

Conservation benefits to poverty reduction

Practically, what can conservation do for the poor? Below are ten examples:

1. Ensure productive fisheries by developing management plans for mangroves, rivers and coastal zones.
2. Increase income by providing marketing opportunities for medicinal plants and other natural resources.
3. Help negotiate rights to access and use of natural resources between governments, local communities and professional organizations.
4. Empower women to exercise their rights over natural resources.
5. Increase availability of fuel wood by improving harvesting techniques and regulations.
6. Demonstrate the application and use of specific types of natural resources to improve livelihoods where such use is unknown.
7. Stimulate informal and formal markets for the trade of natural resources.
8. Stabilise ecosystems to reduce vulnerability to natural disasters.
9. Set up small enterprises for the production of natural resource based products or the sharing of tourism benefits.
10. Provide access to clean water by developing ecosystem-based water management plans and collaborative platforms.



Conservation for Poverty Reduction Initiative

Objective: Promote the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources for the benefit of poor rural communities

Duration: 5 years

Cost: US\$ 300 million

- Phases:**
- a) Mobilizing the Union's capacities for poverty reduction
 - b) Building coalitions for action
 - c) Managing knowledge to influence legislation and policies

Conservation for Poverty Reduction



More information

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Sharing nature's dividends

Another way works. Nature's yields can be used, and conserved more effectively, to reduce rural poverty. Rural people go out daily to find the food, fodder, water and fuel that healthy ecosystems provide. The Conservation for Poverty Reduction Initiative of The World Conservation Union uses the productiveness of nature to enhance security and provide opportunities to the poor.

The first objective is to reduce the environmental degradation that threatens to make the poor even poorer, when they are excluded from or deprived of their natural resources. The second objective is to use the wealth of nature more effectively, and turn the conservation of nature into opportunities for local, community-driven development.

To those ends, the World Conservation Union is mobilizing its member organizations and experts in a worldwide partnership that makes poverty reduction an explicit part of conservation action, and works together with development agencies to find practical solutions to reduce poverty and conserve nature's resources at the same time.



Nature's benefits to the poorest

Seventy per cent of the estimated 1.1 billion poor people live in rural areas, where they depend on the harvest of wild, natural resources for their lives.

In Senegal, wild plants and animals contribute up to 50% of the annual cash income to the poorest households. In Lao, fish and other aquatic animals comprise between one third and one half of the protein consumed and are worth an estimated US\$ 100 million per year.

Between 50 and 100 per cent of the poorest inhabitants in developing countries depend on biomass fuels, mostly fuel wood.

The evidence is obvious: **nature is vital to the lives of the rural poor.**

Exclusion and loss of productivity

Clean water is difficult to obtain when wetlands are drained or rivers are polluted; deforestation makes fuel wood harder to get; fish and wild meats disappear when forests or savannahs are converted to large-scale monocultures.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and other scientific studies clearly show that ecosystems are having increasing difficulty to provide goods and services to humans: food, fodder, water, building materials, clean air, recreation and more. Whereas much of the environmental degradation is driven by the resource hunger of the wealthy, or its benefits go to a select group, it is often the poor who pay the price.

At the same time, efforts to stop or slow environmental degradation have mostly focused on the conservation of species and ecosystems, with little consideration for the security they provide to rural communities. People have been separated from protected areas, or excluded from reaping the benefits of species.



"[The loss of biodiversity] severely undermines health, livelihoods, food production and clean water, and increases the vulnerability of populations to natural disasters and climate change" – Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations.



"Everyone depends on this wetland for fish, rice, vegetables and much more. The wetland is our supermarket" – Mong, fisherman in Ouan, Thailand.



Partnerships for sustainable development

The international community has acknowledged the plight of the poor and committed to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. Among other aims, they seek to reduce poverty, provide clean water, foster education and improved health, and ensure environmental stability.

At the core of this commitment is the conviction that one cannot be achieved without the other. We need to find a different approach to development that is based on the interdependence of people and nature, pro-poor and sustainable.

Such an approach can only be found in partnerships at different levels, between local communities, non-government organizations and the private sector, between governments and civil society, between the rich and the poor.

Conservation for Poverty Reduction

The Union seeks to mobilize its networks to make the conservation of nature contribute effectively to poverty reduction. Secure people will secure their natural resources. Our quest is to find practical solutions that increase security and reduce poverty of rural communities, and conserves biodiversity at the same time. Our objective is to improve the well-being of the rural poor and the natural well-being of ecosystems, by:

- empowering people to engage in decision-making related to the connection between natural resources and their livelihoods
- enhancing their abilities to manage natural resources for sustainable benefits
- improving governance to promote peoples' rights to access lands, resources, financing and other economic assets
- enhancing security by providing practical solutions to deal with economic shocks, disease and natural disasters

Mobilizing the conservation movement

We already have part of the solution: local communities, governments and the private sector have been working with the conservation community for years. Together, we have learnt that conservation can increase security, reduce poverty and provide new economic opportunities.

Now is the time to apply those lessons at a larger scale, in policy and practice. The World Conservation Union has the unique power to mobilize its networks of experts and organizations to make the objectives of poverty reduction and conservation mutually reinforcing.



Engaging with the development community

We know a lot about ecosystems and how to manage them to deliver goods and services people depend on, but other institutions know more than we do about the complexities of human development. That is why we promote partnerships with them. Together, we can foster innovation and find different ways that work – for people and nature.

The Conservation for Poverty Reduction Initiative is an ambitious undertaking that requires different forms of partnerships at different levels. We will continue to work with those organizations with whom we have already achieved successes over the years, and we extend an enthusiastic invitation to all others who feel they want to join us in this effort.