

Student Conference on Conservation Science, Cambridge
A practical introduction to social survey design for conservation science

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Many conservation scientists come from a natural science background but there is increasing awareness that successful conservation is interdisciplinary and must use knowledge and methods developed by the social sciences as well as the natural sciences. For example, conservation interventions often seek to influence behaviour (reduce demand for products made from threatened species, encourage engagement in certain activities) which requires a clear understanding of why people behave as they do. Conservation scientists may need to collect quantitative data on aspects of human livelihoods. For example, estimates of volumes and spatial patterns of harvesting of a target species may be needed to quantify the sustainability of the harvest, or the likely socio-economic impacts on local people of efforts to reduce the harvest. Other surveys may seek to understand people's attitudes, social norms and other possible influences on their behaviour. All surveys need to be designed to ensure the target population is successfully sampled, that biases are considered and minimised and ethical implications considered. This course, being just two days, cannot hope to replace proper training in the social sciences. However we aim to introduce important concepts and give you an easy way into further reading targeted to what you need to know.

Issues to be covered:

1. We will explore why conservation scientists should be interested in understanding people and I will briefly introduce you to some theories of human behaviour and suggest further reading.
2. Ethics. We will use scenarios (many taken from my own experiences and those of my students) to draw out a code of conduct for ethical social surveys.
3. Survey instrument design: we will review and discuss some of the principles of good questionnaire design and consider how to write a 'good' question. You will be asked to collect some data using a standard questionnaire before coming to the workshop which we will analyse in class to illustrate some important biases.
4. Study design and sampling: we will consider what the appropriate target population may be for a range of research questions and how we may effectively sample that population. We will also explore the value of robust study design.