# Tanzania: Human rights, social justice and conservation

Efforts to conserve certain threatened species or habitats have in too many cases been implemented at the expense of local peoples throughout the world. Although modern conservation thinking has been shifting away from its original anti-people bias, it has yet to redress many of its past abuses and to accept that people are part of the environment. The following quotes from the conclusions of a study on Tanzania carried out by Neumann (see details below) may prove useful to that debate.

"The establishment of virtually every national park in Tanzania required either the outright removal of rural communities or, at the very least, the curtailment of access to lands and resources. The historical processes of colonialism and postcolonial nation-building thus shaped the basic relationship between peasant farmers and pastoralists and the conservation regime. From the perspective of pastoralist political activists, numerous injustices have been carried out by the state in the name of wildlife conservation. The fact that pastoralist voices speaking out against conservation as usual are now heard loudly at international conferences and workshops is in itself a remarkable historical shift in Tanzania's conservation politics. Rural activists have incorporated the potent rhetoric of sustainable development and human rights into their struggle, an action that heralds a new assertiveness."

"Local resistance to the loss of access rights to land and resources has motivated new efforts by international conservation NGOs to redistribute tourism benefits and promote social welfare in communities adjoining protected areas. Continued pressure from "below" will necessitate further attention to questions of land rights and justice. Increasingly in contemporary cases, local groups, often through the formation of indigenous NGOs, are demanding autonomous control of land and resources, which they view as customary property rights that have been usurped by the state. In this context, 'it is often sociopolitical claims, not land pressure per se, which motivate encroachments' into protected areas (Fairhead and Leach 1994:507). Local demands can be politically radical, and most international conservation NGOs and state authorities are reluctant to go so far as to grant sole control of forests and wildlife habitat to villages or other local political entities. Local participation and local benefit-sharing, however, are not the same as local power to control use and access. Yet, in the end, this is what many communities seek."

"So far, pastoralists are the main social group organizing to redress the perceived injustices of wildlife conservation in Tanzania. Other affected groups, such as peasant farmers on other park boundaries, have not yet organized around similar issues. The potential exists, however, for a much more widespread and comprehensive political struggle over land and resource rights in protected areas, such as developed as part of the nationalist movement in the colonial period. Provided with new democratic openings, pastoralists are moving away from 'everyday forms of resistance' and protest toward more organized and formalized forms of political action. It is difficult to predict what new structures and policies for wildlife conservation will emerge as a result of their activism. Land rights activists have, however, made it clear that wildlife conservation issues cannot be addressed without considering broader struggles for human rights and social justice."

Article based on quotes from: Neumann, Roderick.- Land, Justice and the Politics of Conservation in

Tanzania. In: Zerner, Charles (ed).- People, Plants, & Justice: The Politics of Nature Conservation. New York, Columbia University Press, 2000