

Biodiversity Conservation and Poverty Traps
December 2, 2009
Co-organizers Alex Travis and Chris Barrett

A group of 16 faculty, staff and students gathered to discuss the impending, February 2010 workshop on this theme and prospective Cornell collaborative research around the intersection between biodiversity conservation and poverty traps. Multiple participants observed that Cornell has relatively large and distinguished communities of scholars who explore one or the other of these topics, but limited integration across these groups. Few places do this well, so there appears to be open space in which Cornell could position itself strategically, with adequate support and the right players and topic(s). Michigan State (especially its Center for Systems Integration and Sustainability, led by Jack Liu) was raised as a possible exception to the rule and a model worth exploring. It was observed that Cornell has many good external partners to help with field-based, highly contextualized research, which seems essential in this arena. A good deal of discussion concerned the emphasis on biodiversity conservation as opposed to broader ecosystem resilience/sustainability. Multiple participants emphasized that the connections between ecological processes and the livelihoods of the poor were their interest and, arguably, Cornell's comparative advantage (especially given strengths in agriculture and veterinary medicine), rather than strictly biodiversity conservation per se. There was some discussion of specific subthemes such as ecotourism and bioprospecting, especially with respect to identifying where the private for-profit sector fits in the joint pursuit of biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction objectives. It was proposed that a useful synthetic activity would be to document and extract generalizable lessons learned from success stories where both objectives were advanced effectively. There was related discussion about the difficulty of monitoring and documenting success in either dimension, much less both simultaneously, due to the need for sustained, in situ data collection. Several participants encouraged invitation of prospective partners in developing countries for "reality checks". The related issue of cultural diversity, which seems correlated with both biological diversity and poverty in many settings, was raised and discussed a bit.

Attendees: Alex Travis (host), Chris Barrett(host), Helene Schember, Drew Harvell, Mark Milstein, Jim Lassoie, Krista Capps, Zellman Warhaft, Karim-Aly Kassam, Kristen Ford, David Dieterich, Mark Lawrence, Anurag Agrawal, Monica Touesnard, Carmen Moraru, Louise Buck



Cornell University

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CCSF Topical Lunch, Cornell University

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Motivation

Connections between biodiversity conservation and poverty traps:

Geographic coincidence of biodiversity “hot spots” and areas of most enduring extreme poverty.

Formal models of poverty traps and of ecological resilience have very similar mathematical structures: multiple dynamic equilibria with tipping points and regions of resilience/attraction.

But largely unexplored, especially empirically!



Workshop and objectives

February 4-5, 2010, workshop

Co-hosted by Cornell Center for Wildlife Conservation and CCSF (with support from the Institute for the Advancement of Economics at Cornell)

Web site: http://aem.cornell.edu/faculty_sites/cbb2/html/

Objectives:

- Small group to jointly explore the connections between poverty traps and biodiversity conservation with greater rigor, to marshal empirical evidence from a range of poor areas to better understand tradeoffs/synergies.
- Increase Cornell visibility in this crucial area, both through word-of-mouth and direct networking effects, and through a special section of PNAS.

Confirmed Attendees

Social scientists:

Karim-Aly Kassam (Cornell)
Chris Barrett (Cornell)
Partha Dasgupta (Cambridge)
Paul Ferraro (Georgia State)

Travis Lybbert (UC-Davis)
Katrina Brandon (CI/CABS)
Lisa Naughton (Wisconsin)
Oliver Coomes (McGill)

Biological scientists:

Alex Travis (Cornell)
Drew Harvell (Cornell)
Jim Lassoie (Cornell)
David McDonald (Oxford)

Ivette Perfecto (Michigan State)
Art Gold (Univ. Rhode Island)
Jan de Leeuw (ILRI)
Justin Brashares (UC Berkeley)

What other Cornell faculty/staff/students are we missing?

Key Questions Looking Forward

Who else on campus is interested in this area of intersection?

Centers: EEID, Ctr for Invasive Species, CIIFAD

Depts/Fields: EEB, NR, Lab of O, AEM, Zoology & Wild Cons

Student groups: Zoo & Wildlife Society, VIDA, Wildlife Society

External partners: WCS, CRC/Smithsonian, DEC, USDA, CARE

What locations and funding sources might support new collaborative research, training and outreach in this area?

What other campuses have active, high quality, high profile programs in this area? What can we learn from them and from others who may have tried to mount efforts in this area?

Thank you for your time, interest and comments!

