

Participant Information Sheet

Project title:

Balancing Nature Protection and Restoration: Assessing Social and Ecological Impacts to Inform Equitable Conservation Policy

Researcher:

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Invitation to take part in this study

You are invited to take part in a research study exploring how different conservation approaches – specifically **nature protection** (such as marine protected areas) and **nature restoration** (such as mangrove or coral restoration) – affect both ecological outcomes and social equity.

You have been invited because of your professional, community, or lived experience related to environmental management, conservation policy, restoration projects, or the use of natural resources in coastal or island contexts. Participation is entirely voluntary. You should only take part if you wish to do so. Choosing not to participate will not disadvantage you in any way.

Before deciding whether to take part, please read the following information carefully. You may discuss it with others if you wish. If anything is unclear or you would like further information, please feel free to ask.

Background to the study

Governments and conservation organisations around the world are increasingly investing in nature-based solutions to address biodiversity loss and climate change. These include international commitments such as the “30×30” target, which is part of a global agreement known as the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The 30×30 target aims to ensure that 30% of the world’s land and ocean areas are conserved or managed for nature by the year 2030, in order to protect biodiversity and support healthy ecosystems.

While conservation initiatives can deliver important ecological benefits, they may also redistribute social benefits and burdens unevenly. For example, protected areas may restrict access to traditional/historical fishing grounds (Brondo and Bown, 2011). In contrast, restoration projects may create new opportunities for participation, employment, or community cohesion, but these benefits are not always shared equitably, particularly among those in the community who may need them most (Löfqvist et al., 2023).

This PhD research examines how protection and restoration interventions differ in their **ecological effectiveness**, **social impacts**, and **perceived fairness**, with a particular focus on **coastal and island contexts**, including Small Island Developing States and UK Overseas Territories. The study aims to inform more equitable and socially just conservation policy and decision-making.

What does taking part involve?

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to take part in a **semi-structured interview** conducted by the researcher.

The interview will:

- Explore your experiences, perspectives, or professional role in relation to conservation, protection, or restoration initiatives;
- Include some general background questions relevant to your role or involvement;
- Focus on issues such as participation, decision-making, perceived benefits and costs, and governance.

The interview is expected to last approximately **45-60 minutes**, depending on how the discussion develops. Interviews will usually be conducted **online (e.g. via Zoom or Microsoft Teams)** or, where appropriate, in person.

With your permission, the interview will be **audio-recorded** to ensure accuracy. You may choose not to answer any question and may stop the interview at any time.

Benefits and risks of taking part

Your contribution will help improve understanding of how conservation strategies affect different stakeholders and communities, and may help inform more equitable future policies and practices.

There are no significant risks associated with participation beyond those encountered in everyday conversation. Some topics (such as conflict, exclusion, or perceived injustice) may feel sensitive. You are under no obligation to discuss anything you are uncomfortable with and may pause or stop the interview at any point.

Informed consent

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to provide **informed consent** before the interview begins. This will normally be done via a written or electronic consent form. Consent confirms that you understand the study and agree to participate.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

If you choose to withdraw:

- You may request that your data be withdrawn up until data analysis has been completed;
- Once findings have been anonymised, aggregated, or included in publications, it may not be possible to remove individual contributions.

To withdraw, please contact the researcher using the details below.

Data protection and confidentiality

All information you provide will be treated as **confidential**.

- Your name and any directly identifying information will be removed from transcripts;
- Pseudonyms will be used where appropriate;
- Data will be stored securely in line with University of Essex data protection policies and UK GDPR requirements;
- Only the researcher and supervisory team will have access to identifiable data.

You will not be identified in any reports, publications, or presentations arising from this research.

What will happen to the results?

The findings from this study will form part of a PhD thesis and may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences. All outputs will use anonymised or aggregated data.

If you wish, you may request a **lay summary** of the research findings once the project has been completed.

Concerns or complaints

If you have any concerns about any aspect of this study, please contact the researcher in the first instance.

If you remain dissatisfied or wish to make a formal complaint, you may contact the Head of Department or the University of Essex Research Governance team using the details below.

Ethical approval

This research has been reviewed and approved by the **University of Essex Ethics Committee**.

Contact details

Researcher / Principal Investigator

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Thank you for considering taking part in this research.

References

- BRONDO, K. & BOWN, N. 2011. Neoliberal conservation, garifuna territorial rights and resource management in the cayos cochinos marine protected area. *Conservation and Society*, 9.
- LÖFQVIST, S., KLEINSCHROTH, F., BEY, A., DE BREMOND, A., DEFRIES, R., DONG, J., FLEISCHMAN, F., LELE, S., MARTIN, D. A. & MESSERLI, P. 2023. How social considerations improve the equity and effectiveness of ecosystem restoration. *BioScience*, 73, 134–148.