

MAKING IT PAY: CAN COMMUNITY-BASED BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PROGRAMMES BE SUSTAINED THROUGH MARKET-DRIVEN INCOME GENERATION SCHEMES? (JORDAN)

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SYNOPSIS

Jordan is a small, arid country supporting a remarkable variety of wildlife habitats and many endemic species. It has a rapidly growing population, with current growth rates exceeding 3.1 percent. Development pressures and poverty have resulted in severe land degradation, leading to widespread habitat and species losses; problems greatly exacerbated by the Middle East conflicts. Urbanization is advanced, with 70 percent of the population living in towns and cities, but most of the rest rely on subsistence agriculture or pastoralism and many remain nomadic. The Government has shown a commitment to biodiversity conservation, being a signatory to the Biodiversity Convention, but it lacks the financial resources to invest heavily in national conservation programmes, carrying a national debt of over US \$ 7.2 billion. Its strategy is unusual in that it has granted the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), a long established NGO, the mandate to establish and manage protected areas and enforce wildlife protection laws. Protected areas are the cornerstone of the country's biodiversity conservation initiatives and, to date, five have been established covering over 1000 sq km. All of them have poor, subsistence communities living inside or around their boundaries.

This case study examines the results of a pioneering project, implemented by the RSCN, which has attempted to sustain biodiversity conservation in Jordan's protected areas through the development of community based, *market-driven* income generation and tourism programmes. It describes how income generation schemes can be used to help regulate damaging resource-use practices and promote more positive attitudes towards conservation initiatives. It also draws attention to the benefits of institutional strengthening for enabling community based approaches to be effectively implemented and sustained.

The authors were involved in this case study as follows: Khaled Irani was an employee of the RSCN and a recipient of the institutional strengthening programme. As a result of the programme he was appointed, at the age of 31, as the Director General of RSCN and given responsibility for its day-to-day management. Chris Johnson was the GEF project manager responsible for orchestrating the process of institutional strengthening and developing the on-site capacity in protected area management.

THE INITIAL SITUATION

One year before the institutional programme began, a large protected area (300 sq km) called Dana Wildlands Nature Reserve in southern Jordan had been designated. Living within and around the protected area were several hundred people from nomadic and settled communities who were partially or entirely dependent on the area for their livelihood; most notably for the grazing of goats and sheep. These people were (and still are) among the poorest and most disadvantaged in Jordan and included a significant number of nomadic refugee families from adjoining Palestine. Most of them had not been

consulted about the establishment of the protected area and were openly hostile towards the concept of the reserve, the RSCN and the initial regulations imposed on hunting and grazing. They perceived the reserve as depriving them of their traditional rights and of opportunities to exploit its resources for their own social and economic needs. If these problems had not been addressed, the general hostility towards the reserve would have remained, making attempts to regulate damaging land use practices, such as excessive grazing, extremely difficult to enforce, with the possibility of violent confrontation. Also, it would have been impossible to 'sell' the benefits of biodiversity conservation to such an alienated population, resulting in a lack of political and practical support for environmental initiatives locally and nationally. Furthermore, if no compensation was made for restricting traditional uses of the protected area, life would have been made even more difficult for these marginalised people.

THE CHANGE PROCESS

The process of integrating the local community into the protected area conservation programme was initiated and directed by a specific project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), entitled "Conservation of the Dana Wildlands and Institutional Strengthening of RSCN". Jordan was a signatory to the 1992 Biodiversity Convention and was eligible for projects under the pilot phase GEF programme. This project was prepared by a World Bank consultant team, following lengthy consultation with the RSCN, Government Departments (notably the Ministry of Planning) and other stakeholders. The intention of the key stakeholders, and particularly the RSCN, was to use the Dana Nature Reserve to create a regional model of integrated conservation and development in the spirit of the Biodiversity Convention; recognising that in Jordan, and many other developing countries in the Middle East, the socio-economic needs of people still directly dependent on natural resources must be addressed in order to achieve political and practical support for biodiversity conservation. The organisation which led this Jordanian initiative and brought about the change was the RSCN. It was appointed as the sole implementing agency for the project and responsible for all activities on the ground.

THE OUTCOME

In order to address the problems between the local communities and the Dana Nature Reserve, institutional changes were instigated at two main levels: at the *site* level with the development of income generation activities for local people linked to the presence of the protected area; and at the *organisational level* with the restructuring of the RSCN to ensure that it had the capability, technically and financially, to initiate and manage community based conservation programmes.

