



# Role of Plant Diversity in Poverty Alleviation

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## Introduction :

Seventy percent of the world's poor live in rural areas and depend directly on biodiversity for their survival and well-being. The urban poor also rely upon biodiversity, not only for the production of food and other necessary goods, but also for ecosystem services such as the maintenance of air and water quality and the breakdown of waste. The impact of environmental degradation is most severe for people living in poverty, because they have few livelihood options to fall back on. Biodiversity within species, between species and of ecosystems is crucial to poverty alleviation and development:

Species diversity provides goods that can be used for subsistence, barter and trade. Some examples of these goods include:

- ◆ foods such as fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, roots, fish and meat, milk and eggs,
- ◆ fibers, leather and pelts,
- ◆ medicinal plants,
- ◆ firewood and other fuels, building materials such as wood for furniture, grasses and reeds for baskets etc.

Species diversity often contributes to development by supplying material used or small-income generating activities, such as the sale of craft items, local foods or traditional medicines.

The world's poor, particularly in rural areas, depend on biological resources for as much as 90% of their needs, including food, fuel, medicine, shelter and transportation. The loss of biodiversity through the reduction of crop and livestock genetic diversity and the decreased availability of wild biological resources threatens food and livelihood security for the poor.

Many families in the developing world depend on biological resources, collected from their surrounding environment, for their day to day needs. A shortage of these resources increases the workload of families, including children, which makes it harder for them to attend school.

The Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes that gender equality and women's empowerment are important prerequisites for the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development. Biodiversity degradation makes the daily tasks of women more time-consuming and difficult, due to a reduced availability of firewood, non-timber forest products and potable water.

Biodiversity loss directly affects the quality and quantity of ecosystem services provided, such as carbon sequestration, watershed protection, soil fertility, recycling of nutrients, control of erosion and pollination of crops and trees.

A stronger partnership between all stakeholders, from the global to the local level, is necessary to better integrate biodiversity considerations into poverty alleviation strategies and development programs.

Residents of rich countries and residents of poor countries are often assumed to be in opposition on this matter. On the one hand, some analysts tend to blame the loss of biodiversity on alleged excessive use of natural resources by residents of poor countries, while on the other hand there are those who blame residents of rich countries for alleged unsustainable livelihood strategies. Secondly, the debate on the contested relationship between biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation is often characterized by a tussle between proponents of biodiversity conservation and human rights/anti-poverty activists.



Clearly, therefore, any proposal put forward for reconciling poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation is likely to continue being contested, depending on the disciplines or areas of operation of the individuals involved.

Linkages between poverty and conservation are dynamic and context-specific, reflecting geography, scale, and social and political issues and also to eliminate poverty on the groups involved most biologically diverse country in the world, with between 250,000 and one million species, many of which are endemic. The Constitution not only commits government to biodiversity conservation, but also to eliminating poverty. Over half of South Africa's 44 million people live in poverty, with over 70% of these living in rural areas. In the light of mounting concerns about environmental degradation, the post-apartheid government has made an attempt in its policy formulation to ensure that poverty alleviation strategies incorporate environmental concerns, and that some biodiversity conservation strategies make a contribution to poverty alleviation.

We wish briefly to explore what we think are some of the synergies and conflicts in countries attempts to reconcile biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation .Local people are encouraged to allow the conservation of the area to continue, in exchange for economic benefits from ecotourism. Private investors are encouraged to enter into deals with these communities, as a result of which there has been an increase in land dedicated to conservation. However, critics argue that, more often than not, the need for economic benefits outside the protected area is far greater than the benefits yielded by such areas. In other words, these projects are only viable in situations where there are few poor people. Additionally, weaker property rights of the rural poor jeopardize equitable arrangements with investors; this undermines poverty alleviation and conservation efforts.

Conservation agriculture forms a central component of the government's approach to poverty alleviation and conservation. A key principle of the programme is that if land degradation is addressed and sustainable natural resource utilization promoted,

land and other natural resources have a meaningful chance of contributing to the alleviation of poverty. It must be noted that in some cases it is seen mainly as a short-term poverty relief measure, using government poverty relief funding, and takes a technically old fashioned labour intensive public works approach to conservation that may reduce the chances of sustainable enhancement of the natural resource base.

As a way of addressing conservation and poverty, local communities are given temporary employment, again using poverty relief funding, to clear alien vegetation all over the country alleviation, notably through the transfer of state forests to community ownership, is largely dependent on alien species. These controversies represent some of the challenges associated with reconciling conservation and poverty alleviation.

## Conclusion

We believe that any country is not unique in struggling to reconcile poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation. Such challenges should be expected wherever there is a history of political upheavals that exacerbates poverty. Many governments that have emerged from colonialism within the last 50 years or so find themselves having to make trade-offs between meeting the immediate livelihood needs of all their people and safeguarding the environment for future generations. While we agree with the numerous challenges facing biodiversity conservation, we disagree with their emphasis on poverty alleviation strategies as one of the challenges facing biodiversity conservation. We believe that if any blame should be assigned, it should be on the massive inequalities - that often translate into poverty - that still exist in former colonies. Thus, the trial-and-error strategies of poverty alleviation, which often pose a threat to the environment, are not likely to yield meaningful results if the historical, political, social and geographical contexts are ignored. Lastly, even though it is problematic to ensure adequate protection of nature through these various integrations of poverty alleviation and conservation, it has become clear that there is no future for fortress conservation that ignores the needs and rights of the rural poor.