

# BUILDING THE POLICIES THAT STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION

Policy Brief Series: Volume 1 Issue 1 August 2024



EDITED BY: RACHEL ASHEGBOFE IKEMEH

The discourse on community conservation is no longer only a paradigm shift in natural resource management; it has been globally accepted and extensively adopted in many parts of the world, widely reinforcing the critical role of Indigenous communities in biodiversity management. The global 30 x 30 target —aiming to protect 30% of the planet equitably and effectively by 2030—offers a chance to enhance local involvement and deepen engagement that guarantees conservation solutions are effective but sustainable over the long term.

To strengthen community-based conservation, policymakers and conservation practitioners must work together, adopt good governance, push for increased funding, and invest in building the capacities of Indigenous people. Policymakers can build a strong framework that encourages sustainable conservation efforts and provides communities with the tools to play an active role in effectively conserving their natural environment.

### **Key messages:**

- Ensuring inclusive policy development. Engaging local communities in decision-making increases the legitimacy of policies and ensures that local knowledge and values are incorporated into conservation strategies.
- Policymakers should prioritize frameworks that support continuous assessment and flexibility of conservation policies based on real-time data and community feedback. By institutionalizing mechanisms for feedback and learning, policymakers can ensure that conservation efforts remain relevant and effective over time, enhancing community resilience and engagement.
- Collaboration among government agencies, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and local communities can amplify resources, expertise, and outreach efforts.
- Clear and transparent communication strategies are necessary to convey the objectives, processes, and expected outcomes of new, improved and updated policies.
- Education and capacity-building initiatives are vital for empowering communities and conservation practitioners. The collective of policymakers and conservation organizations should invest in training programs that enhance the skills and knowledge of local stakeholders, enabling them to actively participate in conservation planning and implementation.
- Elevate community conservation initiatives on the political agenda. We must leverage data, success stories, and case studies to demonstrate the impact of community-led conservation efforts.

In this briefing note, we emphasize the need to create robust policy frameworks that support sustainable conservation efforts and empower communities to play an active role in safeguarding biodiversity. As we move forward, it is essential to recognize that the success of conservation actions lies in the ability to harmonize diverse interests, foster a shared commitment to conservation goals and improve the effectiveness of both policy and of conservation practice at the grassroots.

## TRADITIONAL TOP-DOWN APPROACHES IN GOVERNANCE OFTEN FAIL TO ADDRESS THE INTRINSIC NEEDS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

Recognizing the invaluable local knowledge that communities possess, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of policies

Data-driven, evidence-based decision-making guards against misinformation and lobbying.

Using data analytics and geographical information systems, policymakers can identify crucial locations for intervention and tailor conservation policies to reflect Indigenous people's priorities.<sup>1</sup> This trend toward technology-driven involvement results in a more inclusive policymaking process that strengthens local voices and initiatives. There should also be a focus on multidisciplinary collaboration, i.e., ecology, sociology, economics, and cultural studies all play a role in developing effective conservation policy. **Interdisciplinary methods, which encourage relationships between conservationists, community leaders, and government can lead to more comprehensive solutions that take ecological integrity and social equity into consideration.**

Inclusivity in policy development and equitable governance is pivotal to biodiversity conservation.

The idea of "co-production" in policymaking has gained traction in governance,<sup>2</sup> where legislators and communities collaborate to develop policies. This concept acknowledges that communities have essential local knowledge that may greatly improve policy effectiveness. **Policymakers may foster a sense of ownership and responsibility for conservation initiatives by including indigenous people in the decision-making processes.** This builds the resilience of local communities as they adjust to varied changes and raises the possibility of effective implementation.



## CHALLENGES TO COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION ARE BARRIERS TO POLICIES.

Understanding the challenges to community-based conservation is vital for developing effective policies.

### ➤ LAND TENURE

Challenges exist in the status and overlap of the exact extent of community lands whether claimed or recognized, even so the extent of their overlap can be a limiting factor in the effective governance and management of such areas for conservation. The recognition of collective tenure rights represents an important enabling factor for communities to achieve positive conservation outcomes.<sup>3</sup> More so, in Nigeria where the Land Use Act of 1978 vests all land in the government to govern and manage in trust for the people.

