Session: C3 Poster: W190A

Climate change adaptation and wildlife conservation in Africa: a comparison of strategies being utilized by seven major environmental NGOs

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The lack of precedent on how to engage climate change is especially problematic to conservation interests in tropical Africa, where climatological data is generally absent and chronic threats related to population pressure, natural resource extraction and landscape conversion ensure that conservation attention is occupied with short-term needs and objectives. This presentation reviews programs on climate change adaptation in Africa by the Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group (ABCG), a consortium of seven U.S.-based international conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with field programs in Africa. It surveys and compares the approaches and tools for adaptation being utilized by ABCG members, and identifies lessons learned from our respective experiences. In Africa, the past decade has been a valuable incubation period in the creative development of climate change adaptation studies, strategies and field initiatives. However, continued innovation performed independently, without searching for commonalities and complementarities in work by others, is inefficient, and enhances the likelihood for unnecessary redundancies, superfluous efforts and strategic failures where lessons learned are not communicated to others. Conversely, sharing experiences will quickly reveal complementarities and other opportunities for improved and more effective climate change adaptation initiatives. A case is presented for the Albertine Rift, a global priority for biodiversity conservation where climate change has emerged as a building threat to the long-term persistence of plant and animal species and the human livelihoods that depend upon them. Working with government and NGO partners, local communities and a range of stakeholders, the Wildlife Conservation Society has developed a strategy tailored to local needs to generate the requisite knowledge for effective conservation planning for a climatically changed future. The program has three stages: building knowledge of current climatology and modeling future ecological states; establish monitoring networks to detect climate change and associated ecological response; and stakeholder consultation and associated follow-up activities. This multi-step approach provides a comprehensive strategy designed to build critically needed knowledge and capacity to adapt conservation management effectively for climate change in a data-poor region of high conservation concern.