



**HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NORWAY/UN  
CONFERENCE ON THE ECOSYSTEM  
APPROACH FOR SUSTAINABLE USE OF  
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY  
THURSDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 1999**

On the fourth day of the Norway/UN Conference on the Ecosystem Approach for Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity, participants met to hear presentations on the themes of the ecosystem approach in forest resource use and globalization vs. decentralization, as well as a panel debate on local resource management in the relation to the GATT and WTO.

**ECOSYSTEM APPROACH IN FOREST RESOURCE USE**

Jeffrey Sayer, Center for International Forestry Research, discussed the application of ecosystem management to forests. He stated that humans once managed forest ecosystems sustainably, but lost this ability as resources and capacity were over-stressed or societies broke down. He proposed that recent attempts to return to ecosystem management have generally relied on a scientific and technology-driven vision of management. Sayer supported a plurality of management approaches that incorporates flexibility, adaptability and experimentation. He contrasted existing assumptions and characteristics with a potential new management paradigm, in terms of: simplified vs. complex systems, bounded vs. connected, predictable vs. unpredictable, steady-state vs. dramatic change, management units vs. landscapes, components vs. systems, maximum vs. optimum yield, single vs. multiple products, externalities vs. environmental services and single best way vs. multiple choices. Sayer stressed the need to move from command and control management to collaboration and adaptation. He listed a number of key points for managers, including, *inter alia*: minimize power differentials amongst stakeholders, facilitate decision-making, ensure transparency, optimize total utility of all products and services, eliminate free-riders, represent absent stakeholders and minorities, enforce the law and collect taxes, and represent all interests fairly in resource assessments.

Richard Steiner, University of Alaska, spoke of the global forest crisis and the tragedy of government inaction. He stressed that the forest/biodiversity crisis is one of the most important issues of today, citing coastal temperate rainforests as one of the most extensively degraded ecosystem types in the world. He said that the crisis is resolvable, but is impeded by governmental inertia, the dominance of short-term industrial interests and public apathy. In a series of recommendations, Steiner called for: the CBD to issue an official declaration of the global forest crisis; protection of all remaining frontier forests; restoration of at least 20% of harvested forest lands; implementation and enforcement of sustainable forestry in all managed forests; improvement of plantation management to increase intensity of wood production; reduction of forest product consumption; resolution of environmentally-related trade issues; establishment of a global forest protection fund; and establishment of a World Environmental Organization or an increase in UNEP's authority.

When asked about the difficulty of extending protected forest areas in developing countries, Steiner suggested that this could be a role for a global forest conservation fund. One participant commented that the forest crisis has been highlighted by the IFF and that a global conservation fund has been advocated in the past, but the international community is not prepared to create a new funding mechanism.

Hans Verolme, Biodiversity Action Network, spoke about the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation. He reviewed an international process involving seven regional and one indigenous peoples' workshops, which culminated in a global workshop that provided input into the IFF. He expressed dismay at the IFF's failure to integrate key forest concerns and government attempts to re-negotiate prior commitments. The process identified four major themes and their specific concerns, which include: land tenure, research management and stakeholder participation (inequitable distribution of costs and benefits, land tenure inequities, indigenous rights, role of government vs. other stakeholders, dominance of industrial interests, lack of participation, corruption, military dictatorship); trade and consumption (over-consumption, over-production, impacts of free-trade); international economic relations and financial flows (inappropriate development strategies, debt generation, weak governance, perverse subsidies, private capital flows); and valuation of forest goods and services (non-recognition of non-timber forest values, failure to incorporate traditional knowledge, inadequate legislation and management capacity, inadequate data for resource assessments). Verolme noted the need to operationalize the ecosystem approach and other CBD commitments in national action plans, especially in regards to sustainable use and benefit sharing. He listed some key challenges, including identifying stakeholders, developing a strategy for research objectives, creating ownership of results, linking local realities and international policy, and utilizing existing information and research better.

Sten Nilsson, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, spoke on boreal forests and biodiversity in Russia. In identifying future sustainable development options and policies, Nilsson noted three ways to conserve forest biodiversity in Russia: protected areas, biodiversity-sensitive forest management and efficient landscape management. He said that Russia has a good network of specially protected nature reserves, *zapovedniks*, yet the country is now experiencing major forest disturbances from fires, pests and disease, soil erosion, sulfur and nitrogen deposits, land-use change and timber harvesting. He also cited other obstacles to forest conservation, such as inconsistencies in current environmental legislation, lack of participatory mechanisms and little stakeholder dialogue. He noted that forest biodiversity is scale-dependent in Russia and future biodiversity policies must incorporate the interaction between different ecosystem scales. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of social and economic considerations when addressing forest management issues.

Responding to a question on suggestions to help Russia conserve its biodiversity, Nilsson supported direct funding of specific projects or managed areas. When asked if Russia could implement large-scale

industrial forest management practices, Nilsson agreed, but said such practices would have to incorporate principles relevant to Russia.

