Vicuña management in the Andes

Project background

Species of focus:  • Vicuña

Country/Countries:  • Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Peru

Site(s):  Not site specific.

GPS coordinates:  No data

Project web site:  No data

Summary description:

Vicuña are endangered camelids – listed on CITES Appendix II and I – whose ranges cover the Andean countries of South America. Poaching levels have dropped dramatically following coordinated trade regulations and the rise in local management initiatives. However, illegal trade continues to persist as vicuña fibre is a valuable commodity and so illegal hunting is the primary threat to vicuña.

The scale of the problem was highlighted in reports submitted to the XXVII Technical Meeting of the Vicuña Convention held in La Paz in July 2014.

- In Bolivia at least 3,289 vicuñas were hunted illegally between 2008 and 2013.
- In Peru, 1,723 vicuña were reported killed for the period 2009 to 2013.
- In Argentina, poaching of 149 vicuña was reported between 2012 and 2013, and 94 skins were seized in 2014.
- In Chile, at least 49 dead vicuñas were found by patrols during the first few months of 2014.

All these figures were based on official reports, meaning that the true loss is likely much higher. Most of the trade in vicuña fibre is international, although there is a local black market
for fibre in Bolivia for ritual use, handcrafts and folk costumes.

Community based management has been used as a mechanism for encouraging conservation and tolerance of vicuñas in community lands, while at the same time contributing to local economic development and poverty alleviation. The implementation of vicuña management projects in the region has been a process divided into four main stages: conservation (including custodianship by the local people, and control and monitoring by the government), planning (by the government), fibre production and processing. In the conservation stage, government decides on the conservation activities required to implement the provisions signed under the Vicuña Convention (1979). The protection and increase of vicuña populations and the control of poaching and illegal trade of vicuña products depend on the support of local people who have little influence or control over government directives - typically local people act as informants and many local communities have local guards for their wild populations. In all countries, the government is responsible for the certification of fibre as a measure to control illegal trade. The fibre is pooled together for the national auction that is usually organised by the associations of producers with support from the governments (Stølen, Lichtenstein and Renaudeau d’Arc 2009).

Examples of community management in the region come from Peru and Argentina:

There are two types of community management of vicuña in Peru: (1) Captive management and management in the wild. Until 1995, vicuñas were managed exclusively in the wild, only captured to be shorn and then released. Since 1996, the Consejo Nacional de Camélidos Sudamericanos (CONACS) started developing a Programme of Corrals for the Sustainable Use of Vicuña. This programme consists of installing corrals (perimeter fencing) over 1,000 ha of communal land from which domestic livestock is withdrawn. Communities pay US$ 2,000 for the material to construct the corrals, and provide free labour and communal land. Corrals can be paid for in cash (i.e. through a loan from the government) and/or in vicuña (valued at US$ 1,000 each). These vicuñas are used for a programme of repopulation that consists of selling animals to communities that want to install a corral. (2) Communities with large numbers of vicuñas are still managing free ranging vicuña and conducting captures of wild animals. They operate with paid staff, all of whom are community members, and a full time coordinator. These projects have been financed with loans from FONCODES, a social development fund (Stølen, Lichtenstein and Renaudeau d’Arc 2009).

Since 1994, 28 vicuña breeding ranches have been established in the Argentina’s Provinces of Salta and Jujuy with the stated aim of improving the economic situation of local people while contributing towards vicuña conservation. The CEA (High Altitude Experimental Station) INTA (Institute of Agriculture and Cattle Technology) model consists of individual producers maintaining a number of vicuña (ranging from 12 to 36) in fully fenced enclosures of a few hectares (ranging from 0.5 to 10 ha). Vicuñas are given to the rancher as a loan from the CEA INTA herd. Producers have 7–12 years to return the same number of juvenile vicuña to the CEA INTA station as they were given originally. In 80 % of the cases, fencing materials for the installation of corrals are financed by the Argentinian firm that is the principal local buyer of vicuña fibre. Once the vicuñas are shorn, producers sell the fibre to the same firm to pay off the debt on fencing materials (Stølen, Lichtenstein and Renaudeau d’Arc 2009).

**Land management type:**
Communally managed land
Unmanaged land

**Product(s) in trade:**

- Fibre

**Product value at site level:**

Black market trade values are between US$ 100–200 per kg, depending on colour and quality. These rates are significantly lower than the cost of fibre traded legally, which ranges between US$ 300–600 per kg.

**Types of poachers:**

Gangs from outside

**Details of 'other' poacher type:**

No data

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**Project implementation**

**Is the project implemented by an external party?**

No

**Implementing organisation:**

No data

**Name of funding organisation(s):**

No data

**Community organisation(s) involved:**

Various across the region.

**Was the project established specifically to engage communities in combatting IWT?**

Yes
Year the IWT project or component started: No data

Project status is currently: Ongoing

Case study information is up to date as of: 2016

Community engagement

Approach taken to community engagement and its rationale:
Community members benefit from sustainable harvesting and trade as conservation incentive

Details of 'other' community involvement approach type:
No data

Financial:
Not specified.

Non-financial:
Not specified.

The community engagement project is:
No data, possible values:
- Stand alone initiative
- Part of a wider effort to combat wildlife crime in the area

Details of wider response:
No data

Do community guards carry firearms?: 4
Do community guards conduct joint patrols with formal guards?:

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

Are community guards unarmed, without armed backup?:

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

Do community guards have rights of arrest?:

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

Do community guards have specialist training:

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

Are community guards covered by military law in the case of someone being killed or wounded?:

No data, possible values:
- Yes
The community has traditional authority to sanction poachers from within their community?:

No data, possible values:
- Yes
- No
- Not known
- Not applicable

What “rules of engagement” for working with communities does the case study address?

