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 **successstories**

Issue 3 - 2010

Understanding how wetland management methods can reduce poverty

Good practices

IWMI and Wetlands International published the findings of the project in the peer-reviewed report, *Good practices and lessons learned in integrating ecosystem conservation with poverty reduction objectives in wetlands* and the book, *Planting trees to eat fish*. Experiences from the four case studies and seven past experiences were used to demonstrate how improving livelihoods and conserving wetlands can go hand in hand.



Farming, gardening and livestock rearing are common and potentially sustainable practices around most wetlands.

Wetlands are vital ecosystems that also provide livelihoods for millions of people who live within and around them. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) called for different sectors to join forces to secure wetland environments in the context of sustainable development and improving human well-being. This was the motivation for the three-year Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Project (WPRP) carried out by Wetlands International, which included IWMI as a partner. The aim was to explore and understand how wetland conservation initiatives can help improve livelihoods. Wetlands International conducted demonstration projects, one each in Kenya, Mali, Malawi, Zambia and Indonesia. IWMI researchers helped evaluate the progress and eventual success of these projects. The IWMI team also assessed seven other projects with similar objectives, analyzed existing literature on past wetlands conservation and poverty-reduction efforts, and synthesized the findings.

One case study looked at how *dambos* – wet, grassy valleys or depressions where water seeps to the surface – can be farmed sustainably to improve livelihoods. If *dambos* are mismanaged or overused, which was starting to happen at the six project sites in Malawi and Zambia, they become quickly degraded. The project built on the local knowledge of farmers to identify how each *dambo* ecosystem functioned. Researchers and staff of the demonstration projects worked with local people at each site to provide training on sound soil and water management practices. The project’s ‘functional landscape’ approach helped villagers learn how the *dambo* functioned within the broader environment. This meant that

they could understand that some of the problems they faced (such as the buildup of sediments) were caused by actions outside the immediate area (by erosion of uplands caused by deforestation), and the need to manage the landscape as a single system.

Providing food security

Before the WPRP, there were cases where people had died from starvation due to food shortages. By the end of the two-year program, many more people had access to sufficient water to grow their own vegetables. A key achievement, therefore, was that villagers had security of food supplies during the long, dry months. They also benefited from other spin-offs. For example, they gained better nutrition by being able to grow a wider variety of crops and were able to invest in their education and health because they could now save money. Community cohesion engendered by the project boosted self-confidence and people’s capacity to act collectively. The project’s creation of local institutions to act as multistakeholder platforms for resolving conflicts and planning for the future helped build local capacities to sustain management efforts following the project.

The *Good Practices* report was widely distributed. It is presently being used by students and course developers at the Wetland Alliance for Training, Education and Research in KwaZulu–Natal, South Africa, and at the Water, Engineering and Development Centre at Loughborough University in the UK. Other recipients include students, teachers and researchers in Kenya, Thailand and India, plus Birdlife International and the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment. The results were presented at the Wuhan International Forum on Water Resources and Sustainable Development in 2009.

Donors and collaborators

IWMI worked with Wetlands International during the WPRP. The funds were specifically for IWMI’s inputs to the WPRP through reports and participation at the project inception (Kenya), review (Malawi) and final wrap-up (Mali) meetings.

For more information

IWMI report:

For more information on the project and to acquire a copy of the report, *Good practices and lessons learned in integrating ecosystem conservation with poverty reduction objectives in wetlands*, visit: www.ramsar.org/cda/ramsar/display/main/main.jsp?zn=ramsar&cp=1-26-45-84%5E16998_4000_2__