

## **High levels of participation in conservation projects enhance learning**

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Participatory approaches are often suggested to increase sustainability and adaptability of conservation programmes because they are assumed to build capacity of participants to learn and manage projects. This paper compares participatory projects with different styles of management to determine whether increasing the extent or quality of engagement of participants affects the degree to which they learn. The results show that: (1) Participants in all projects learnt something, but the extent of learning was overall highest for projects with greatest engagement; (2) The length of time participants were involved in a project did not influence how much they learned; and (3) a range of factors relating to engagement influenced learning outcomes. The results suggest that if capacity building is a desired outcome of participation, then it pays to invest in high levels of engagement right from the outset. More research to help understand the processes involved in enhancing learning is required.