

Values

Incorporating local values into projects helps ensure that conservation initiatives are compatible with local concerns and builds respect and trust between local communities and project managers.

The specific values, degree, and order of importance placed on biodiversity varies from region to region and from people to people. Inhabitants of growing urban areas may interact with wildlife only indirectly on television; for them, the closest contact with wild animals may be at zoos and in protected areas. City dwellers

may therefore value wildlife more in aesthetic, recreational, ecological, and perhaps intrinsic terms. Similarly, international conservation organizations and conservationists tend to emphasize the global value of biodiversity (ecological, scientific, educational, existence, and intrinsic values). For those, particularly in rural areas, who have to live with and tolerate wildlife, biodiversity is valued as food, fuel, building materials, medicines, source of livelihood, and, in some

cases, religious and cultural identity. Thus, while national governments may see biodiversity in terms of economic values related to consumptive uses, such as timber exploitation and wild animal trade, and nonconsumptive uses, such as tourism, rural inhabitants tend to be more concerned with the direct subsistence values of biodiversity.



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Sacred lakes represent local cultural values which can form the basis for strong biodiversity conservation incentives.

The diverse values placed on biodiversity by different people and stakeholders influence the decisions taken by states, institutions, and individuals as to how natural resources in a particular area are used. Given that different stakeholders are likely to emphasize different biodiversity values and advocate different uses of natural resources, the question then is: Whose values should determine biodiversity conservation action in Africa and Madagascar?

Funding agencies (mostly foreign organizations with developed country perspectives), by holding the purse strings, can often determine biodiversity conservation priorities in Africa and Madagascar and the activities to be implemented. These priorities usually emphasize global values of biodiversity, which, by and large, reflect Western conservationist values. Similarly, conservation agencies, particularly NGOs based in developed countries who are the recipients of donor funding, are more often concerned with scientific and intrinsic values of biodiversity; it is they who largely determine which project activities get priority. Where then do the values of the rural people who rely on wild resources for their livelihoods and who bear the cost of living with wildlife fit into the picture? In fact, are rural people's values considered at all in setting priorities for biodiversity conservation projects? Characterization of the goals and specific objectives of the 11 BIOME projects provides useful insights into the interplay of different values and interests in biodiversity conservation on the African scene.

Observations from the Field

For rural Namibians, the primary value of biodiversity is food security (bushmeat, wild fruits, water lilies), particularly in times of famine; materials for household construction and tools; and, as a source of cash income (sale of bushmeat, grass/thatch, crafts including baskets, mats, and carvings). The colonial government took away the ownership of natural resources from indigenous Namibians; tracts of land were set aside as protected areas without consultation with the people; and local hunters became "poachers" overnight. Thus, for rural people, wildlife became a symbol of oppression, and they had no incentive to protect the resource. The **LIFE** project recognized this



KENGO, a national NGO, coordinates the Indigenous Vegetable and Fruit Tree Development Project in Kenya. The project is working with local women in two districts to

- promote production, consumption, and conservation of indigenous vegetables and fruits
- increase food production and improve rural diets and economy
- reintroduce and incorporate indigenous food plants into the cropping system and
- assess the conservation status of indigenous food plants.

To learn more about the KENGO project, see page 78.

and sought to promote sustainable use of resources through return of ownership of and benefits from natural resources to the rural communities. As a result, these local communities' values of natural resources have been recognized again, and they are more supportive of the project's objectives and activities.

The **KENGO** project was based on the subsistence value (food resource) of biodiversity for local people. The **AMCFE** project on multiple-use plant species in Mali was based on local-use values of biodiversity. And the **NATURAMA** project in Kaboré Tambi National Park was based on local people's values and dependence on natural resources.

The **GACON** project illustrates how spiritual and cultural values of natural resources can provide strong incentives for some members of rural communities to protect these resources. In Ghana and other West African countries, patches of sacred forest and specific wild animal species supported by the forest are protected on the basis of strong traditional beliefs and cultural associations with wild species of plants and animals (Dorm-Adzobu, Ampadu-Agyei, and Veit 1991; Ntiamoa-Baidu 1995). The establishment of the groves was based on the belief by the people of Jachie and Keygase that the groves are the abodes of their ancestors.

The villagers who took part in this project had different levels of control over the groves and depended on them in different ways. In general, the **GACON** project showed that, while people in these villages generally valued the sacred groves, their actions toward grove conservation seemed to have more to do with their economic relationship to them. The **GACON** project activities centered on providing alternatives to using the sacred groves for fuelwood or clearing them for agriculture. Because this project considered people's economic needs along with their general cultural values, people were perhaps more interested in taking part in **GACON** activities than they would have been if the focus had been solely economic in nature.

Establishing the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park and **DZANGA-SANGHA** Dense Special Forest Reserve was based primarily on international values. However, permitting multiple resource uses within the reserve was an attempt to address the values of indigenous people by protecting Ba'Aka rights to hunt and gather forest resources. Similarly, though the **MADAGASCAR WETLANDS** project was established based on international values, local communities' traditional taboos against disturbing fish eagles provided a context for the project to incorporate local values and ensure local support for fish eagle conservation. Similarly, the **CAMPFIRE** project was based on both local values (livelihood and food security) and external values (recreational/touristic/scientific) of biodiversity.

Conclusions

Observations from the BIOME projects suggest that successful conservation of Africa's biodiversity requires the integration of the diverse values—local, national, and international—and the consideration of the interests of a wide range of stakeholders and actors. In some cases, the initiation of BIOME projects was based solely on maintaining and reinforcing local values (e.g., **AMCFE**, **GACON**, and **KENGO**). Other projects were initially based primarily on international values, but subsequently attempted to integrate local values (e.g., **LIFE**, **CAMPFIRE**, and **DZANGA-SANGHA**).

Understanding people's values should be a part of the sociological information gathering that happens before a project starts and continues during its implementation. As demonstrated by the **GACON** project, socioeconomic studies are necessary so that a project is not simply based upon the villagers' values in general but considers how different people in the villages can hold different values.

Projects established purely on external values must be prepared to invest considerable time and other resources on conservation education and information dissemination to obtain community support. It is also helpful, and in most cases not too difficult, to identify local values to which projects can be linked since this offers a more concrete reason for local communities to support projects.*

* In a non-BIOME example, the Ghana Save the Seashore Birds project was initiated out of concern for the threatened Roseate tern (*Sterna dougallii*) (i.e., international values). However, during the initial consultations with coastal communities, it was discovered that local fishermen value terns as indicators of shoaling fish. Project participants found that they could easily sell the conservation education message if they justified the need for tern conservation based on their value as indicators of where to find fish. The coastal people were interested in the practical value of the species, not its intrinsic value (Ntiamo-Baidu 1991).