stakeholder groups. While most participatory processes will divide stakeholders in various resource user groups, not all may consider the need to go a step further and disaggregate each user group into its sub-groups that may represent different needs and perspectives. While the extent of a user group's heterogeneity may vary from one group to another, the fisheries sector was taken as a good example where this group could be subdivided by the type of boats and gear they use, and the resource base such as lagoon, near shore, pelagic, etc. Failure to conduct the participatory processes at the level of such subgroups is liable to only give a "quick and dirty" overview that could be misleading in the setting of priorities. This may be especially the case as it is likely that the views presented in a "quick and dirty" overview will be those of the predominant subgroups at the expense of the smaller or more marginalized ones.

In addition to enabling communities to influence governance processes, the process of participation, especially if conducted effectively, changes people's perspectives on issues through the exposure to multi-stakeholder dialogue and exchange of views and information so critical for consensus building. They may also better understand and accept the decisions that result from decision making processes because they were part of that process and understand the underlying rationales that gave rise to a particular scenario. It also importantly provides a platform for building relationships between different stakeholders that either strengthen a common voice or makes space for compromise between competing interests, and starting the process leading to the resolution of conflict. Above all perhaps is the need for restoring people's confidence and self-esteem, especially with disadvantaged communities, as the starting point for all further social organization.

While NGOs have been the predominant driver of participatory resource management approaches, concern was voiced about the degree to which governments are taking up successful examples as a basis for their work.

Overall, it was recognized that the opportunities for poverty reduction will be context specific, although several approaches can be identified that may be adapted to fit different situations. Those that arose from the discussions are described below.

The experiences in Lake Chilwa in Malawi was presented as an example where zoning was used to balance resource exploitation with biodiversity conservation. In this case, fish and bird sanctuaries were created while fishing, hunting and agriculture was permitted in other areas. The sanctuaries ensured that the resource base was able to sustain itself.

Another lesson, this time from Uttar Pradesh, India, was the to ensure the provision of ownership/right of access to wetland resources is balanced with obligations for sustainable resource use. Following the allocation of land, including many wetlands, to poor communities in 1951, in several instances, these beneficiaries proceeded to fill the wetlands for housing and agriculture. The driver in this land use change was the much higher revenue potential in agriculture when compared with other resource uses in the wetland. Thus, while the need for secure tenure and access to resources is often stated as key condition for poverty reduction, this example demonstrates that the process of rights allocation cannot stop with allocation itself, but that such allocation must exist in a broader package of rules that also restricts what a resource can and cannot be used for and how such use should be effected. This in turn entails a process of consultation and negotiation for arriving at a most acceptable tradeoff between use and conservation. Mere allocation of rights without the requisite checks and balances assumes an inherent desire for communities for conservation which is apparently not always the case.

Payment for Environmental Services was another approach illustrated by an example from Bhopal, India. The project sought to reduce the impact of agricultural chemicals on the wetland by funding the transition of local farming to organic methods. Such a transition would save a farmer an estimated Rs.40,000 - 45,000 (\$980 - 1,080) a year though reduced inputs, whilst concurrently maintaining the ecological quality of the wetland. Organic farming also requires more labor which meant that more work was created for the landless members of the communities. Given the relatively low labor costs, this added benefit would not significantly erode farmer savings either. Since 40% of the urban population of Bhopal was received their water supply from the wetland, a tradeoff was facilitated whereby the urban water consumers would bear the 'shock' of reduced yield of farmers when they first change to organic production.

The eco-tourism based approach to providing alternate livelihoods and reducing bird hunting and excessive fishing was used in the WedWetCoast project in the Aamiq wetland in Lebanon. By training locals as eco-guides, initiating programmes where tourists stay with locals and giving locals the jobs of wardenning and monitoring, the project has been able to create a change in local people's perceptions and attitudes towards the wetland giving rise to their engagement in its conservation. What was emphasized in this instance was the importance of allowing the communities to develop the eco-tourism and conservation plans themselves, with the project and government providing the necessary technical and financial support. It was also noted that such processes involved long-term dialogue and arrangements for long-term support from the project and government until the local skills and benefits were able to self-sustain.

