

Is it worth the effort and expense?

The scale of a transboundary conservation initiative should be determined after a thorough analysis of the costs and benefits

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WORLDWIDE, the number of transboundary protected area complexes has been increasing exponentially. According to the most recent survey (Zbicz 2001), there were 169 in 2001 (involving a total of 666 protected areas) compared to 136 in 1997 and only 59 in 1988. To some extent, the apparent increase is due to the recent recognition (and therefore counting) of situations where protected areas adjoin one another across national boundaries, although actual cooperation might be minimal. But it also indicates that transboundary conservation has achieved greater prominence in the eyes of governments and non-governmental organisations in recent years as a means for regional cooperation and effective landscape-scale or eco-regional conservation.

At first glance this increase in effort and attention seems entirely positive, resulting as it might in better conservation and cooperation among countries to the benefit of all. However, transboundary conservation is but one of many options for the investment of scarce conservation resources; the added value of any given transboundary initiative needs to be examined critically to determine if it is really justified, given that the transaction costs of dealing with the political, social and economic dimensions of transboundary cooperation can be high. At present, however, no comprehensive critical review of the impacts of transboundary conservation programs has been produced to guide thinking and decision-making in this regard.

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The term 'transboundary conservation' is used here to indicate a broad suite of possible arrangements where conservation programs straddle national boundaries. There is always a debate about typologies (see page 4), but it is perhaps most useful to regard all arrangements as forms of transboundary natural resource management (TBNRM); as Bakarr indicates in this edition, the term transboundary conservation area (TBCA) embraces most forms of TBNRM. At one end of the spectrum are situations where there is a need for cooperation across national boundaries for economic development based on natural resource management in shared ecosystems. At the other, there is a more restrictive concept of adjacent protected areas (coinciding with the last of Bakarr's typology on page 4), where a transboundary protected area (TBPA) is:

An area of land and/or sea that straddles one or more boundaries between states or sub-national units such as provinces and regions, autonomous areas and/or areas beyond the limits of national sovereignty or jurisdiction, whose constituent parts are ... especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and

managed cooperatively through legal or other effective means (Sandwith et al. 2001)

There are, of course, many combinations and permutations of situations between these two extremes; indeed this heterogeneity is one of the characteristics of transboundary conservation programs. There is no single recipe or formulation for all situations, and implementation really does require a flexible and adaptive management approach.

Bearing this in mind, a number of conservation agencies have sought to assist countries and authorities to plan and manage transboundary conservation programs more effectively. At a global scale, IUCN has promoted discussion regarding 'parks for peace' and provided guidance to protected-area managers regarding best practice in implementing programs for both biodiversity conservation and maintaining peaceful cooperation. This guidance (Sandwith et al. 2001) canvasses the following nine areas for the development of TBPA's:

- 1) **identifying and promoting common values:** the purpose of the TBPA is paramount, setting a vision for the cooperative implementation of a conservation and development program. It is against this vision that the impact of the TBPA program for biodiversity conservation, peace and cooperation must be assessed;
- 2) **involving and benefiting local people:** the social impact of international boundaries has specific relevance for communities living there. In many cases, communities are divided by political boundaries or by economic marginalisation and are far from the centres of power and decision-making. Specific efforts must be made to involve communities in these transboundary situations and to ensure that they benefit from transboundary cooperation and development;
- 3) **obtaining and maintaining the support of decision-makers:** of necessity, TBPA programs involve multiple levels of jurisdiction within and between countries. It is usually necessary to engage with structures at all levels in parallel, because progress at a local level can be inhibited by the absence of a supportive mandate at the national level. Similarly, high-level cooperation does not automatically translate into cooperation on the ground;
- 4) **promoting coordinated and cooperative activities:** this should be done at two levels. First, expertise should be developed and exchanged through coordination structures, communication systems and joint working groups. Second, tangible and useful areas of cooperation should be developed; this could take the form of small, joint projects concerning shared problems such as fire management, or the management of animal populations that traverse the boundaries;
- 5) **achieving coordinated planning and protected area development:** planning is essential if the purposes of

