



Assessing the utility of stakeholder analysis to Protected Areas management: The case of Corbett National Park, India

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 January 2010

Received in revised form 9 April 2010

Accepted 21 April 2010

Available online 18 May 2010

Keywords:

Stakeholder analysis
Protected Area management
Participatory conservation
Conflict resolution
Environmental planning
Corbett Tiger Reserve

ABSTRACT

This study tests the potential utility of Stakeholder Analysis to Protected Area management. Using Corbett National Park (CNP), India, as a case study, Stakeholder Analysis (SA) was used to identify important stakeholder groups and assess their relationships, relative power and importance. This exercise was undertaken to assist the managers of CNP with future strategy formulation and implementation. The results demonstrate SA to be a simple, yet effective, method that can help PA managers understand the social dimensions of their undertaking, without waiting for long-term policy changes. The results reveal possible stakeholder alliances, and those that may need strengthening to guarantee the welfare of CNP. Divergent opinions on the same issue were also discovered. This underlines that addressing low levels of knowledge and misplaced information may be of strategic importance in reducing conflict against a PA. This research also helps theorize previously unexplored relationships among stakeholders in India, using the framework of Stakeholder Theory. Repeating the exercise on a regular basis could help PA managers monitor stakeholder interactions and political positions over time.

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1. Introduction

Protected Areas (PAs), which are among the most important refuges of biodiversity on earth, have several interested parties (Prendergast et al., 1993; Myers et al., 2000; Pimm et al., 2001; Gadgil and Guha, 2005). These parties often have divergent demands, such as biodiversity conservation and local livelihoods, and aspire for the PA ecosystem to be managed according to their priorities (Saberwal et al., 2001; Madhusudan and Mishra, 2003; Negi and Nautiyal, 2003). In such contexts, any policy decision is deemed unfavourable by at least a few parties (often including local communities), leading to contest, disagreement and antagonism (Gadgil and Guha, 1993; Kothari et al., 1996; Maikhuri et al., 2002; Ghate, 2003; Negi and Nautiyal, 2003; Salz and Loomis, 2005; Ogra and Badola, 2008). As demonstrated by the recent local extinction of tigers from Sariska Tiger Reserve, a premier PA in India, this antagonism can be directed against the PA and can jeopardize the objectives of both conservation and sustainable development (Project Tiger, 2005). PAs do not exist in a socio-political vacuum, and are prone to negative feedback from their societal

implications. It is important to incorporate local perspectives in PA policy to reduce conflicts associated with conservation (Singh, 1996; Rangarajan, 2001; Wilshusen et al., 2002; Sarin, 2005; Saxena, undated). However, there is no clear consensus on the most suitable approach for this incorporation.

A possible approach is Stakeholder Analysis (SA), a technique developed in management studies. SA is variously used as an approach, or tool, for generating knowledge about actors (individuals or organizations) and to understand their behaviours and interests, and for assessing their value to decision-making (Varvasovszky and Brugha, 2000). It also helps identify current/future opportunities and threats to projects (Blair and Fottler, 1990). SA can help to find compatibility between policy objectives and stakeholder aspirations, and assist managers to choose between short and long-term policy objectives, or balance conflicting objectives such as conservation, development, equity and peace (Chevalier and Buckles, 1999).

SA is particularly relevant to Natural Resource Management (NRM) and the management of PAs for a number of reasons (Grimble and Wellard, 1997). For example, although a PA may accrue a 'net gain' for society, the benefits may accrue to a party that is not particularly disadvantaged while compromising an already-marginalized group (De Lopez, 2003; Guha, 2003; Vasan, 2007). In such situations, marginalized groups often depend on the natural resources found in PAs for their livelihoods, resulting in potentially negative conservation outcomes if their needs are ignored. Here, SA can help the managers of PAs to understand dynamic stakeholder

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interactions and potential partnerships for conservation (Nepal and Weber, 1995; Kothari et al., 1996; Enters and Anderson, 2000). Additionally, it is prudent to account for local community concerns because antagonism can jeopardize the PA through direct confrontation or political activism in a democratic society such as India (Ramírez, 1999; Rishi, 2007; Rishi et al., 2008). SA could help policy makers to foresee the potential socio-political obstacles to establishing a PA and identify stakeholder alliances, existing and potential. In developing countries, where conservation schemes often have very limited budgets, SA may also assist with developing strategies to mobilize local resources for conservation. Further, SA has the potential to assist decision-makers as they strive to accommodate biodiversity conservation objectives in concert with the ideals of equality and democracy, where poverty reduction and welfare are the primary aims of development, (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004) thereby leading to comprehensive information inputs in decision-making (Reed, 2008). Despite this, from the approximately six hundred PAs in India, official 'Management Plans' rarely, if ever, take into account the perspectives of local stakeholders. This is perplexing in a context where human conflict over natural resources is widespread.

This paper, possibly for the first time in India, presents the results of a SA that was conducted for a premier Indian PA, Corbett National Park (CNP). The first objective of this study was to identify the stakeholders of CNP and record their key characteristics, such as position, interests, leadership and knowledge. The second objective was to analyze the power, importance, and alliances of stakeholders, and to represent these findings in a Stakeholder Map. Finally, as a result of conducting the case study, we discuss the utility of SA to PA management.