The discussion also brought out some of the concerns with eco-tourism. One was its seasonality and another was its dependence on a country's political stability. The third concern was the need for a framework of check and balances that promoted the equitable distribution of incomes between operators and the communities and prevented overexploitation of resources. It would also reduce the "green washing" of traditional tourism as eco-tourism that occurs today.

The use of a DVD developed by BirdLife Africa titled "Together for birds and people" to showcase success stories also have the effect of providing a further incentive to local people through the international exposure provided to themselves and their communities.

Other lessons or approaches for conducting integrated wetland management-poverty reduction projects included:

- The need for patience and long-term dialogue was emphasized by several participants in recognition that resolving conflicts is often a difficult and time-consuming process. Initiating donors, NGOs, CBOs or individuals all have different requirements, and opportunities and constraints that will dictate how, in what is often a long and difficult struggle, requiring compromises, to get things off the ground. Even after the resolution of conflicts, implementation of any resulting management framework will also require time for the appropriation of skills and resolution of practical challenges that may arise.
- The same reasoning applies for the need for long-term support by projects and government.
- Flexibility in project design and implementation - in the DFID funded Joint Wetlands Livelihood Project in the wetlands of northern Nigeria, the problems and solutions were not determined at the outset, and stakeholders were encouraged to collectively identify both, and allowed to determine the main thrust of the project, within a set of broad DFID developmental guidelines. In this way, the project allowed the process to take its own shape and course - for committed leaders to emerge (when there's no money on the table and personal sacrifice is needed), for stakeholder groups to form and grow (around their own needs rather than those of the project), and for the momentum for change to build slowly over a number of years, strengthening and sustaining itself (no 'quick-win' or 'flash in the pan'). The project therefore let the local circumstances and stakeholders dictate the best route to follow to get results, and it tried lots of different strategies and followed the ones that worked.
- Building on existing knowledge of stakeholders and employing the most knowledgeable and committed as project staff. These staff members then helped the DFID project in Nigeria reach out to an extremely broad range of (100+) stakeholder groups across the wetlands/basin (from every site, level and sector touched by the problem), to establish and maintain good personal relations with them and engage them in the process of the project - to own it as their own vehicle for change.
- The use of integrated models or pilot exercises applied in a few locations or communities within a wetland to test methods and demonstrate their broader applicability and thereby to arouse the enthusiasm amongst a broader stakeholder base. This includes demonstrating the value of wetlands to communities. In the case of the Aamiq wetland in Lebanon for example, wetland in their mind moved from being just a pond of water that breeds mosquitoes to a site worth conserving and looking after.
- The use of participatory rural appraisals understand the root causes of the decline in livelihoods, the resultant poverty amongst the wetlands inhabitants and over exploitation of wetlands resources.
- Following dual or multiple approaches of creating enabling environments that focuses on policy, awareness, communication, and capacity building, while demonstrating viable models of community led management of wetlands resources.
- The need for constant dialogue between stakeholders for reaching a broad consensus on root causes of their wetlands problems, and on the short, medium and long term measures/solutions they themselves need to and can implement or influence others to implement in response.
- Building the capacity of stakeholders to push the process of change forward themselves, by increasing their collective 'commitment to act' and demonstrating 'group action' through various communications and influencing strategies and pilot projects to make them more supportive, more powerful and/or more accountable

- Access to markets, but equally importantly, the ability to influence market prices through collective bargaining to ensure a fair return is obtained. This was illustrated by an example from work in coastal wetlands in Kenya where a kilogram of mud crabs was bought by hotels from individual collectors for \$1 and sold in their restaurants for \$30. There is currently a process of bringing mud crab collectors under one forum that will negotiate prices.

#### Resources and links

- Use of Site Support Groups for community-based wetland conservation developed by BirdLife International - <http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/03/EnglishDOC.pdf>
- Online case study database (CaseBase) which has the primary aim of facilitating information exchange in ecosystem management launched by the Nature Valuation & Financing (NV&F) network - <http://www.naturevaluation.org>
- Educational package published by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) - <http://www.iges.or.jp/en/phase2/ee/pdf/report8.pdf>, <http://www.iges.or.jp/en/phase2/ee/report8.html>
- Community-driven conservation success stories identified by the Equator Initiative - <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/external/equator-prize/equator-final-2007-en.pdf>