The Importance of Processes in EIA & Partnership Conservation

FORGENMAP/RFD

Martin Greijmans

EIA

In Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) proposed projects are scrutinised for their environmental sound development effects.

EIA concentrates on anticipating negative effects, risks, socio-cultural impacts and natural resources constrains that may result as a consequent of the project, based on its design and intended activities through wide, democratic and informed involvement.

In case of unacceptable impacts alternatives should be considered or even abortion of activities. However, there is often a lack of respect by proponents for the EIA system as they see it as a form of red tape. Once the process has been hurdled by corruption or neglect the original purpose is lost and so its value.

Processes

The key to maximise the effectivity of EIA is to make sure each step of the process is properly done so that acceptance is ensured, wide spread and founded on serious considerations. Also, through these processes stakeholders are more likely to accept commitment and responsibility for tasks ahead.

Keywords are therefor, trust, respect, communication, listening, active participation, flexibility, commitment, patience, different views, …

Local stakeholders, often the ones most affected by proposed projects, are the first to suffer the effects. They are in possession of relevant local and indigenous knowledge and would therefor be able to better comment on the proposed project.

Partners

In the case of the ‘Partnerships in Conservation pilot study sites’ 4 Reserved Forests have been degraded over the past decades. As the areas are owned by the Royal Forest Department (RFD), people legally can not cut down trees or grow products or even live in there. However, encroachment happened anyway because of land shortages and ineffectiveness of the RFD to protect the areas sufficiently. In some cases, conflicts are long lasting and resulted from earlier evictions from the forests elsewhere or arrogant attitudes by the RFD.

In a few cases there are some effective and committed RFD people from the Regional Forest Office who started to use new approaches to deal with these conflicts. Through patience and friendly approaches local people had possibilities to voice their problems and grievances, but also local foresters could do so. The approach has been effective in the case of Ubon Ratchatani, but also in Uthai Thani activities are promising is dealing with forest degradation in a participatory and involved manner. Successful conservation and natural resources management projects are those that grow on a common ground of objectives and shared values through the social acts of facilitation, learning, participation, negotiation and accommodation. These processes involve many partners, networking, attitudinal change from foresters and patience and commitment from local people

Views & Facts

From the side of the RFD the forest reserves must be protected and even ecologically upgraded through rehabilitation or natural regeneration techniques. From the local people’s point of view the improvement of their living standards is important and by using the forest and its products. The conflict is that forest genetic resources are being degraded, pines are chipped for their resin and wood, and fires are set to stimulate the growth of fresh grass shoots. Illegal cutting for wood or land has been a problem for a long time, but these are often initiated by outside rich people who make the most out of it, not the local villager.
Common grounds

One activity, which is important for both the villagers and the foresters, is to assess the areas genetic resources. When knowledge of the resources is in hand people can make better decisions for future management activities. For it to be an effective assessment it is necessary that the information to be gathered is appropriate to either the villager or forester. In order to make sure this will be the case the inventory needs to be undertaken in a flexible and participatory way leaving room for all stakeholders to comment while doing the assessment. Techniques used should be simple and easy to learn, provide baseline data defining biodiversity significance and conservation importance of the area and the impact of activities by villagers. Other characteristics considered are little resources and equipment use (cheap), using indigenous knowledge and methods accepted by the scientific world in order to use data on policy level. After the use of the inventory method the analysis should also be simple and straightforward in order to plan management effectively.

Role

FORGENMAP suggested to include the ‘Managed Nature Reserve’ (IUCN category 4) in the Thai protected area system as a solution to conflicts mentioned. The Reserved Forests now are often degraded through human intervention, but would still be suitable for habitat conservation through management. Being located outside the protected areas, rural communities can have a clear impact on the possibility for protection and conservation management. The pilot studies aim at investigating possibilities of conditions and means for creating models for Partnerships in Conservation under varying circumstances pertaining to forest types, ethnic groups and social conditions. Within a Managed Nature Reserve it is suggested to create different zones in the area by appointing core areas, buffer zones and woodlots based on the integrity of the forest. By identifying different areas or classes using a rapid ecological assessment all stakeholders could be served. Core areas would be placed there where the forest resources are more or less intact, or worth restoring and get a protection status. This area could be used for collection purposes and the harvesting of NTFPs, but also serve as a gene pool where seed can be obtained and to be used in the whole area. Buffer zones would serve a wider purpose, more relevant to local people, but no solely as wood cut should still be discouraged here, but the inclusion of multipurpose trees in this area could be considered. The woodlots should serve the demand for timber, poles and other wood products such as charcoal. Woodlots should not be placed next to core areas, in order to keep activities away from the biodiversity sensitive areas.

Commitment

These suggestions are the views of FORGENMAP, however they can and should be rewritten when all stakeholders are ready to commit themselves more fully. As for now, the processes of trust building, communication and small-scale activities (mushroom growing, fire station building, creation of fire breaks, etc.) and soon participatory ecological inventories are taking place. Local people often use community forestry as an argument to make sure the area would not be further degraded, but the foresters don’t want to hear about that, especially as there is no legislation for it. FORGENMAP likes to find something in between where all stakeholders have a chance to work out the differences between each other, and where it can use its expertise most efficient. Creating an enabling environment through assistance in tree-based production systems elsewhere has proven to be a good incentive for villagers. By the provision of a broad genetic base of quality seed, success of tree planting and economic returns improve. By using a diversity of species ensures a range of products and a spread of possible risks in the future. Including local well-adapted species, proven to be useful and acceptable by local people is both beneficial for biodiversity rehabilitation and woodlot establishment.

Integrating conservation with development will help local communities to see themselves as genuine stakeholders, or as used here, as genuine partners. However, this takes time and means constant building from the project and the Regional Forest Office.

Policy

From higher hand in the RFD there is no active support however, no problems exist while the activities are still building on capacity. Legislative issues are a tough spot in this case, especially with the lack of the Community Forestry law.