



CONSERVATION SOLUTIONS LAB IS A JOINT INITIATIVE OF CHEMONICS INTERNATIONAL  
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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION



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Lessons from the Field — Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda

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## A. Introduction

Over the past half century, engaging communities situated amid areas of high biodiversity and other values of the natural world became a cornerstone of nature conservation practice. This is a dramatic change from the early days of nature conservation strategies. Previously, conservation practitioners around the world used a strict nature protection model, which evolved in the latter half of the 19th century in America. Spiritual, physical, and social elements grounded this model, driven by a largely romantic view of nature. Science came to the forefront later, with conservation practitioners working in consort with governments and lawyers to apply restrictive top-down mandates. Little to no input was solicited from affected communities. For example, the U.S. government gave little consideration to the Blackfeet, Bannock, Shoshone, or Crow tribes when it elected to establish Yellowstone National Park in 1872. A similar resettlement of mainly European communities occurred with the establishment of Shenandoah National Park in 1935. Despite its many problematic aspects, the Yellowstone model — together with the values upon which it was based, and the prescriptions required to establish exclusive protected areas — made it attractive to many colonial governments. This model continues to find favor with post-colonial governments, educated elites, and — to a surprising extent — international nature conservation organizations. National parks and other strict protected areas, along with their paramilitary policing, found a strong foothold in East Africa in the last century when authorities gazetted iconic reserves and parks such as Tsavo and Amboseli in Kenya, Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth in Uganda, and the Serengeti and Selous in Tanzania. The majority of these reserves were established as exclusive protected areas cleared of human habitation, use, and — except for science and tourism — access.

However, the exponential growth in the area allocated for nature protection around the world in recent years and the growing realization that biodiversity outside of protected areas may carry equal or more significance to that inside, and suffer from greater threats, is changing perspectives on the design and management of areas managed to protect nature. Conservation scientists are increasingly embracing the idea of working with local communities to achieve conservation goals, requiring them to expand their toolkit to embrace the work and contributions of social and behavioral scientists.

The influence of this perspective in eastern and southern Africa has been dramatic (Hulme and Murphree, 2001). In East African nations, wildlife authorities and agencies responded by developing institutional capacity and programs to engage with communities through a broad range of initiatives. Even before independence, authorities promoted efforts that brought local people, especially children, into protected areas to provide education and raise awareness. A broadening and evolving range of interventions followed these efforts in the 1980s and 1990s, aiming to link conservation and economic development, with a focus on revenue and benefit sharing, support for community livelihoods, and institutional mechanisms to engage communities in conservation governance. These initiatives focused on government-controlled protected areas. In parallel with these approaches, interventions arose to cede control of wildlife outside government-controlled protected areas to landowners and communities. Initiatives like the Community Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources program in Zimbabwe, the Luangwa Integrated Rural Development Project in Zambia, and community conservancies in Namibia all took a community-based natural resources management approach to conserving wildlife with their contributions to livelihoods and economic development. Authorities took similar approaches more recently in East Africa through land conservancies for wildlife, such as those under the framework of the Northern Rangeland Trust.

Thirty years ago, these perspectives became consolidated in a conservation strategy generally known as integrated conservation and development. Integrated conservation and development programs (ICDPs) intended to engage the interest and support of communities with means that ranged from basic consultation to education to technical training to genuine partnerships in planning, decision-making, and management. With a dual goal of improving the management of natural resources and people's quality of life, ICDPs aimed to conserve wildlands and their biodiversity while simultaneously balancing the needs of local people, sustaining ecosystem dynamics and resilience, and ensuring continuity for future generations (Brown and Wyckoff-Baird 1992).

Conservation practitioners undertake community engagement — whether top-down conservation education or bottom-up empowerment — for many different reasons, but these can be considered as falling under two general justifications. Working to engage communities was initially considered a practical and pragmatic way of improving the delivery of conservation outcomes and making interventions more cost-effective. Practitioners operated from the assumption that increased support for nature conservation by communities would reduce illegal activity and thus the need to invest in expensive law enforcement activities. More recently, however, a moral, rights-based agenda has also arisen as another driver to community engagement. As U.N. and related international organizations worked to ensure adherence to conventions on human rights, conservation organizations were quick to respond. Conservation practitioners could undertake actions based on practical drivers to engage communities, depending on circumstances, organizational perspectives, and the evidence of useful outcomes. But drivers based on global acceptance of human and community rights are not optional and evidence that they contribute to conservation at all may be considered to be beside the point.

