



HIGHLIGHTS FROM FORUM '97
18 NOVEMBER 1997

Forum '97 participants attended two Plenary sessions, on Institutional Pathways to Sustainability and on Conservation and Development in War and Peace, and participated in several simultaneous conference sessions in the morning and afternoon. Participants also enjoyed a theater presentation, "The Wolf at the Door," performed by Human Nature (US).

PLENARY SESSIONS

INSTITUTIONAL PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Anil Gupta, Honeybee Network (India), stressed the importance of understanding the processes through which rules and institutions evolve. He noted that the transaction costs of enforcing agreements will be lower if more time is invested in negotiating good agreements at the outset. He highlighted the potential for innovation at the grassroots level, but stressed the need for an optimal level of isolation to allow for innovation and for new ideas to emerge.

Kuldeep Mathur, Jawaharlal Nehru University (India), underscored the need to understand traditional and local knowledge before formalizing rules and internalizing them in institutional formation. The relationship between the state and community institutions must also be taken into account. The characteristic context of the rise of community institutions is one of contestation with the state, where these institutions often emerge to assert rights to natural resources in situations where the state has restricted these rights. Community institutions are expressions of democracy, but in many societies this expression is constrained; institutional processes will respond to the social context. He stated that innovative institutions need to negotiate with the state for support and with other community institutions.

Jeff Romm, University of California - Berkeley (US), explored institutional innovation and how context affects the patterns it takes, with implications for forms of innovation on a larger scale. He demonstrated institutional innovations through five cases of community forestry in northern California and southern Oregon. He noted that in each of these cases, rapid institutional innovation had taken place through community action with the aim of achieving sustainable forestry. He said that these cases illustrate how community-based actions and innovations can transcend the local context and have implications on much larger scales, such as government policies and legislation at the national level. He pointed out that these were somewhat isolated cases due to barriers to innovation such as politics and lack of financial means.

In the ensuing discussion, participants considered: means of resolving the conflict between industry and environment; the tension between spontaneity and the "routinization" that occurs with the institutionalization demanded by the drive for sustainable development; the ability of large-scale federations to represent large groups of different communities; and whether pathways to

institutional sustainability run through NGOs in the long term or if NGOs are a reflection of the breakdown of institutional processes and are therefore epiphenomenal.

CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN WAR AND PEACE

Eugène Rutagarama, International Gorilla Conservation Program (Rwanda), discussed factors that influence conservation during and after armed conflict, including the uncertainty of government, the establishment of a new government, the international community's attitude towards the conflict, and the efficiency of international assistance. He described the establishment of the national reserves system that protects habitat for endangered mountain gorillas, elephants, rhinos and giraffes in Rwanda and the impact of the recent civil war on these protected areas. He cited several causes of the regression of conservation efforts during the civil war, notably rebel force camps in a national reserve that caused destruction of gorilla habitat due to road construction and fuelwood consumption, refugee migration through and to natural reservations and the resettlement of repatriated refugees in protected areas. The major post-war threats to these parks consist of pressures on land resources from high population density, a high population growth rate, timber demand for new construction, wood demand of refugees, and deforestation from fires. He said that conservation is difficult in the post-war period because the government is preoccupied with pressing short-term concerns.

CONFERENCE SESSIONS

Community-based Management of Forest Resources:

Panelists gave presentations on: community forestry in the Philippines: paradoxes and perspectives in development practice; livelihoods and local determination in natural resource management in upland forest communities in Thailand; jump-starting a grassroots forest industry in northwest California; and economic versus conservation impacts in the commercialization of the ivory nut in northeastern Ecuador. The debate that followed concentrated on the issue of knowing what sustainability actually means and whether a community-based management approach is always preferable. A panelist noted that sustainability is more a utopia than an actual goal in itself. The participants also agreed that community-based approaches should be launched before resources are completely degraded and that this form of management is still too rare and needs to be applied in more cases.

Empowering Local Communities: Citizen Fora at the World Bank and NAFTA: Panelists described the World Bank Inspection Panel, a mechanism to improve transparency and to hold the Bank accountable for violations of its policies and procedures. Two of the ten claims filed to the Panel thus far were outlined, the Itaparica claim in Brazil and the Yacyreta claim in Paraguay. Panelists also described the cooperative quasi-judicial mechanisms of NAFTA's North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation that were established to enhance enforcement of environmental laws, as well as the Cozumel Pier (Mexico) claim filed to this Commission. Participants discussed: precedents in jurisprudence emerging from

these claims; tensions between international and/or community oversight of environmental regulation and national sovereignty; the lack of information at the grassroots level and the fear of reprisal when organizing around human rights issues in some countries; and the importance of facilitating access to information about the Bank's procedures for affected people.

Mediation as a Tool for Natural Resource Issues: An Interactive Workshop: Participants explored conflict resolution through mediation with the goal of cross-cultural sharing of mediation concepts. The panelists explained the major advantages of mediation over litigation and arbitration: self-representation by parties; negotiation between the parties facilitated by a neutral third party; the creation of solutions through compromise by both parties; and the possibility for reconciliation and long-term relationships between parties. Workshop participants discussed their own experiences in mediation, including: mediation to resolve a dispute between the Pueblo Indians and environmental organizations over land rights for communally owned Pueblo land in New Mexico; aboriginal land rights in Australia; mediation for cultivating popular participation in South Africa; limits to the effectiveness of the mediation process; the role of neutrality in mediation; how all interests can be represented in the negotiating process; the importance of preparing traditional communities for mediation with the "dominant culture;" and the role of NGOs as mediators in Tanzania.

