Collaborative forms of governance in the context of land reform: trade-offs in the pursuit of more equitable access to ecosystem services

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Abstract

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Developing countries worldwide are caught in the predicament of trying to redress past social injustice, promote development and transformation, while simultaneously meet international commitments to maintain, and indeed expand, protected area coverage. The ability to make informed trade-offs at the interface of social and ecological systems is critical in such circumstances. An area in which such trade-offs directly relate to issues around equity, empowerment, benefit sharing and ecological processes is in cases on land claims on protected areas. Successful land claims on protected areas by previously disenfranchised communities around the world often result in compromise solutions involving co-management agreements between claimant communities and state conservation agencies. However, experience in South Africa has shown that despite promises of pro-poor, democratically informed management, the practical experience of co-management has seen the continuation of the status quo in terms of conservation, with very few material benefits for claimant communities and limited sharing of responsibilities and decision-making functions. Alternative approaches, such as the deproclamation of a protected area for a communities’ benefit, deserve greater attention. Drawing on an in-depth case study from South Africa, we reflect on the social and ecological trade-offs associated with this approach, reflecting on the experience of both the conservation agency and the land claimants. Based on our analysis of several co-management cases, and this alternative case study, we develop a matrix of social and ecological trade-offs that might assist decision making in cases of land claims on protected areas. Such decision support tools are essential in balancing trade-offs between conservation, the needs and aspirations people and historical redress for injustice.

Keywords: ecosystem services, equity, trade-offs, adaptive co-management

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