Conservation practitioners applied a wide range of mechanisms designed to engage communities in their nature conservation endeavors. Several terms represent approaches to conservation that place community engagement at their center - community conservation, community-based conservation, and community-based natural resource management, among them. Integrated Conservation and Development serves as an umbrella term for conservation that engages communities by responding to their needs or aspirations for social and economic development while also delivering biodiversity conservation. Practitioners implement ICDP approaches in various forms and scales, under many names, and in every corner of the globe. This has led Chemonics to collaborate with the Conservation Solutions Lab (CSL) at Arizona State University to ask a very basic and important question: Do we have any evidence to show that this approach is achieving the results we seek? At the request of Chemonics and CSL, the authors traveled to three East African countries — Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda — to meet with practitioners from each sector of the ICDP process. This represented an effort to examine the question in detail, offer a perspective on how conservation practitioners can perhaps learn from the effort to question the utility of community engagement, adapt lessons to bridge conservation and development more effectively, and apply the limited funds available to conservation to accomplish more on the ground.

## B. Our Task

Our assessment sought on-the-ground evidence to show how, where, and when specific community engagement tools — whether designed to generate support for conservation measures directly through education or governance-related measures, or designed to reduce pressure on protected areas or natural resources by delivering economic development that would allow communities to support or at least tolerate conservation initiatives — effectively achieve conservation outcomes. To explore the larger question, we broke down discussions into the following smaller, more pointed inquiries:

- Why do you practice community engagement?
  - How do you define engagement?
  - What is your decision to engage based on?
- What does community engagement deliver?
- How do you know that you achieve the desired results?
  - Do you monitor outcomes and impacts?
  - Do you modify assumptions and interventions based on information?
- What have we learned? Where do we go from here?

To produce a summary of the practitioner’s perspectives on these questions — simple on the surface but actually quite complex in practice — we carried out in-depth interviews and dialogues with 52 practitioners, managers, and funders from a variety of institutions, including donors, governments, international research and advisory bodies, universities, private business, NGOs, and community-based organizations (see Annex). At the end of our field visits, we participated in a one and a half-day workshop with several dozen international conservation practitioners in Washington, D.C., to review our findings,

revisit the broader questions with this larger group, and attempt to produce a meaningful synthesis of the following:

- How do different practitioners understand and approach community engagement in biodiversity conservation?
- Has community engagement evolved over time?
- Is the design of community engagement approaches evidence-based?
- Do practitioners respond to lessons learned and apply adaptive management practices?
- Has the sense of community engagement as fundamental (or not) to biodiversity conservation changed?
- Given available evidence and outcomes from our Washington, D.C., workshop, what are the key lessons learned?
- What should be done to more effectively assess and verify best practices, either retrospectively or going forward?

Our report provides a mix of findings from the country visits together with observations from the Washington, D.C., workshop.

## C. Stories from the Field: Community Engagement as Interpreted by Practitioners

### ***How is community engagement in biodiversity conservation understood and approached by different practitioners?***

An analysis of commentary from our respondents makes it clear that there is no universal understanding of the concept of “community engagement” or of the various components and factors for inclusion in its domain. Field practitioners, institutions, and organizations understand and apply the concept very differently. As a consequence, expectations of outcomes from engaging with communities also vary greatly, as do the ways they go about engaging communities in conservation. This report examines this diversity by presenting perspectives of the wide range of results of community engagement from practitioner interviews. Two concise case studies demonstrate the distinct approaches taken by the many actors relying on community engagement in their conservation interventions.

We can describe differences in the forms of engagement as falling along a continuum, ranging from top-down processes typically used by governments to educate and raise awareness in communities about nature conservation, to the full transfer of rights and responsibilities to communities for managing and conserving natural resources and biodiversity at the other end of the spectrum. Actions lying at different points along this continuum include those designed for consultation with communities to understand and incorporate their views and perspectives; negotiations with communities to recognize and integrate their needs, interests and, in some cases, their demands; and various forms of partnerships with communities that can include co-management, collaborative management, and community-based natural resource management.

The institutional mandates, legal obligations and responsibilities, and constituencies and donors of practitioners greatly influence the intentions of practitioners in these different forms of community engagement. For example, respondents from NGOs emphasized their personal and organizational interest in, and sympathy toward communities and their needs, while also noting the necessity of responding to the demands and perspectives of their donors. It bears mentioning that many — and perhaps most — sources of funding for conservation organizations come from international donors with mandates to support economic development and requirements for sensitivity to community rights. Respondents from government institutions, however, tended to emphasize their role in implementing national legislation for the protection of lands and species from illegal use, while viewing community engagement in more practical terms and principally backing the approach when it directly supports their mandate.