TBPAs are to be translated into effective management and development. Activities must be harmonised across the boundaries to avoid the juxtaposition of incompatible activities. Joint planning and zonation supported by shared information systems can be a powerful unifying process for TBPA development;

- 6) **developing cooperative agreements:** both formal and informal agreements can be used to declare common interests, agree on objectives, state guiding principles and plan and implement management programs. Agreements are required to secure the endorsement of relevant authorities and accountability among the stakeholders. The peace and cooperation guidelines provide examples of several legal precedents for transboundary protocols and agreements;
- 7) **working towards funding sustainability:** one of the benefits of transboundary conservation is an increase in the efficiency of management and reduction in costs while ensuring increased economic and other benefits. In addition, a cooperative approach to seeking funds from donors, the private sector and NGO community may be more powerful in achieving appropriate thresholds of development and financial sustainability;
- 8) **monitoring and assessing progress:** the evaluation of progress in TBPA programs against specified goals is essential if the investment is to be justified. The peace and cooperation guidelines provide some generic tools, including a means to assess the degree of cooperation; and
- 9) **dealing with tension and armed conflict:** protected areas on international boundaries are often affected in situations of tension or armed conflict. The guidelines include a draft code for TBPAs in times of peace and armed conflict, supporting the maintenance of peace and cooperation and preparing and guiding authorities and agencies on how to deal with conflict situations.

How much cooperation?

The Biodiversity Support Program (BSP) examined TBNRM in sub-Saharan Africa and provided useful guidance on the process by which TBNRM takes place (van der Linde et al. 2001), particularly on the assessment of relevant issues in a given transboundary context as a means to guide the prioritisation of conservation programs. The peace and cooperation guidelines provide a protocol for analysing the threats and opportunities that affect the achievement of natural resource management objectives and targets. In a tropical forest, for example, one might start by examining the biodiversity or natural resource components on each side of the border and the implications for the neighbouring countries. In Park w, a TBCA named for the peculiar shape of the river in the area and shared by Niger, Burkina Faso and Benin, the poaching of elephants in Benin causes cross-border movement into adjacent countries and subsequent over-population on the Niger side. This is clearly a case where the objectives for managing elephant populations in one country are being affected by the policies and management regimes of the others, and a clear indication that a harmonised policy and management regime may be needed.

There are also social connotations and implications. Community rights to seasonal fishing are recognised in Burkina Faso, whereas the authorities in Niger do not allow any fishing. At the local community level, this has resulted in inequitable access to natural resources and conflicts among users. Managers also find it difficult to regulate use in a shared ecosystem by focusing only on one group of users.

In other cases, there may be no compelling rationale for transboundary management, since management activities applied nationally may be sufficient to counter existing threats. In these, cooperation might usefully focus on communication and the sharing of skills and experiences rather than on direct cooperative management.

Thus, different levels of need dictate the level and cost of the TBCA. In essence, the BSP argues for a strategic and focused approach to TBNRM, where the specific objectives of any program should determine the nature and level of any engagement.

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Be clear on purpose

There is a tendency amongst the conservation community to look for a 'one size fits all' solution to conservation management; a formulaic response to the transboundary conservation challenge has been called for in the past. However, contemporary guidance indicates that there is a need to polish the tools of transboundary conservation to accommodate the specific needs of particular circumstances. In general, an adaptive management approach should be adopted, guided by a clear rationale for the TBCA and by measurable targets for achieving impact in terms of that rationale. In TBPAs, this impact must be regarded as primarily biological, but large-scale conservation initiatives also carry significant social, economic, institutional and political implications. Transboundary conservation initiatives will always have value, but this value can be enhanced when the rationale and purpose of the program are clearly stated and supported by the monitoring and evaluation of progress against explicit targets.

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