Jeff McNeely, IUCN, spoke about incentives and constraints related to communities dependent on sustainable use. He noted that rural people living in poverty are the most directly dependent on biological resources, yet least able to tap into the market. He stated that conceptions of sustainability must entail ecological, economic and socio-cultural factors and that sustainability also varies according to the stakeholder, location and time. He listed other pertinent issues, including user commitment, the balance between individual and social benefits, stakeholders' rights, the state's willingness to allow significant commercial benefits to disadvantaged communities and subsidization of unsustainable use for national development. McNeely provided a number of prerequisites for sustainable use at the community level, including clear tenure rights, sufficient knowledge to manage a resource, feedback and adaptive management, appropriate legislative frameworks and social pressure. He concluded by asserting that sustainable use is a variable, not a constant; that it may be more attractive than commercial harvesting for local subsistence; and that a combination of approaches is needed, ranging from strict protection to sustainable and intensive uses.

In the discussion some speakers noted that local communities often choose commercial harvesting over sustainable use. McNeely stressed that the question is whether such actions will be sustainable in the long-term.

#### GLOBALIZATION VS. DECENTRALIZATION

Peter Bridgewater, UNESCO, discussed the globalization of socio-cultural values and the ecosystem approach. He stressed the importance of cultural diversity and consideration of the cultural dimensions of biodiversity management, conservation and use. He added that management is a matter of social choice and that the ecosystem approach should involve all relevant sectors of society and scientific disciplines. He noted that globalization is not just an economic phenomenon, but also a cultural, technical and environmental one. Bridgewater then said that globalization tends to contribute to a lowest common denominator approach, thereby ignoring aspects of cultural diversity. He stressed the need to be more sensitive to cultural issues, and that people's relationship to the biosphere and how that relationship is managed are the keys to the ecosystem approach.

Responding to a question on building international consensus, Bridgewater noted that although it is important, it is also necessary to agree to disagree. Regarding local landscapes, one participant noted the need for a "red list" of languages in danger of extinction as a way of highlighting cultural dimensions.

Jan-Eirik Sørensen, World Trade Organization (WTO), addressed the compatibility between the WTO framework and environmental agreements. He briefly outlined the WTO's major principles of non-discrimination, trade liberalization and removal of barriers to trade, as well as its dispute settlement system. He noted WTO preambular language on the optimal use of natural resources and sustainable development. He listed parameters for mutually supportive trade and environmental measures, including: the positive role of trade liberalization in proper pricing; the right to set environmental protection standards provided that they are not discriminatory; and the WTO's openness to integrating developing and least-developed countries into the world economy. He noted that discussion around the WTO and CBD has generally focused on the Agreement on Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and specifically Article 27.3(b), which addresses biotechnological inventions and plant varieties. He listed areas of conten-

tion, including the definition of *sui generis* regimes for such protection, the patenting of life-forms and genetic material, access to environmentally sound technologies and the protection of traditional knowledge. He asserted that TRIPS could be a powerful instrument for benefit sharing in the area of traditional knowledge.

Ricardo Melendez-Ortiz, International Center for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), spoke on the issue of trade and environment within the context of globalization. He stressed the need to make sustainable development a main objective of trade policy-making and the trade system. He described the trade regime as a pyramidal, hierarchical set of norms, rules and common principles; the environmental regime as a proliferation of problem-based, *ad hoc* norms and diverse approaches; and the development regime as a variant of income growth-based strategies. Overall, he said the different regimes were comparatively incoherent, uncoordinated and unequal. On transparency, he emphasized relations with civil society, coordination with other international bodies, and compatibility between WTO provisions and actions related to environmental protection in the framework of regional and economic integration. He concluded by noting that the challenge ahead lies in pushing the trade system to agree on a shared vision with the environmental regime.

#### PANEL DEBATE: WHAT CHANCE FOR LOCAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE TIMES OF GATT AND THE WTO?

The panel debate, moderated by Kjetir Gravir (NRK Radio), included Ricardo Melendez-Ortiz (ICTSD), Jan-Eirik Sørensen (WTO), Jose Sarukhan (Mexican National Committee for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity), Holly Dublin (WWF), Subramonia Ananthkrishna (Forum) and Robert Monro (Zimbabwe Trust). On the issue of bringing environmental issues into the WTO, Ananthkrishna noted that environment-trade conflicts need to address root causes, such as subsidies. Sørensen agreed, citing the potential of the WTO in addressing subsidies in areas such as fisheries and agriculture, which are price distorting and environmentally damaging. Monro argued that trade is not necessarily the issue as national policies and practices are often the cause of unsustainable resource use. Melendez countered the perception that developing countries are being dragged into the WTO framework, stating that they are looking for a rule-based system to protect them in international markets and that any discussion of environmental matters also needs to address economic development. Sarukhan noted that global markets generally support productive efficiency over resource efficiency, which compromises sustainable use efforts. Monro asserted that biodiversity is the biggest comparative advantage of developing countries, and highlighted the double standard of calling for devolution of management while prohibiting commercial production by local users. He added that if local communities are not allowed to profit from their surrounding biodiversity, then they will replace it with products that do have market value (e.g., monoculture crops). Dublin noted that in environment-trade issues the most affected stakeholders are often left out, as in the case of the ivory trade. She stressed the importance of scale, noting that local trade is often sustainable and that local examples should be the starting point for addressing resource management vis-à-vis the WTO.

#### THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

Session 11 – Successes and Failures: Case Studies in the Use of Biological Resources: 9:00 am

Session 12 – Follow-up to the Conference: 2:00 pm