

# Summary of Lessons Learned

**B**ased on the observations of BIOME project managers, we can conclude that, although all BIOME principles appear important to biodiversity conservation, meeting people's needs and participation are the most important for Africa and Madagascar. Project staff observed that biodiversity conservation must coincide with resource uses that provide tangible benefits to local people. Interconnecting resource use with biodiversity conservation is considered critically important in Africa and Madagascar because rural people depend so much on natural resources for basic survival. In wealthy, industrialized nations, conservation often is viewed as putting something aside for future use. Past approaches to biodiversity conservation have required rural people to give up access to resources that they must, in fact, continue to use to survive. This has often resulted in local people being labeled as poachers, even though most are merely continuing their traditional relationship with nature. Observations from the BIOME projects have shown that biodiversity conservation cannot mean simply setting aside resources for future use; it must focus more on continuing and sustainable use of resources so that both present and future Africans can reap tangible benefits from nature.

Similarly, in all BIOME projects, participation of key stakeholders was viewed by project staff as central to the success of the project. Without stakeholder participation, projects would not comprehend people's needs and values; would overlook valuable indigenous knowledge critical to effective policy formulation and project design; and would be unable to effectively monitor, evaluate, and adaptively manage project activities.

Most interesting was project staff's observation that, without stakeholder participation, projects could not hope to meet their needs and that, without attempting to meet people's needs, projects could not expect people's participation. In fact, observations on the role of the BIOME principles in promoting effective biodiversity conservation show that it is not simply that each principle is important to consider in project design and implementation, but that they are interconnected and interdependent. For example, people are more likely to want to participate in projects if the projects take their values into consideration and seek to meet their needs. However, without participation, it is unlikely that project managers can gain sufficient understanding of the culture, perceptions, and attitudes of local people to be able to address their needs and values properly. Indigenous knowledge can only be effectively incorporated into project implementation if the custodians of the knowledge are involved in the project; thus, without participation, it is unlikely that valuable indigenous knowledge will be identified or incorporated into project implementation.

Again, the prevailing policy framework in a particular place, as well as the legal and land tenure systems, determine what can and cannot be done and who can do what. In many BIOME projects, project managers have had to advocate for policy revisions in order to create the enabling policy environment for projects to work. By combining indigenous knowledge with scientific knowledge and our understanding of local people's culture and values, we are able to design appropriate educational messages, information dissemination strategies, and training packages that will build the capacity of local communities to participate effectively as partners in biodiversity conservation and ensure sustainability of project activities. Monitoring and evaluation programs enable us to assess project performance with respect to defined goals and review implementation strategies, if necessary, to improve performance. This is best done with the involvement of all stakeholders, which is possible only if the stakeholders have been participating in the project at all stages.

Based on the observations of BIOME project staff, it can be seen that key practical lessons have resulted from applying the BIOME principles in biodiversity conservation projects.

**Participation:** The level, form, and timing of participation that project staff must facilitate varies depending on stakeholders' capacity to participate and the issues that need to be addressed by stakeholders to manage natural resources successfully. The greater the change desired in people's use of natural resources, the greater the investment project staff must make in people's participation.


**Policymaking:** An enabling policy environment is a key to successful biodiversity conservation, and project staff play a central role in helping governments to formulate and implement new enabling policies.

**Indigenous Knowledge:** Local knowledge often provides project staff with opportunities for developing effective approaches to conserving biodiversity. However, it is often necessary to merge indigenous knowledge with outside tools and approaches to address the challenges of natural resource management in the twenty-first century.

**Values:** Project staff who can identify convergent values across stakeholder groups find it easier to implement biodiversity conservation projects. To do this, project staff have to understand the values that underpin the establishment of their project and must actively invest in relating these values to those of other stakeholders.

**Community Needs:** Rural families cannot afford to set aside resources that are critical to their daily livelihoods. Placing custodianship of these resources and responsibility for their sustainable management in the hands of local communities is viewed as a key to meeting people's needs while conserving biodiversity. While acknowledging the importance of decentralizing decision making and project implementation, project staff note that most rural communities do not have the capacity to manage natural resources sustainably. Thus, in many cases, developing partnerships between local communities and external agencies would be a better option than total devolution of responsibility.

**Education:** Changing stakeholder behavior is a complex process that is influenced by their knowledge and by social and economic factors. To address the specific needs of various stakeholders, project staff tend to take a broad-based approach to education. By using a range of tools and forms of communication, project staff should target training and awareness raising at particular stakeholders.



IT IS NOT SIMPLY THAT EACH BIOME PRINCIPLE IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER IN PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION, BUT THAT THE BIOME PRINCIPLES ARE INTERCONNECTED AND INTERDEPENDENT.

🍃 **Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E):** For project communities to want to invest their time and effort into monitoring, project staff need to make it very clear why the information is being collected and how it relates to their own interests. The approach that project staff adopt for M&E should match the capacity of project participants.

🍃 **Sustainability:** To build and maintain the institutional and technical capacity needed to sustainably manage natural resources, a stable source of financial support must be available. As few options exist for generating sufficient revenues from the sale of natural resources, long-term external financial support from national accounts and international donors is essential for effective conservation of biodiversity in Africa and Madagascar.