

Local Empowerment for biodiversity conservation and improved livelihoods-a necessity for the Africa region

Title

The official launch of the BirdLife International Local Empowerment Programme could not have come at a better time. Despite numerous efforts, many sites of biological significance are under serious threat, and around 45% are lacking any form of protection.

Site safeguard and sustainable land-use planning remain marginal to global economic growth. As pressures against biodiversity increased, local indigenous knowledge systems are being eroded at unprecedented levels. Over the past years, there is growing evidence that local communities are increasingly demanding visibility and a say in their own matters i.e. access/use/management and benefit sharing, issues on tenure. In Africa- ?people? not only identity themselves with the resources- but they are also custodians of those resources. In Africa, not only is there an inextricable linkage between biodiversity and people as ?people are also the critical vehicles for biodiversity conservation. Engaging the ?people? within the BirdLife Africa Partnership demystifies that bird conservation is only the realm of the ?scientists?.

Therefore- what better way is there to conserve the birds and their habitats. Through local empowerment programme- this is also an opportunity to know what knowledge is out there that exists amongst the people about birds ? *local intelligence*? and what ?appropriate interventions? can be made to achieve BL?s mandate concerning birds and conservation. What lessons can be drawn from real attempts to empower communities? This question is a fundamentally simple but nonetheless elusive one to answer. Despite its current importance to policy makers and practitioners alike, community empowerment is not easy to achieve. The lessons learnt within BL can be profiled/ showcased at a much broader scale. There is need for BL to conduct a detailed analysis of where empowerment has worked (within the Partnership).

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