

Nepal – rethinking conservation strategy in times of conflict

Workshop held during the 3rd World Conservation Congress, Bangkok, November 2004

Do conservationists have the tools to respond to conflict?

Nepal has demonstrated a strong commitment to environmental protection confirmed by the establishment of national parks and protected areas that cover 18% of the country.

In the nine years since violent conflict began between the Nepali government and the Maoists rebels over 10,000 people have been killed and between two to four hundred thousand people have been displaced.

In addition to the tragic human cost, the conflict presents serious challenges to conservation in Nepal. Conservation organisations need to protect staff, while attempting to maintain their activities in the field, prevent opportunistic exploitation of natural resources, and make space for the coping strategies of conflict-affected communities.

Experience from around the world suggests there are ways to sustain conservation in times of conflict.

The 2003 World Park's Congress in Durban presented an opportunity to discuss how conservation organizations can best respond to violent conflict. Delegates debated strategies to preserve minimal environmental conservation and to protect staff and infrastructure during conflict. Various options were discussed, including contingency planning, possible UN neutrality status for park staff and Rapid Crisis Response initiatives, maintaining staff morale, providing for ranger families in the event of fatalities and anticipatory strategies for dealing with conflict.



Building on the Durban resolution on conservation and armed conflict, IISD organised a workshop during the November 2004 IUCN World Conservation Congress to



debate the case of Nepal. The session considered the strategies used in other countries to sustain programmes, preserve the legitimacy of conservation organisations and contribute towards the peaceful resolution of conflict.

Key conclusions:

1. The Maoist insurgency presents conservation organizations in Nepal with serious challenges; constraining programmes, damaging infrastructure and threatening staff.
2. Environmental impacts are not uniform throughout the country. Their true extent is likely to remain unclear until the conflict is resolved.
3. The majority of negative impacts can be classified as opportunistic endeavours. Others originate from localised need for resources. Both occur due to a lack of local security. But not all negative impacts can be attributed to a particular group.



Key recommendations:

1. Conservation organisations need to anticipate conflict, prepare contingency plans and work with donors to ensure reliable sources of funding.
2. In times of conflict conservation organisations must demonstrate their legitimacy by acting transparently, maintaining programme continuity and engaging local communities in protected area management. In areas where traditional security measures have broken down conservation organisations should train local people to manage the PAs themselves.
3. By managing protected areas in ways that contribute to poverty reduction, the conservation community can both increase its effectiveness and help to reduce conflict.

Further information:

World Commission on Protected Areas '*War and Protected Areas*' The International Journal for protected area managers, IUCN – the World Conservation Union, Vol. 14, No 1, 2004

IISD/IUCN, '*Conserving the Peace: Resources, Livelihoods and Security*' R. Matthew, M. Halle and J. Switzer (eds), 2002

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