Defining Communities in Conservation and Development: Panelists presented case studies on: nomads as agents of development in Turkey; an overview of wild-harvested products and foragers in Central Appalachia (US); natural resource use and management in a Bulgarian mountain village; and a critique of community-based conservation practices in India. The discussion focused on criteria used to define a community. Questions were raised on whether the definition of "community" should be based on legal and territorial boundaries, ethnicity, common culture, shared economic activities, or whether a more realistic definition warrants a flexible model combining factors such as these on a case by case basis. Points were raised on differences in community involvement in conservation practices according to the degree of dependence on natural resources for survival, alternative livelihoods, cultural values and political perceptions.

Community-based Irrigation Management in Southern India: The panelists' presentations focused on: watershed movement; relevance and modeling of tank irrigation for other countries; strategic alliances between government, NGOs and the community; and the rise and fall of traditional water harvesting. The discussion focused on rights, fiscal measures, grassroots democracy, local knowledge and wisdom, coalition building, corruption and the politics of policy-making. Participants felt that there are many good examples where institutions and charismatic leaders can make a significant difference in irrigation management.

Local Participation in Protected Areas Management: The Cayambe-Coca Ecological Reserve in Ecuador: Panelists presented background on the Nature Conservancy's PALOMAP project, and outlined lessons learned from the project, including the need to link conservation projects directly to threats to protected areas and the need to understand that the type of participation influences the effectiveness and equity of the conservation initiative. Panelists presented case studies of participatory conservation in the area, including the Oyacachi thermal baths ecotourism initiative and land-use zoning in Sinangue. In the ensuing discussion, it was emphasized that legal aspects of projects need to be examined carefully, particularly regarding rights and title to land. An understanding of who controls resource management and the involvement of the right stakeholders were highlighted as central to the development of conservation initiatives.

Reaching Consensus on Conservation Priorities and Forming Effective Partnerships: Panelists gave presentations on practical examples of consensus building in Ecuador, Papua New Guinea and Namibia. In the Ecuador case, the issue of land rights and indigenous territories was a major concern, in Papua New Guinea a meaningful cooperation was achieved between the local communities, WWF and Chevron, while in Namibia the conservation efforts of the government were initially opposed by the local

communities and NGOs. Throughout the discussion, participants attempted to answer the following questions: who are the stakeholders and what are their interests; was a common agenda agreed to; and what partnerships were formed? One panelist stressed the importance of spending more time in dialogue with stakeholders at the outset of the process so they can at least reach consensus on common goals. Participants also discussed the issue of who to include in a consensus, knowing who the partners should be and what the benefits of partnership are likely to be.

War, Peace and Conservation: Panelists considered: whether or not conservation during war is a luxury; the obstacles to conservation during war; the integration of environmental considerations into army mandates; and the roles and responsibilities of NGOs, governments and relief agencies in mitigating the devastating consequences of war on conservation. Panelists' presentations addressed: the need to replace the "paternal" relationship between relief agencies and recipient populations with a relationship that is inclusive of stakeholders' concerns; overpopulation, resource scarcity, poverty and economic crisis as causal factors of war in Rwanda, as well as the uncertainty of funding for conservation after the war when other issues are more pressing; the impact of war refugees' migration on conservation in the Ituri forest in the Congo; and the ecological impacts of war and infrastructure building in the Condor range during the border conflict between Ecuador and Peru.

Communication and Information Dissemination in Conservation and Development: Panelists made presentations on: the efforts of Island Press (US) to respond to the need for practical, tool-oriented, multidisciplinary information that translates technical, scientific environmental work for the lay audience; Television Trust for the Environment's (UK) work to promote global public awareness of environmental and development issues through film; Vanguard Communications' (US) use of communications as a tool to influence policy and to educate, mobilize, fund-raise, and empower people to effect social change; and the evolution of the media in Nepal and the initiatives of the Nepal Forum for Environmental Journalists to educate the public and policy makers about environmental issues. Participants discussed: how to give a voice to the unheard; the importance of voicing criticism without alienating the audience or the opposition; the need for strategies and alternative information packages to confront the messages of mainstream and corporate media; and the need to build linkages between the grassroots and those with access to communication channels.

Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity: Panelists discussed cultural, moral, spiritual and traditional values involved in biodiversity. Case studies were presented on: traditional agricultural methods used by Peruvian populations in the Andean mountain range as viable alternatives to conserve biodiversity; agricultural and wildlife harvesting practices in West Java, Indonesia according to cultural values and spiritual beliefs of local populations; and the approach to natural resource management and use by the Zuni Nation in Arizona according to historical environmental constraints. Points were raised on the close inter-linkages between cultural and biological diversity, and differences in understandings of the relationship between humans, nature and creation according to spiritual beliefs.

Involving Communities in Conservation and Development Programs in Brazil: Panelists presented case studies on: a participatory management plan in the Jau National Park; "agro-ecological possession" of land, protection of the Amazon and land rights; sustainable forest management in the Xilkrin do Catet; indigenous land in the eastern Amazon; and participatory forest management in the Tapajos National Forest. Discussion focused on the types of institutional and regulatory frameworks being used to ensure community involvement in the management plans for each of these ecologically fragile areas. Presentations and comments addressed the need for strong legislation to protect indigenous populations' rights, including land tenure and difficulties encountered in harmonizing past and present legislation on natural resources. A new notion of land possession in the Brazilian Amazon was introduced ("agro-ecological possession"), which entails sustainable use of forest resources by dwellers in areas of common use.