### **Case Study: The Budongo-Bugungu Chimpanzee Forest Corridor, Uganda**

#### **PLAYERS**

- National Forestry Authority, USAID, Uganda Biodiversity Fund, Jane Goodall Institute, Fauna & Flora International, Ecotrust Uganda, Kinyara Sugar Works

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- Maintain connectivity between Budongo and Bugungu Forest Reserves
- Protect chimpanzees outside of forest reserves

#### **THREATS**

- Human wildlife conflict leads to chimp killing and forest removal; forest loss through conversion

#### **FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT**

- Education, improved agriculture, alternative crops and markets, savings and loans, water sources, human-wildlife conflict training, institution development (e.g., community forest associations; private forest owners associations)

#### **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

- Volunteer village-level monitors; mobile phone technology; weekly updates; Jane Goodall Institute system

#### **OUTCOMES**

- Reduced levels of crop damage, human injury, forest loss and chimp killing

Different political philosophies and understandings of the roles of civil society and government also influence conservation practitioners. Respondents from civil society organizations, including international NGOs, tend to show sensitivity to issues related to communities and their rights and the imperative to ensure that their conservation interventions yield positive outcomes for often-poor communities or, at least, do no harm. Donor organizations possess similar perspectives, supported or enforced by norms established by international bodies such as the United Nations and managed through a complex framework of safeguard measures. Government organizations, however, often seem split between their desire to support communities and their development, their recognition of the fundamental long-term difficulty of imposing demands on an unwilling and uncooperative constituency, and their interest in implementing their mandate in the context of less supportive administrations.

Practitioners described their expectations of the outcomes from community engagement in terms that relate closely to the nature of the engagement undertaken. These included the following:

- Engagement designed to change the characteristics of communities and the environment in which conservation operates aims to:
  - *Create awareness.* Improving environmental and ecological awareness and knowledge will result in increased understanding of and therefore support for or tolerance of conservation measures
  - *Build capacity.* This ensures that communities have the skills and knowledge to function as responsible, independent, and, ultimately, empowered actors in conservation programs during their implementation and to continue to deliver conservation outcomes in the long term
- Engagement designed to change how communities perceive conservation aims to:
  - *Deliver on promised benefits.* These benefits are mainly financial (e.g., livelihoods), but also include social and cultural outcomes.
  - *Create legitimacy for conservation interventions.* Protected areas often lack historical legitimacy, while conservation programs can look like external impositions.
  - *Strengthen support.* The universal expectation holds that engagement will achieve positive and active support for conservation measures, or at least increase tolerance for them.

It bears noting that this suite of initiatives and their expected outcomes describe the perspectives of the external agencies from which we drew our respondents and says nothing of the interests and expectations of communities themselves. Concepts like inclusive conservation, community participation, and community engagement can be understood as bi-directional. Communities *could* invite the inclusion or participation or engagement of third parties in *their* conservation initiatives or interests. This is how the Indigenous and Communities Conserved Area (ICCA) Consortium understands these terms (Borrini-Feyerabend and Campese, 2017). However, respondents almost universally understood these terms as uni-directional, with outside agencies expecting to control engagement processes, inviting communities to participate in their programs in ways dictated by them and with objectives identified by them. This perspective is generally evident among our respondents working in East Africa and probably would be found in many, if not most, agencies and organizations working to implement or support conservation globally.

### ***Has community engagement evolved over time?***

Information and perspectives shared by our respondents indicate an evolution in community engagement, if engagement is understood to range from basic forms of activity such as education and raising awareness, to advanced forms such as empowering communities and building equal partnerships. However, the practical efforts and initiatives respondents described for engaging communities in conservation over the past four decades in East Africa varied greatly between the very different institutions concerned with this work.

Respondents indicated that conservation donors, especially western governments, tended to respond to the perspectives and demands of bodies like the United Nations. These international bodies typically enshrine in their declarations and approaches the rights of communities to their lands, resources, and cultures, especially those related to human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples. These positions appear throughout the publications and policies of the Convention on Biodiversity; Global Environment Facility; World Bank; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development; and virtually all other international donors, regulators, and advisory bodies. With public concern rising over the plight of communities in developing countries around the world in parallel with the concern for the loss of nature, international conservation initiatives are increasingly committing themselves to interventions that, at minimum, seek to do no harm to communities, and more broadly seek to build real and meaningful partnerships with communities as required by international conventions. Donors and governments in some instances also wrote social safeguards into grant agreements that aim to ensure that communities participate in and benefit from conservation initiatives in significant and meaningful ways, requiring in effect that a suite of activities for community engagement be part of any conservation initiative they support. Even so, these safeguards rarely prescribe measures or methods for use in achieving this engagement, though many donors do demand projects achieve economic outcomes as well as conservation outcomes. Respondents made it clear that bodies seeking access to donor funding thus need to ensure a high profile for community engagement activities in their programs, with wide flexibility in how they choose to accomplish it.