### ➤ INSECURITY

Across Nigeria, insecurity has been a major deterrent to reasonable-paced socio-economic progress. For example, in the Niger Delta there has been a serious challenge of insecurity and instability that has festered over the years and has made cultism, piracy, militancy, kidnapping, oil bunkering and other social vices thrive. This problem has been linked to the political marginalization of the region, resource control, underdevelopment and related issues.<sup>4</sup>

### ➤ INSUFFICIENT FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Funding is needed to conserve and manage biodiversity effectively. However, finding consistent funding sources is a common challenge for conservation organizations seeking to guarantee the long-term sustainability of conservation work let alone communities accessing this financial resource while managing the natural resource they depend on for livelihood.

### ➤ INSUFFICIENT TECHNICAL CAPACITY

The existing crisis facing biodiversity need a high degree of skill application, specialization, and technology. Local communities have traditional expertise to tackle traditional problems; even so, some current difficulties require modern technologies, which communities lack.

### Box 1

#### THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM – CLIMATE CHANGE!

- Climate change is the most pressing concern when it comes to effective policies and conservation efforts.

Whereas despite being disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change, indigenous peoples and local communities whose livelihoods depend on nature are often not consulted in the formulation of climate-mitigation and adaptation policy.<sup>5</sup> The consequences of climate change are getting worse, which presents complicated problems for biodiversity protection. Climate change is predicted to have major implications for species and ecosystems, acting as a driver of biodiversity loss in its own right<sup>6</sup> and amplifying the effects of existing threats. A new attitude may be needed, not only for designing interventions and setting conservation goals, but in designing conservation policies, practices, and in enacting legislation which are often very regionally or nationally focused. Meanwhile, it is critical to include biodiversity conservation in all-encompassing policy frameworks to support coordinated, cross-sectoral efforts, particularly at the local level where the effects of climate change are most felt.



# A FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN POLICY-MAKING

Understanding the art of engagement is crucial for formulating effective conservation policies that will promote community conservation.

- Stakeholder mapping and network analysis is essential to ensure that strategic steps are taken in developing policies.<sup>7</sup> Strategy is required if policies must translate to implementation. In community conservation, policies must align with local ecological and cultural priorities. By grasping the nuances of engagement, policymakers can navigate the complex decision-making landscape at the community level. At its core, community engagement is about communication and understanding. It entails translating community needs into a compelling narrative for policy development, requiring a clear understanding of the issues and political context at different levels and scales even within communities. Effective engagement articulates the benefits of conservation not just in environmental terms but also in social, economic, and cultural contexts. This holistic approach bridges scientific evidence and policy action, ensuring community voices are included in decision-making.
- Building coalitions and partnerships is vital for successful engagement. Community conservation involves various stakeholders, including local governments, NGOs, indigenous groups, and private sectors. By fostering collaboration, effective engagement can help to amplify their individual interests and influences. Such partnerships enhance the legitimacy of policies which will hitherto be shaped by those affected by it.
- Understanding the policy landscape is critical for effective engagement. Policymaking is influenced by political ideologies, economic factors, and public opinion even at the local level. Proper community engagement must navigate these dynamics, strategically positioning and aligning their diverse ideas within the broader discourse.

## Box 2

### HOW IMPORTANT IS THE ART OF ENGAGEMENT?

- Identifying key decision-makers within the community and leveraging timing can maximize impact, ensuring engagement efforts remain relevant.
- Measuring the impact of engagement is essential for improvement. Policymakers should evaluate their effectiveness in garnering local support for policy formulation and/or changes through solid community engagement. Tracking policy shifts, assessing awareness levels, and gauging community involvement can refine strategies and strengthen community conservation. Viewing engagement as an ongoing process is vital for achieving sustainable outcomes.



## CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION

These case studies offer insights into the practical application of conservation policies, highlighting local context, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive management strategies.

In Kenya's Kuruwitu coastal community, north of Mombasa, a conservation initiative resulted in the formation of the Kuruwitu Conservation and Welfare Association, with the initial goal of establishing a community-managed marine reserve to improve environmental conservation and management for better livelihoods. At the time, Kenyan policy supported nationally maintained Marine Protected Areas without community input and did not address alternative revenue streams to compensate for opportunity costs. The locally-led Kuruwitu approach soon spread and was embraced by other communities in the region when they visited the Kuruwitu Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA). This is currently the dominant method of managing marine resources in Kenya, with more than 30 additional coastal communities establishing their own LMMAs ([See story here](#)).

In the Amazon rainforest, indigenous communities combat deforestation by implementing community-managed conservation areas governed by traditional practices that promote sustainable resource use and biodiversity.<sup>8</sup> Policies developed with national governments and NGOs allow for flexibility in response to environmental changes and external pressures, highlighting the integration of traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation strategies.