We did not seek to evaluate the conservation objectives in CNP; rather, we explored stakeholder characteristics to help improve the management of CNP with policy formulation and implementation.

2. Study area

The CNP is situated at the foothills of the Western Himalayas in the civil district of Nainital and Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand, India (Fig. 1) at Latitudes 29°25–29°40'N and Longitude 78°5–79°5'E. On August 8, 1936 it was established as India's First National Park, and christened Hailey's National Park. Post independence, its name was changed to Ramganga National Park in 1954 and then in 1957 to its present name Corbett National Park, in memory of Jim Corbett, the legendary hunter and naturalist who had helped in marking out its boundaries and setting it up. The area of the National Park was increased from 323.75 km² to its present size of 520.82 km² in 1966. The area of the Reserve was further increased to 1288.32 km² by adding 301.18 km² of Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary and the remaining 466.32 km² as buffer area.

In 1973–1974, together with Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary it was designated a 'Tiger Reserve', under 'Project Tiger' of the Government of India, and it is now a premier PA with a high density of tigers (Jhala et al., 2008). Its management objectives include "protecting natural and scenic areas of national and international significance for scientific, education and recreational use". According to The World Conservation Union (IUCN), it is a management Category II Protected Area, i.e., it is managed for conservation of species, with little human activity.

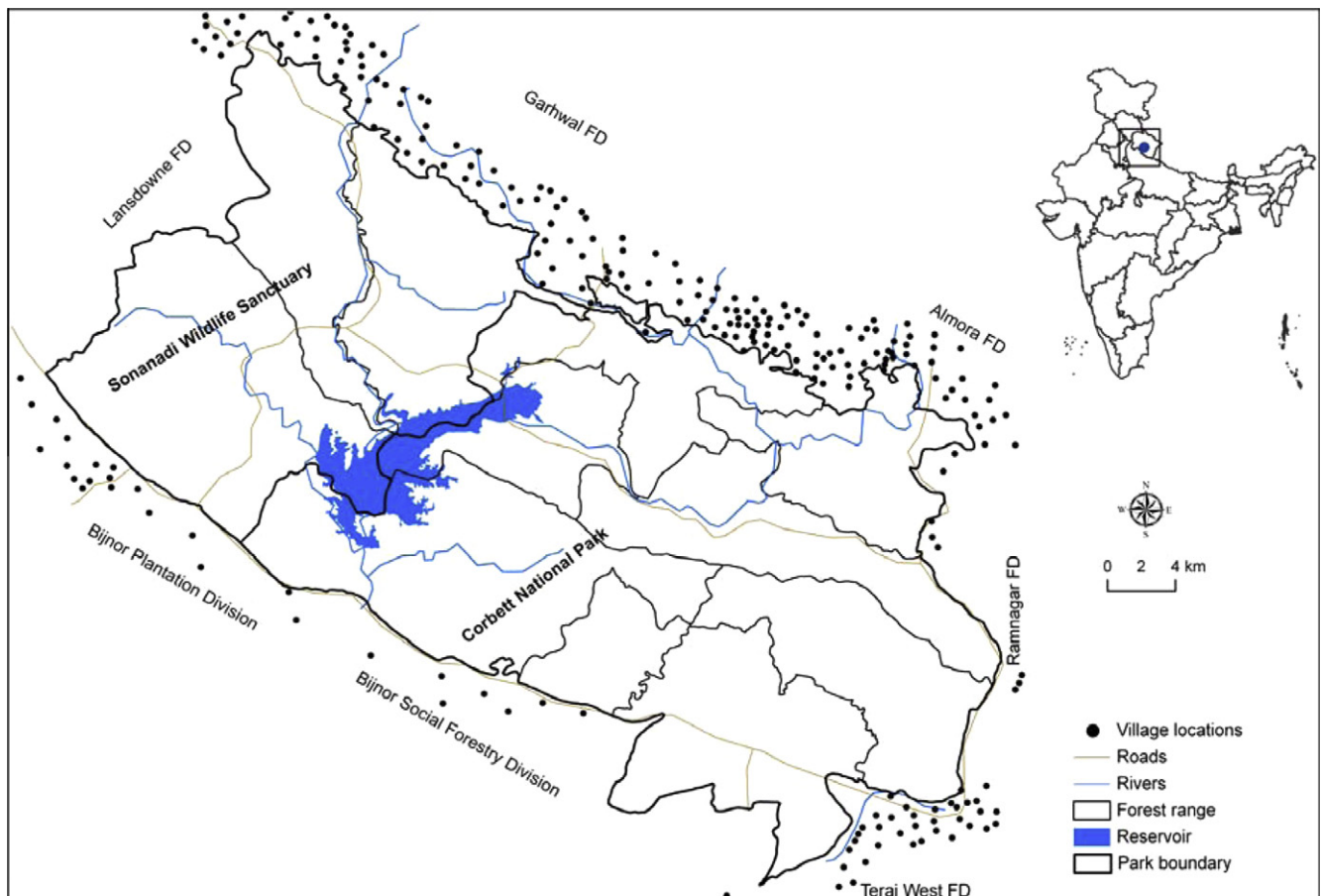


Fig. 1. Map of Corbett Tiger Reserve, India showing boundary of Corbett National Park, Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary, village locations and adjacent Forest Divisions.

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