

Scaling-up Success in the Baimaxueshan Nature Reserve, China¹

In the rugged mountains of China's Yunnan Province, the Baimaxueshan Nature Reserve has recently been expanded. As a result, a large number of Deqin County residents now find their homes within its boundaries and have had severe restrictions placed on their traditional livelihood strategies of agriculture, livestock rearing, hunting and foraging for food. This experience is not unique to Deqin County. Due to the Chinese government's growing commitment since the early 1980s to protecting biodiversity and upper watersheds, the conflict between protected areas and local people's welfare has been growing. An official from the State Forestry Administration estimated in 1997 that 30 million poor people were living in and around China's nature reserves.

In order to improve conditions for the people living in and around the Reserve and reduce conflicts with the existing conservation policies, WWF-China began working locally with selected communities within the Nature Reserve in an effort to develop alternative livelihood strategies and reduce the degree of conflict with Reserve authorities. Interventions included provision of micro-credit, improved crop technologies, re-establishing local regulations on resource management and other efforts to lesson their dependence on forests. There were positive results, but this effort was resourceintensive, and difficult for WWF to scale-up to cover larger numbers of people.

WWF's Macroeconomics Program Office (MPO) reviewed the situation in Baimaxueshan as a part of its Economic Change, Poverty and Environment (ECPE)

1. Case study supplied by Dawn Montanye, WWF Macroeconomics Program Office, Washington DC and Tri Agung Rooswiadjie and Klaas Jan Tuele, WWF-Indonesia



project, and carried out an analysis of the local poverty-environment dynamics and their links to meso and national policies. This showed that selected policy reforms could facilitate the use of existing resources to achieve a win-win for conservation and poverty reduction in the Reserve. Emphasis was placed on working both with local communities and with the Reserve authorities to explore co-management options that would both improve management of the Reserve and generate economic benefits for local residents.

One of the impacts of the work in Baimaxueshan has been greater receptivity by policy makers at both provincial and national levels to the integration of poverty reduction and conservation. A national Poverty and Environment workshop was recently convened by WWF and hosted by the State Development and Reform Committee. The Government of China has provided a clear mandate for setting up community co-management in Baimaxueshan and in other nature reserves. The challenge now is how to establish an equitable benefit-sharing system which supports sustainable natural resource management, minimum legal preconditions required for co-management, and the decentralization it demands. Connecting local action with policies and institutions at the provincial and national levels, has opened up the possibility of vertical scaling up of benefits and much greater sustainability of efforts as compared with WWF-China's independent efforts at the local level.

Achieving success in this vertically-integrated strategy relied heavily upon improving understanding and dialogue opportunities among all related stakeholders. Effective capacity building at all levels and collective advocacy was aimed at all levels including local communities, Nature Reserve staff, county-level government officials, provincial-level environmental protection and poverty alleviation agencies and experts, and national-level long-term planning bodies, such as the State Development and Reform Committee.

Although progress has been made, particularly at local levels of government within the Reserve, the gains made in pilot programmes such as this are fragile without continued legislative and representative support from higher levels of government. WWF China is currently building on its established reputation to facilitate a continuing dialogue on co-management of nature reserves, both amongst Chinese practitioners and between China and international organisations. This dialogue process is currently focusing on lobbying national legislation that recognises community rights.