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The use of Participatory Rural Appraisal and Planning to enhance local planning capacity in the buffer zone of Carrasco National Park, Bolivia

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, the government of Bolivia has tried to introduce the concept of co-management in protected areas but only few positive experiences have been achieved. In 2007, the government made an earmarked commitment to support this initiative by strengthening and broadening policies related to participatory planning of protected areas. This paper contributes to this objective by investigating how Participatory Rural Appraisal and Planning (PRAP) can be used as a tool to enhance local planning capacity. PRAP is a participatory method that has been widely used in research and development interventions. In order to gain a better understanding of the usefulness of PRAP in the complex Bolivian situation, four communities located in the buffer zone of Carrasco National Park – the most threatened and biodiversity-rich protected areas in Bolivia – were selected as a multiple-case study application of PRAP. The results from this study show that PRAP was useful to enhance local planning capacity by giving participants a sense of ownership to local initiatives. However, there are also limitations like that unrealistic expectations may be created in the process. The paper terminates with a discussion on the potential challenges to enhance local planning capacity by using PRAP in buffer zones of protected areas in Bolivia.

Keywords: PRAP; Evaluation; Capacity building; Project planning capacity; Protected areas; Bolivia