## Case Study: Ujamaa Community Resource Team, Tanzania

### PLAYERS

- Dorobo Fund, Carbon Tanzania, Heifer International, Northern Tanzania Rangelands Initiative, Pastoralist Indigenous NGOs Forum, Hadzabe Survival Council, Pastoral Women's Council, DFID, USAID, Wildlife Conservation Society, The Nature Conservancy, Oxfam

### OBJECTIVES

- Build community capacity to secure land tenure rights, increase gender equity, and establish community natural resource management in rural Tanzania

### THREATS

- Habitat loss and degradation through colonization of traditional and indigenous lands
- Loss of indigenous knowledge and subsequent decline in wildlife abundance and resilience

### FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT

- Community-driven land rights acquisition; education and training in planning and business development; community natural resource plans and management; advocacy

### MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- Paid village-level monitors; community designed and managed technology

### OUTCOMES

- Reduced human-wildlife conflict, enhanced habitat conditions, improved livelihood opportunities through tourism and carbon credit sales

Civil society organizations vary in the kinds of engagement they undertake, often employing a suite of activities located at very different points along the evolved continuum of engagement. The nature and history of the organizations themselves — along with who formed them, and with what objectives — influence the forms of engagement employed. The African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), for example, originally arose from the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation. Efforts to engage communities through education dominated AWF's early programming, while building a cadre of trained conservation professionals. More recently, however, the organization has focused on delivering financial and social well-being benefits from nature-based enterprises and championed developing conservancies around secure land and resource tenure. Another civil society organization, the Jane Goodall Institute, includes education as a core component of all its programs. While the institute's Roots and Shoots schools program serves a purpose central to its organizational philosophy, it also actively promotes the role of private forest owners in chimpanzee conservation.



The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda, by contrast, was not established as a nature conservation organization but to focus on empowering traditional cultural institutions, especially those of marginalized ethnic groups in Uganda. As a consequence, its approach to community engagement in conservation has tended toward building capacity, promoting rights, and empowering communities to take leading roles in nature conservation. Similarly, the Arcus Foundation, which holds a founding interest in human rights, considers community empowerment closely in their grant-making.

The institutions that have perhaps evolved least in their understanding and practice of community engagement over the past 40 years include the government institutions responsible for nature conservation in East Africa: Kenya Wildlife Service, Tanzania National Parks Authority, and Uganda Wildlife Authority. This is perhaps the consequence of their mandated responsibility for enforcing the conservation laws of their nations, the strong historical focus in East Africa on strict protected areas, and the difficulty many governments find in genuinely sharing power with their peoples, especially among newly developing democracies or persistent police states. Perhaps as a result, wildlife agencies in the region focus their community engagement on education, informing communities of their programs, and demonstrating the value of conservation by sharing benefits. However, these agencies maintain firm control over the lands and resources and only share genuine decision-making and management responsibilities to a limited extent, if at all.

### ***Is the design of community engagement approaches evidence based?***

All of the practitioners with whom we spoke indicated that they use some form of monitoring, data collection, and analysis to plan, carry out, and adapt their community-based conservation initiatives. However, the degree to which practitioners design hypotheses for their community engagement interventions and collect quantitative data to check their validity varies greatly. Some groups rely on carefully structured empirical data, while others use qualitative observations and narratives to plan and move conservation agendas. We found no consistency in the choice of methods, or any evidence that practitioners share methodologies, data, or conclusions.

The requirement to demonstrate a sound logical basis for the design of projects and selected activities is not new. Donors and conservation NGOs formerly structured their thought and design processes around Logical Framework Analysis and, more currently, using Theory of Change. Practitioners described comprehensive design processes carried out to ensure the development of strong project narratives. They also described how monitoring and evaluation frameworks are based on a range of indicators and means to measure changes to them. There was little agreement, however, on language describing interventions, on what constituted suitable indicators, or on how attribution could be determined. The result was that cross-site or cross-project comparisons were hard to make, even within organizations, and largely impossible between organizations. This would seem to create a clear impediment to designing and implementing effective conservation interventions, something that all parties should be concerned by and seek to address.

At the impact level, indicators include species-level population changes (e.g., mountain gorillas, chimpanzee populations); ecosystem health measured through indicator groups (e.g., birds, amphibians); and biophysical condition (e.g., land cover, ecosystem functions). Conservation practitioners often resort to proxy measures such as protected areas with management plans, community management institutions formed, and private land under conservancy agreements.

At the activity level, indicators measured inputs, outputs, and outcomes relevant to the activity itself. For example, education programs observed learning levels among targets, small grants schemes evaluated changes to household incomes, and improved land management or farming monitored crop yields and income derived from them.