The income generation schemes introduced within and around the Dana Nature Reserve were intended to provide local people with financial and social benefits from the reserve and compensate for imposed restrictions such as grazing controls. They included enterprises such as fruit drying and processing, medicinal and culinary herb production, jewelry making and extensive tourism services. All of these enterprises were developed with a strong emphasis on marketing. A marketing strategy was developed based on using a conservation philosophy and the nature reserve 'address' as the principal selling points of the newly developed products and services. This was manifest, for example, in the use of recycled materials for packaging, in the use of 'Wadi Dana' as a brand name and in the product slogan "helping nature, helping people". Tourism services were also 'sold' on the contribution visitors would make to protecting wildlife and supporting the local economy. The reason for adopting a market-led approach was to demonstrate to the local communities that the nature reserve itself could provide the means to generate small businesses and employment opportunities to supplement or replace the subsistence farming and income generators they were engaged in before the reserve existed. Through this approach, it was

hoped that the local people would, ultimately, become more supportive of the reserve and of the RSCN and more willing to observe the reserve regulations.

In order to develop the income generation activities, a socio-economic and a tourism unit were established within the RSCN, each with a development officer and compliment of staff. The organisational structure of these units include on-site co-ordinators and managers recruited from the target communities. These staff are being given increasing autonomy, with the long term aim of the local operations achieving effective independence from the RSCN headquarters. Mechanisms for involving local people in the development process have been put in place, including steering groups comprising reserve management staff, RSCN HQ staff and beneficiaries of the socio-economic programmes. Private sector operators have also been increasingly involved, particularly in tourism programmes, where they are marketing the Dana Reserve in collaboration with RSCN as a destination for their clients.

At the end of 1997, after 3 years of operations, the Dana Reserve income generation activities had raised US \$ 260,000 in sales and tourism receipts, created 38 new jobs and provided increased financial benefits to over 140 people. The tourism receipts alone in 1997 covered 60 percent of the reserve's running costs and, interestingly, 70 percent of the visitors were Jordanian. There has also been a notable shift in the local people's attitude towards the Reserve, revealing a much higher level of support and co-operation.

An interesting recent development has been the creation of a goat fattening scheme to enable the Bedouin pastoralists in the western part of the reserve to sell their animals at economic prices. These pastoralist are the most disadvantaged community affected by the reserve, being predominantly refugees from Palestine and required to exist in highly marginal rangelands. They also have the largest number of livestock in the reserve (some 8000 animals) and this excessive grazing pressure poses the most serious threat to the conservation programme. If the fattening scheme proves financially viable, agreements will be reached with the Bedouin requiring them to reduce their flock sizes by 50 percent in ten years.

The introduction of the community-based initiatives described above has only been possible by far-reaching institutional changes within the protected area management authority, namely the RSCN. To enable the RSCN to understand and develop such approaches its knowledge base, skill level, profile and fund-raising capacity have all needed to be enhanced within an organisational framework which encourages planning, team work, innovation and risk taking. An intensive, three year institutional strengthening programme was implemented under the GEF programme, culminating in the complete restructuring of the organisation, the preparation of a long-term corporate plan, the revision of the organisation's legal constitution and, most importantly, the assembly of a well-trained and highly motivated staff team.

THE LESSONS LEARNED

The innovative aspect of the Dana programme is its emphasis on income generation as a principal institutional tool for engendering a more positive and productive relationship between poor rural communities and protected areas, and particularly its attempt to link income generation with a conservation philosophy and community agreements for the enforcement of regulations. The principal lessons learned from this experience, which could be replicable elsewhere, are summarised as follows:

- It is important to help local communities understand the values of biodiversity conservation and to involve them in making decisions about conservation where possible, but these things are not sufficient in themselves. Community based projects must also provide tangible, concrete help in addressing the communities' priorities such as employment opportunities (in the Dana case). They

must also be able to offer viable alternatives to the land-use practices which need to be regulated such as firewood cutting and hunting;

- Additional income, jobs and alternatives to damaging land-use practices can be addressed through market-driven income generation schemes, developed on ‘the back’ of protected areas. Poor rural communities, however, do not grasp marketing concepts easily and require continual guidance and involvement, as well as regular re-inforcement of the link between the success of the enterprise and the presence of the protected area;
- Income generation schemes can be tied to the enforcement of protected area regulations, such as grazing controls. This requires an in-depth understanding of target communities and the extent of their dependency on the protected area, and an ability to be responsive to their immediate needs, whilst at the same time, being clear about the basis of the bargain struck and the intention to rigorously enforce the terms of the bargain;
- The institutional capacity building programme implemented for the protected area management authority (RSCN) was essential for enabling it to work effectively with local communities and to embrace both the philosophy and practice of community-based approaches to resource management;
- Private sector involvement can be very valuable for ensuring the commercial success of income generation schemes, and especially tourism enterprises, but it needs to be carefully guided and monitored to ensure that the conservation philosophy and practices upon which these schemes have been built is maintained; and,
- In-country tourism to protected areas can be an important generator of income and jobs for local communities, but it needs to be nurtured and catered for.