Include local people in wildlife monitoring and enforcement networks
Ensure wildlife generate benefits, both tangible and intangible, for local people

Other key principles for engaging communities emerging from this case study:

No data

What has been the impact on poaching/IWT?

Don’t know/Case study/project has not assessed impact on poaching

What has been the impact on wildlife populations?

Not known/not documented

Further detail about the impact on poaching:

No data

What worked and why?; What didn’t work and why?

What worked about the community engagement approach and why?
Community-based vicuña management has been able to achieve multiple goals such as strengthening local communities, revitalising old traditions, creating relationships among communities, recuperating local knowledge, developing a framework for local participation, solidifying land claims, providing incentives to avoid migration to cities, and providing alternative sources of income to communities that are usually forgotten by nation states. Common factors that occur where indigenous management schemes are particularly effective include strong community organisation, community empowerment, state support, multiple stakeholder involvement including NGOs, sufficient funding and technical and scientific support.

What did not work and why?

Distinguishing illegally traded fibre is hampered by the difficulties in fibre traceability and complex patterns of exports and re-exports. More communities, and private companies, are getting involved in vicuña management without any increase in government’s investment towards fibre traceability.

The overall direction of the programmes across the region has not been truly community based. The role of local communities in combatting poaching is typically as informants. Many communities have local guards and some have developed monitoring systems. However, it is rare for a community to have the resources to pay for their members to work as rangers. Furthermore, in most countries other than Peru, community members are not allowed to use guns during their patrols leaving them vulnerable to attack from armed poachers. Only in exceptional cases, such as Lucanas in Peru, are the numbers of vicuña and fibre production high enough to generate rewards for anti-poaching activities. Most communities are unable to match the vehicles and communication systems used by poachers, who are also often armed. Not surprisingly, local people fear the illegal hunters. When incidents occur, many go unreported for a number of reasons. There is a fear of reprisals and the distances between communities and towns where there is a police force can be considerable. Most of the areas lack communication and a good road system. In general, the police tend not to act, and people worry that if they do report hunters they will become suspects.

Local people are still not obtaining significant economic benefits from legal vicuña use, be it captive management or management in the wild. The distribution of costs and benefits between and within different stakeholder groups should be revised and made more equitable. It is necessary to reach a clear definition of what type of participation projects are aiming for, and who the beneficiaries should be. The current distribution of ownership rights, where communities lack secure tenure rights over land and wildlife, provides more incentives to own domestic livestock (e.g. sheep) than to favour vicuña. Land tenure rights should be secured in order to provide incentives for local people to conserve vicuña. Stronger local organisation capacity and political capital would also enhance outcomes for local people and vicuña conservation (Stølen, Lichtenstein and Renaudeau d’Arc 2009).

Community-based management of vicuña in Peru is still somewhat limited in practice, as communities rely heavily on technical assistance from Government agencies and have little option but to accept the model of captive management. The social advantages normally associated with community based conservation, such as strengthening of community institutions and capacity building, have not materialised in these cases. There are also
signs that captive management programmes may be leading to, or exacerbating, conflicts between communities over land and resource ownership. The exclusion of livestock from corrals has proved contentious, and community members have, in some cases, broken down the fences so that their animals can graze freely. These relationships between government and communities affect the significance of, and attitudes towards, vicuña; and may contribute to the maintenance of poaching (Stølen, Lichtenstein and Renaudeau d’Arc 2009).

In Argentina, the people involved in vicuña management are local inhabitants, but very few of the ranch owners could be described as low income or Indigenous Peoples. In most cases, they are influential people in their communities, either public servants, policemen, former military or even professionals (such as a lawyer). It would be hard for low-income producers to participate in the corral scheme, since they need to own at least 10 ha of land and to be affluent enough to afford the risk of becoming involved in a long-term, and uncertain, investment (Stølen, Lichtenstein and Renaudeau d’Arc 2009).

Future challenges for vicuña management include:

- In some communities, low levels of income generated by vicuña management and the difficulties of fibre commercialisation reduce interest in support for vicuña management and anti-poaching.
- Better means of communication is needed within vicuña management communities.
- Poor infrastructure in rural areas, such as roads, isolates communities and reduces their ability to participate in anti-poaching.
- A fairer distribution of benefits derived from vicuña use within local communities is needed.
- Lack of funding reduces support for community management initiatives and investment in fibre traceability.
- National policies, legislative frameworks and enforcement are generally weak - poachers can operate with impunity.
- Local communities are increasingly at risk from poaching activities.

**Further comments or additional information about community engagement:**

Lessons learnt so far include:

- Strengthening community participation is key.
- Local communities need exclusive user rights over the vicuña.
- It is not enough to rely solely on community engagement to fight poaching. Vicuña fibre has such high market value and the potential reward for illegal trade is so high, that government involvement is crucial.
- Collaboration between authorities at national and international level is important.
- Community management would be more effective if linked with awareness-raising in the destination countries so that consumers demand certified, legally produced fibre.
Local Participation in Vicuña Management

Stølen KA, Lichtenstein G, and Renaudeau d'Arc N

2009


Publisher:

http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-09476-2_7

Download/Access URL:

Case study entry