At the conservation outcome level, practitioners employed Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) surveys as a common tool. As the name suggests, KAP surveys seek to measure changes within

communities against a baseline attributable to project interventions. Surveys investigate the level of knowledge of the values of nature and ecosystems within target communities or subjects resulting from education and awareness programs. Shifts in attitudes toward the natural world, as well as attitudes toward conservation interventions such as protected areas, are measured through a variety of questionnaire or observational methods. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, practitioners make efforts to measure behavioral changes in communities toward nature, often in terms of reductions in illegal activities, but also in levels of reporting of illegal activities and practical support that communities provide, such as helping to put out bush fires. Though we can understand KAP surveys as a standard monitoring and evaluation tool, the detailed design and implementation of surveys may or may not allow for cross-site and project results comparisons, as it must seek to determine and attribute the impact of a wide range of interventions in very different circumstances.

Despite its problematic nature from a hypothesis-testing perspective, most practitioners widely based their monitoring and evaluation on anecdotal evidence and qualitative narrative, both to discuss and assess programs internally and to report to donors and the public. Though many groups do not apply data-based analysis, many practitioners found their storytelling methods provided sufficient and compelling evidence of impact at the site or intervention level.

### ***Do practitioners respond to lessons learned and apply adaptive management practices?***

The comments from respondents we interviewed suggest that monitoring, evaluations, and comparative interpretations of results remain inconsistent, poorly documented, and insufficient for the establishment, sharing, and use of a coherent and cumulative body of knowledge to strengthen the design and implementation of their interventions. Respondents gave a range of explanations for this, including the following:

- A lack of financing available in the budgets of individual projects for robust, data-based evaluation
- The lack of sufficient attention from organizations to monitoring and evaluation
- The practical difficulties involved in developing standard indicators for the numerous social, economic, biological, and behavioral factors inherent to a context-driven design of interventions
- The challenges associated with identifying changes in biodiversity indicators in the time frames of most projects
- The difficulties of establishing cause-and-effect relationships between the measured effects of engagement on community indicators (e.g., improved knowledge or increased household revenues) and biodiversity indicators (e.g., increased biodiversity)

These constraints and challenges prevent most implementing organizations from clearly describing the positive effects of their different interventions on biodiversity conservation outcomes or robust processes for adaptive management. Failures at the intervention and organizational levels in this respect result in a compound failure at the level of the community of conservation practitioners.

At all levels, the reluctance of practitioners to openly acknowledge and share evidence of failed interventions or programs aggravated the situation. Respondents with links to donor organizations even suggested that grantees actively misrepresented results to suggest better outputs, outcomes, and impacts than had actually been achieved. Respondents attributed this reluctance to be transparent to concerns over reputational damage and fears over the loss of funding, notwithstanding the understanding among respondents that failing to report failure meant it was more difficult to improve the design and delivery of conservation interventions.

### ***Has the sense of community engagement as fundamental to conservation — or not — changed?***

Practitioners universally held that community engagement will continue to remain fundamental to the effective, appropriate, and acceptable implementation of biodiversity conservation initiatives. Statements tended to indicate that the importance of community engagement is not, and should not be, open to question. Paradoxically, this sense persists even in the face of conventional conservation practice, which otherwise seems to emphasize the more traditional elements of state-imposed protected areas controlled

and protected by paramilitary forces implementing “fines and fences” approaches. The contradiction in these positions warrants further exploration. Are practitioners operating in a manner that undermines government policy? Are their actions consistently undone by insufficient or incomplete community engagement policies? Can a single institution employ a mix of community engagement and law enforcement approaches? Do these different approaches complement or contradict each other? Unfortunately, we lack the empirical analysis needed to answer these questions, although it could be important to compile it.

The information provided by respondents indicates that, regardless of where they fall along the continuum from top-down conservation education to bottom-up empowerment, conservation practitioners undertake community engagement for two very different reasons. Conservation practitioners considered earlier forms of engagement practical and pragmatic, and designed to improve the delivery of conservation outcomes and make them more cost-effective, but also recognised that a moral, rights-based agenda also drove forms of engagement. Practitioners can undertake the former or not, depending on circumstances and evidence of practical outcomes; the latter remains imperative in a world where the rights of all need respecting.

### ***What were the key perspectives of the parties engaged in the process?***

The detailed discussions with practitioners working in the field; the organizations that support them with technical and financial inputs; and researchers, policymakers, theoreticians, and practitioners in Washington, D.C., covered similar ground from which we can draw key perspectives or positions.

