

Conserving biodiversity protects the world's poorest

Scientists have discovered strong correlations between effective management of the world's high-biodiversity regions and the welfare of the world's poorest.



Credit: Conservation International. Copyright Cristina Mittermeier/LCP

The US-based scientists analysed the value of benefits – in the form of ‘ecosystem services’ – to the world’s poorest people from areas prioritised for biodiversity conservation. The ecosystem services assessed ranged from local crop pollination, foods, medicines, and clean, fresh water, to global climate regulation.

The study *Global Biodiversity Conservation and the Alleviation of Poverty* was recently published in the journal *BioScience*.

According to lead author, Dr Will Turner, Vice President for [Conservation International](#), the world’s top conservation priority areas (less than one-quarter of Earth’s land surface) provide over half the world’s ecosystem service value and directly support the world’s poorest people, who generally struggle to survive on less than one dollar a day.

The study also found that when all 17 ecosystem services examined are combined, the benefits of these high-priority biodiversity conservation areas are more than triple the costs of conserving them.

Yet conservation efforts and poverty alleviation efforts are both at risk of failing, since this ‘natural capital’ is grossly undervalued in the global marketplace.

Dr Turner points out that ‘in many places where the poor depend on these natural services, we are dangerously close to exhausting them, resulting in lasting poverty.

‘Developed and developing economies cannot continue to ask the world’s poor to shoulder the burden of protecting

these globally important ecosystem services for the rest of the world's benefit, without compensation in return.

'This is exactly what we mean when talk about valuing natural capital. Nature may not send us a bill, but its essential services and flows, both direct and indirect, have concrete economic value.'

Source: Conservation International

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