### Box 3

The Apoi Community Conservation Association is an example of a community-led conservation initiative which demonstrate that communities have the capacity and willingness to drive conservation actions just as much as the government does.

In 2021, the Apoi Community Conservation Association was formed (and registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission) an entity within the community to oversee matters of conserving remnant intact forest within its vicinity to save what can be considered as the last stronghold of the Niger Delta Red Colobus Monkey. This led to demarcating and subsequent protection of an area covering 1,013ha referred to as the Apoi Community Conservation Area. This conservation intervention establishes formal protection for the species and supports the community to improve land use planning, adopt sustainable livelihood practices and improve the quality of marsh forest habitat through an inclusive and adaptive management approach to ensure benefits for both biodiversity and the people. Through these conservation actions and support from the SW/Niger Delta Forest Project, this community-based conservation has resulted in building local capacity. Empowering community members through education, training, and access to resources enables them to actively participate in conservation efforts. This capacity-building approach not only instils essential skills but also enhances community resilience, allowing for better adaptation to social and environmental changes while also improving the socio-economic conditions of the community.



## ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION POLICIES

Policies might become obsolete or ineffectual if there is a lack of inclusivity, transparency, and adaptability that would guarantee that all stakeholders are heard during the decision-making process. Significant challenges, which might be institutional, financial, social, or environmental in nature, frequently arise during the transition from the formulation of policies to their implementation. These barriers can, however, be lessened in their effects if the fundamental elements required for an effective policy is taken into consideration.



### ➤ INTEGRATING SCIENCE INTO POLICY IS VITAL

Integrating science-based research with traditional ecological knowledge is critical to developing policies. Policymakers must collaborate with scientists, local communities, and indigenous groups to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ecosystems in question. This collaborative approach ensures that policies are both evidence-based and respect/incorporate the lived experiences and insights of those who depend on these ecosystems for their livelihoods. By valuing diverse knowledge systems, policies can be more effective and culturally relevant, enhancing community buy-in and long-term support.

### ➤ HAVE CLEAR OBJECTIVES AND MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Establishing clear objectives and measurable outcomes is essential to formulating good policies. Effective conservation policies should outline specific goals that are achievable and time-bound, allowing communities and stakeholders to track progress over time. By setting clear benchmarks for success, policymakers can create accountability mechanisms that reinforce community engagement. Furthermore, these measurable outcomes can assist in garnering support from funding bodies and governmental agencies, as they demonstrate the tangible impact of conservation efforts on both ecological health and community well-being.

### ➤ ADAPTABILITY ENHANCES THE RESILIENCE OF POLICIES

Adaptive management is crucial for successful conservation approaches, as flexibility is also required in the policies that drive conservation. Ecosystems are complex and dynamic, necessitating strategies that are adaptable to changing conditions. Policymakers should put in place mechanisms that allow conservation policies to be regularly assessed and adjusted in response to new knowledge, stakeholder feedback, and environmental changes. This flexibility not only strengthens conservation programs but also allows people to actively participate in resource management, encouraging a culture of continual learning and innovation.

### ➤ MUST ADDRESS SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

Policies should not only aim to protect natural resources but also consider the livelihoods and cultural values of local communities. By integrating economic incentives and support for sustainable practices, policymakers can create synergies between conservation goals and community development. This holistic approach ensures that conservation efforts are not seen as a burden but rather as opportunities for enhancing community resilience and prosperity.