- Practitioners, governments, donors, businesses, and communities use keywords with new, complex, contested, and changing interpretations — such as “community,” “engagement,” “conservation,” “nature,” “benefits,” and many more — central to this discussion. Many of these terms have taken on contemporary meanings distinct from how others understood and used them in the early days of community-engaged conservation. For example, communities in East Africa today structure themselves and function very differently than communities 40 years ago. Demographic compositions are shifting as a result of rapid population growth, creating a high proportion of youth, who now dominate East African society in many respects. These youth are better educated, more aware of the world around them, and far more intimately connected than their parents and grandparents to the regional and global worlds outside of the geographic boundaries of their community. They also have very different ambitions, expectations, and opportunities. Their understanding of engagement and their accompanying expectations evolved greatly among community-based organizations undertaking it as well as within communities experiencing it. The insertion of social science, anthropological, spiritual, and philosophical perspectives into conservation challenges understandings of nature previously driven by biology, creating perhaps even more difficulty.
- The community of conservation practitioners, researchers and policymakers must operate with ever-changing terminologies and taxonomies of community engagement, as well as rapidly changing methods, evolving methodologies, and even new epistemologies to examine its impact. It will be exceedingly difficult for community-engaged conservation to mature into a coherent and rigorous practice until community engagement approaches find a way to systematically internalize this fluid operational landscape. This maturity will require practitioners to find some sort of common ground within the broadly used terms, tools, and approaches. However, finding this common ground will not be easy, as it will require some practitioners to give up on organizationally branded approaches often seen as marketing tools.
- Developing common methods for engaging communities — to which conservation practitioners can apply different tools, with common high-order objectives and indicators at impact levels — would significantly strengthen the validation of community engagement in conservation. Social scientists will make significant and essential contributions in this respect. However, the almost infinite variety of site-characteristic contexts encountered by practitioners — including those affecting biodiversity;

biophysical nature; and cultural, social, and political environments — precludes the use of boilerplate models for the design and implementation of interventions on the ground. This dichotomy will always represent a crucial challenge in the design of effective interventions. Truly used and effective common methods will need to provide the flexibility to accommodate these site-based differences.

- Nature conservation occurs in a rapidly changing social, economic, and political world, and particularly one in which observers can know about events globally in minutes. This takes on a particular relevance for community engagement since the nature of community and what it means changes so fast. As in most other low- and middle-income countries, communities in East Africa are becoming more youthful, gender-aware, and ethnically mixed, with altered geographies and economies, global connectedness, and evolving ambitions and expectations. Conservation programs and their engagement strategies must respond to these changes and evolve as rapidly as the nature of the communities themselves.
- Information and evidence can be both quantitative and qualitative. Conservation practitioners should not discount qualitative evidence, particularly narrative reporting, which explains context and allows for culturally sensitive interpretation, as it can play a valuable part in determining and explaining how impacts result from interventions. Wherever warranted, these qualitative approaches can create the foundation for more rigorous qualitative work to enhance lessons learned and adaptive management.

***What should be done to assess and verify best practices, retrospectively and going forward?***

- Clarify the range of assumptions used by different parties about the necessity of community engagement, and why and how it works, in order to design theories of change based on relevant assumptions and test them in the context of the intervention.
- Develop a shared language (e.g., meta-data fields) for community engagement to facilitate comparisons and improve searches for existing data (see preliminary work on classifying engagement approaches by a set of defining characteristics).
- Establish a mechanism for the sharing of evidence between organizations and sectors — including the coordination, collation, analysis and interpretation of data — that allows practitioners, planners, donors, and academics to communicate and share experiences and lessons learned.
- Develop an agreed-upon mechanism with the community of practitioners for the confidential collation and “daylighting” of community engagement failures by a neutral third party without vested interests in the outcomes of the engagement as a service to clients, implementers, and donors of community engagement programs. All members of the conservation community should have an interest in providing this service and could be expected to fund it.
- An increase in synchronicity of approaches used to apply an evidence-based engagement of communities in conservation will prove more feasible if we can establish platforms and tools for practitioners to easily share their approaches, results, and lessons learned. This could include regional congresses and more rigorous requirements for evidence-based results from funders.

## **D. Conclusions**

We can draw some high-level conclusions from the discussions held in the field and Washington, D.C., concerning community engagement in biodiversity conservation. This includes the following:

- Practitioners, donors, and government bodies agree on the need for community engagement and its value but vary in how they understand and carry it out in practice. Establishing a common understanding of community engagement would help. This will not come about easily in the context of widely varying institutional priorities and perspectives, but it would help to craft a definition or description of the high-order intentions and values of community engagement in biodiversity conservation.

