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"Compensation as a Policy for Mitigating Human-wildlife Conflict Around Four Protected Areas in Rajasthan, India"

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In India, human-wildlife conflict (HWC) around protected areas (PAs) has magnified social conflict over conservation and development priorities. India introduced financial compensation for HWC as a policy solution to simultaneously promote human security while protecting biodiversity. We evaluate compensation as a mitigation policy for HWC around four protected areas in Rajasthan (Jaisamand, Sitamata, Phulwari, and Kumbhalgarh). We argue that compensation is failing to reconcile conservation and development priorities for two reasons. First, a focus on charismatic megafauna obscures the livelihood costs of human-wildlife interactions as reported by households, especially conflict perpetrated by non-priority herbivores like antelope. This highlights disagreements about what constitutes "acceptable" conservation costs between communities and the state. Second, government bureaucrats control the compensation process, a model incongruent with the highly negotiated and reciprocal nature of environmental governance at local levels. Using interviews with Rajasthan Forest Department officials (n=21) and household surveys (n=2234), we argue that compensation is a policy designed to conserve (internationally) threatened species and not to safeguard local livelihoods. Ultimately, we suggest that policy solutions that are insensitive to local ecological and social dynamics can undermine efforts to reconcile conservation and development goals. (Text from authors' abstract)

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