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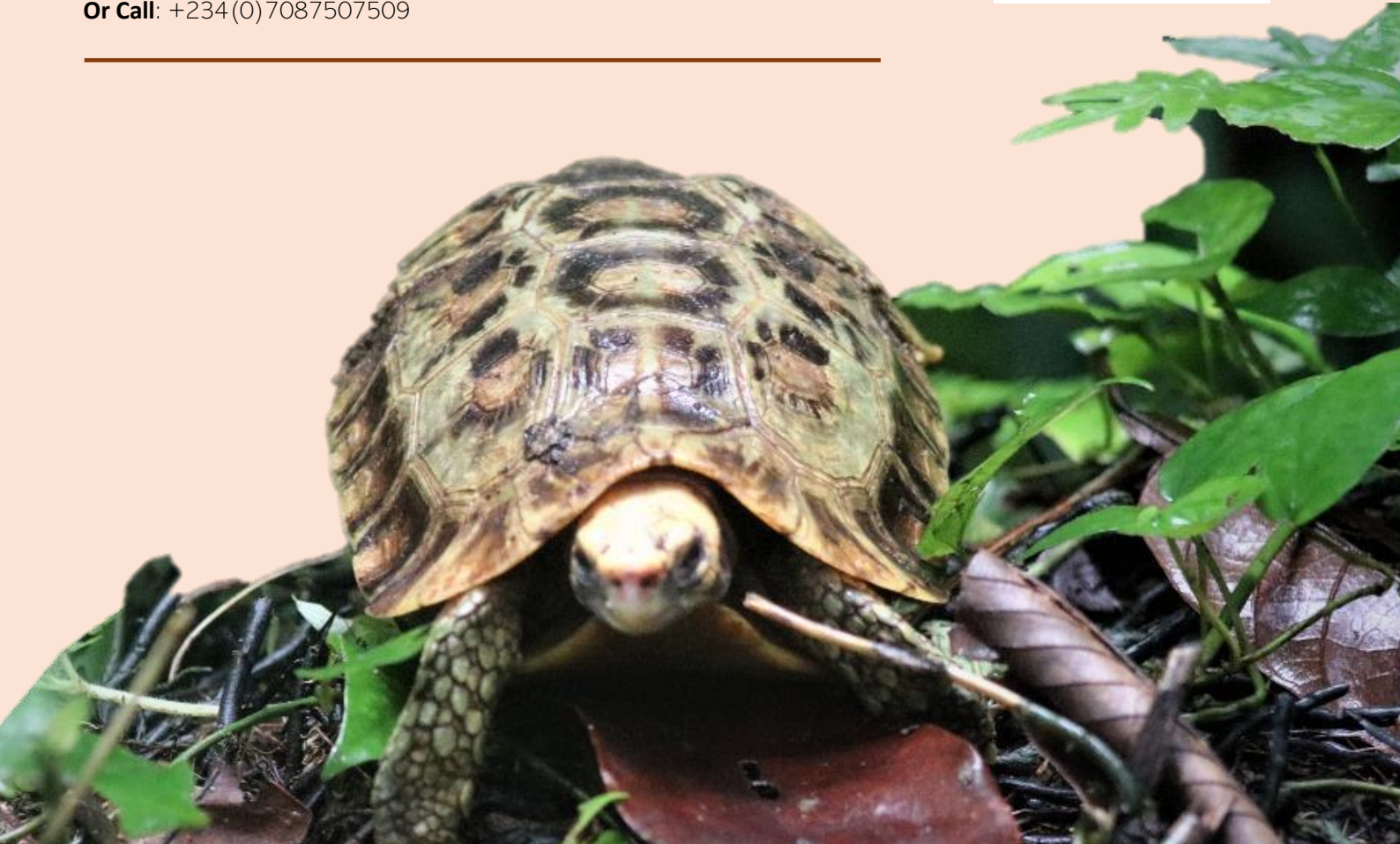
# How can I learn more?

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**Email:** [info@swnigerdeltaforestproject.org.ng](mailto:info@swnigerdeltaforestproject.org.ng)

**Or Call:** +234(0)7087507509

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This briefing note is part of the policy brief series introduced by the [SW/Niger Delta Forest Project](#) as an integral component of activities seeking to develop a legal framework for biodiversity conservation in Bayelsa State.

**CITATION:** Ashegbofe, R., Uwatt, A. E., Jephter, K.E., Soubai, A., and Ebitimi, S (2024). Building the Policies that Strengthen Community-based Conservation. Briefing note for policymakers and conservation practitioners. Policy Brief Series, Volume 1, Issue 1.

**CONTRIBUTORS\*:** Stephanie Brittain, Helen.Newing, E.J. Milner-Gulland, Robin Buxton, Ryan Smith, Julia Migne, Gill Metcalfe and several other workshop participants from Oxford Brookes University.

\*Contributions were also collated for this briefing note from participants' inputs at a workshop (Making community-based conservation model resilient in a volatile socio-political environment.) organized by SW/Niger Delta Forest Project at the University of Oxford's Interdisciplinary Centre for Conservation Science (ICCS) on the 7th of December 2022.

**DESIGN AND LAYOUT:** Media and Communications Unit  
[\[media@swnigerdeltaforestproject.org.ng\]](mailto:media@swnigerdeltaforestproject.org.ng)

**URL:** <https://bit.ly/PolicyBriefSeriesVolume1Issue1> or scan QR 

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