- Practical and moral, rights-related reasons exist for community engagement, giving rise to different explanations and justifications as well as an emphasis on its different forms. Although different in nature — and drawing on various perspectives — the underlying reasons for engaging communities in conservation remain relevant to the design and implementation of initiatives.
- Respondents widely acknowledged and accepted the need and desirability for conservation institutions to move community engagement from lower-order or consultative forms to higher-order partnerships and empowerment. However, our experience and rapid literature review suggest that this idea takes on many forms when put into practice, and conservation practitioners do not consistently or rigorously apply these principles to empower communities as equal partners in the work of nature conservation. While not entirely clear, the reasons for this may include factors like the influence of national legislation and international conventions on relations between government authorities and communities; government accountability or a lack thereof; ongoing “fines and fences” approaches, primarily but not exclusively among government institutions; and the critical role and influence of champions.
- Establishing and voicing the institutional, financial, and social conditions that will allow community engagement to move from “informing” to “empowering” within the operational context of government perspectives and prerogatives — and the constraints of international and local conservation organizations — will prove essential.
- Practitioners see systemic barriers to achieving effective community engagement resulting from the nature of international development programming and the relationship between donors, clients, and implementers. Investigating and engaging with these technical and operational concerns may provide paths to solutions to some of the concerns raised by the respondents interviewed in East Africa and mirrored in discussions in Washington, D.C.
- Practitioners suggested that practical, technical, and institutional constraints prevented information sharing on outcomes of community engagement, especially in situations where the outcomes were not positive. Among these practitioners, concerns arose primarily over the reputation of their organizations and the fear of loss of funding; most felt a widespread concern that no one funds failure. At the same time, many recognize this hesitation toward transparency and sharing findings and lessons learned, even within organizations, as a significant constraint on their ability to improve the performance of community engagement.
- Respondents understand the diversity of approaches to community engagement as the direct result of responding appropriately to the perceived infinite diversity of the settings in program implementation. At the same time, respondents recognized that this diversity of approaches constrains their ability to share results, draw high-level conclusions about the impact of their programs, and employ adaptive management to improve them. It remains an open question whether the positive outcomes from the diversity of interventions outweighs the negative implications of the inability to achieve cross-learning through comparative analysis between projects, programs, and organizations.

## **E. Recommendations for Next Steps: Building a Conservation Solutions Laboratory Network**

Conservation practitioners have learned much that could strengthen the participation of communities in conservation and help build recognition of the centrality of their role, equip them to take on responsibility for conserving their lands and resources, and preserve their dignity as equal partners in the conservation endeavor. Much has also been learned to enhance the social, financial, and biodiversity benefits derived by communities from biodiversity conservation programs.

However, evaluating and sharing these lessons has been ad hoc and without rigor, and the topics covered clearly warrant a more vigorous assessment. Chemonics, an important practitioner in biodiversity conservation, with a wealth of practical in-field experience — together with Arizona State University, with its cutting-edge capacity for research and partnership through CSL — possess the capacity to support the biodiversity sector in developing mechanisms to design, implement, and evaluate their community engagement programs more systematically. We recommend carrying out one or more regional events to provide community engagement stakeholders with an opportunity to share experiences, learn from each other, and articulate strategies for future practice. The individuals and groups we met expressed enthusiasm for convening such a regional event to broaden and deepen this conversation and allow practitioners the time and opportunity to process experiences and build a more vibrant communications framework. The structure, content, and outcomes from this event could include the following:

- *Talk about success, failure, and the lessons from each.* A regional event should serve as a vehicle to facilitate meaningful assessment and sharing of lessons and move us in the direction of better practices.
- *Bring in key government decision-makers.* Attendance and participation must include high-level government actors to change the rules and policies that often constrain community engagement in biodiversity conservation. There are also opportunities to build from important previous efforts (Brown 1996, Brown et al. 1990, Shafer 2015).
- *Build case studies.* A regional event should produce case studies that are tangible and replicable, and that cover the very wide range of conditions and context in which we work.
- *Gather, analyze, and interpret evidence.* The event should require attending practitioners to share and discuss the evidence they have accumulated to demonstrate the results from their work in engaging communities at all levels. The event can also represent a first step toward a repository for this data and create the impetus for funders, communities, and governments to require supportive evidence as part of all community engagement in biodiversity and climate initiatives.
- *Create a communications framework for community engagement in conservation.* A solitary stand-alone event can provide a valuable spark to encourage greater commitment to evidence-based community engagement, but this spark will not endure unless the event also establishes a continuous communications framework to share, critique, and build on theory and practice. The regional event or events should include a session dedicated to constructing and enacting this communications framework, including commitments to house and maintain it. The framework should provide easy access for practitioners to post experiences, outcomes, lessons, interests, and needs, and should serve as a forum accessible to communities, NGOs, community-based organizations, governments, funders, and businesses. The funding to fully develop and build out the proposed framework needs securing prior to the implementation of the regional event to ensure that this essential instrument becomes a central output of the event.

To ensure wide attendance, we propose planning the event for a 2019 date that will not conflict with other leading international or regional meetings. We consider holding the event in eastern or southern Africa preferable because it would provide access to many powerful and long-standing case studies; field trip opportunities; and a diverse array of practitioners, donors, and businesses. It also offers ease of access for participants from Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The results from the event can allow Chemonics and CSL to determine if additional events are warranted for other regions, including the Americas and Asia.

The outcomes from this event and the communications framework and network it creates can establish Chemonics and the CSL as leading voices in community engaged conservation and provide an essential platform if this work ever becomes a more rigorous, evidence-driven practice.

## F. Annex: Individuals and Institutions Met With

### International institutions

#### Kenya

Edoardo Zandri, chief, Scientific Assessments Branch, U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP)  
Alex Forbes, programme officer, Poverty Environment Initiative, UNEP  
Daniel Pouakouyou, regional technical advisor for Africa, UNEP  
Maxwell Gomra, director, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, UNEP  
Sandor Frigyik, programme management officer, UNEP

#### Tanzania

Jennifer Talbot, chief of party, RTI Consultants/USAID  
Thadeus Binamungu, deputy chief of party, RTI International

### Civil society institutions

#### Kenya

Kaddu Sebunya, president, African Wildlife Foundation  
Per Karlsson, program design manager, African Wildlife Foundation  
Evelyn Namvua, African Biodiversity Collaboration Group/Wildlife Conservation Society

#### Tanzania

Dr. Tim Davenport, Africa Special Species Program Director, Wildlife Conservation Society  
Daudi Peterson, executive director, Dorobo Fund  
Dr. Laly Lichtenfeld, CEO, Tanzania People and Wildlife  
Chira Schouten, coordinator, Northern Tanzania Rangelands Institute, The Nature Conservancy, Arusha  
Brenda Bergman, Northern Tanzania Rangelands Institute/USAID  
David Beroff, field director, Carbon Tanzania  
Lindsey West, director, SeaSense  
Dr. Julius Francis, executive director, Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association  
Caroline Sanga, director, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE)  
Asukile Kajuni, deputy program director, World Wildlife Fund — Tanzania

#### Uganda

Lilly Ajarova, executive director, Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservation Trust  
Chris Sandbrook, director of the Master of Philosophy in conservation leadership, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge  
David Tumusiime, associate professor of environment and natural resources, Department of Forestry, Makerere University  
Connor Joseph Cavanagh, research fellow, Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Norwegian University of Life Science  
Juliet Kyokunda, executive director, Uganda Biodiversity Fund  
Simon Weredwong, programme manager, Uganda Biodiversity Fund  
Arthur Mugisha, chairman of the board, Uganda Biodiversity Fund  
Simon Nampindo, country director, Wildlife Conservation Society, Uganda Program  
Moses Nyango, senior project officer, Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, Wildlife Conservation Society, Uganda Program  
Paul Mulondo, project coordinator, African Biodiversity Collaborative Group, Wildlife Conservation Society, Uganda Program  
Sudi Bamulesewa, country director, African Wildlife Foundation  
Steven Asuma, country director, Fauna & Flora International  
Rogers Niwamanya, programme manager, Fauna & Flora International

William Olupot, CEO, Nature and Livelihoods  
Anna Behm Masozera, director, International Gorilla Conservation Programme  
Peter Apell, acting director, Jane Goodall Institute  
Osman Anewa Amulla, natural resources and livelihoods manager, Jane Goodall Institute  
Robert Atugonza, natural resources and livelihoods officer, Jane Goodall Institute  
Brian Gonzaga, natural resources and livelihoods assistant, Jane Goodall Institute  
Ambrose Bugaari, trust administrator, Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust  
John De Coninck, programme advisor, Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda  
Helga Rainer, conservation program director, Arcus Foundation

## Government institutions

### Kenya

Jonathan Kirui, assistant director, Community Wildlife Service, Kenya Wildlife Services

### Uganda

John Makombo, deputy director, Uganda Wildlife Authority  
Pamela Anying, assistant director, Community Conservation Department, Uganda Wildlife Authority  
Shawna Hirsh, Environment & Natural Resources unit leader, USAID/Uganda  
Fiona Florence Driciru, partnerships officer, National Forest Authority

## Unaffiliated individuals

### Kenya

Fiona Percy, regional coordinator, African Adaptation Learning Program, CARE Denmark  
Jens Rydder, managing director, SustainNet Group Ltd.  
Edmund Barrow, consultant, formerly head of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN's) Global Ecosystem Management Programme

### Uganda

Cornelius Kazora, consultant  
Lan Yin Hsiao, consultant, co-chair, IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy, Theme on Environment and Peace, honorary member, ICCA Consortium

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