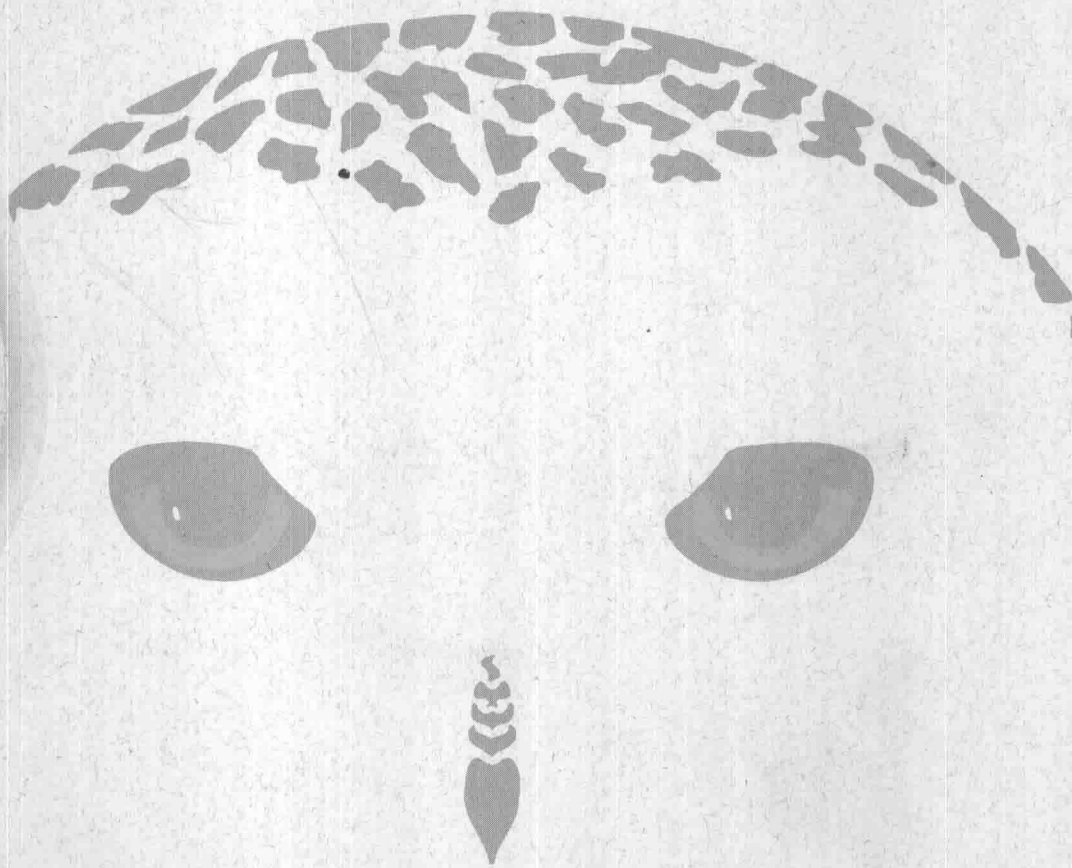
World Conservation Congress
13-23 October 1996
Montreal, Canada

Major Conservation Issues of the 1990s

Results of the World Conservation Congress Workshops



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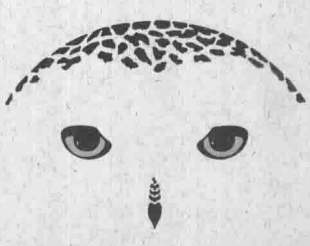

IUCN
The World Conservation Union

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Foreword

This is a summary record of the proceedings of the fifty-two technical workshops and the four so-called "special events" on generic issues conducted during the first World Conservation Congress in Montreal, Canada, in October 1996.

While each workshop was organized by specific IUCN Members, Secretariat Units or partners, the overall coordination of the workshops was in the capable hands of IUCN's Chief Scientist Jeffrey A. McNeely, and he has pulled together the thematic threads – both on the spot, at the conclusion of the Montreal discussions, and in the introduction to the Proceedings below.

We are indebted to the former President of the Union, Sir Shridath Ramphal, who chaired and led with his customary flair and eloquence, the final open panel discussion of the results of the workshops. We thank also for their stimulating contributions to this wind-up debate Sir Shridath Ramphal, Marie-Angélique Savané, Julia Carabias, Keith Bezanson, Ashok Khosla and Anders Wijkman.

The workshops, all well attended and some so crowded that there was standing room only, illustrated yet again two strengths of the Union: its convening power; and the capacity of its Members and Partners to grapple with the emerging and cutting-edge aspects of the great conservation and sustainable development debates of the day.

The workshops were for the first time open to the general public. The level of participation varied but there were some very well informed and pertinent interventions from the several hundred (largely Canadian) members of the public who took part. This was an experiment which paid off.

The special events represented in essence an endeavour to widen the scope of the Union's debate about the future, to set it in some very practical contexts and to bring to the table some highly important global actors. The Union first brought governments and non-government organizations to work together – that was arguably the greatest genius shown by the founders who set up the Union almost fifty years ago. Now there is progress in bringing to the negotiating table other parties who have a major role in natural resource management and use around the world – the private sector and the financiers. Again, we are immensely grateful to the luminaries, ranging from Stephan Schmidheiny to Maurice Strong, William Ruckelshaus to Enrique Garcia and Tessa Tennant, who illustrated by their presence and views that there are several routes to sustainability and much goodwill in searching jointly for this common good.

The workshops and special events were not conducted in a vacuum. With a well organized press centre, the media at virtually all sessions and most of the programme on the Internet each day, the Congress proved to be what it was designed to be – more of a vehicle for getting out the Union's conservation messages than the old General Assemblies ever were. But the professional communicators like David Bellamy who brought their expertise and know-how to the Congress also brought home to participants how far the Union has to go in honing the communication skills which will lift its game in advocacy and wielding influence. Planning for big advances on this vital front are well underway as a result of the Montreal discussions.

It should finally be made clear that this is very much a summary only of the workshop proceedings. The many useful papers presented are not adequately reflected here, nor is the depth of discussion on each theme. This publication is designed to whet readers' appetite to delve further into the

subjects covered. It should also be made clear that the conclusions reached do not always represent a Union-wide consensus on the subjects discussed. That said, I trust you will find this material stimulating and thought-provoking.

David McDowell
Director General
IUCN – The World Conservation Union

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Conservation towards the 21st Century

Messages from IUCN's World Conservation Congress

Jeffrey A. McNeely, Chief Scientist, IUCN – The World Conservation Union

Introduction

Conservationists are seriously concerned about economic and environmental trends around the world. Supported by the current tax and trade policies, people are consuming our planet's resources at an accelerating pace. Governments everywhere are seeking to increase labour productivity, which inevitably means more intensive use of capital, materials, and energy. Increasing resource productivity – which makes more sense from a conservation perspective – would mean reversing this trend, requiring revolutionary changes in policies on trade, technology, industry, labour, and finance. Progress toward sustainable development requires an appropriate balance between the two forms of productivity, closely linking success in conservation to the major development interests of modern society. That's why those of us who are naturalists have climbed down from our mountains, hiked out of our forests and savannas, and swam out of our coral reefs to come to IUCN's World Conservation Congress and meet with bankers, industrialists, economists, journalists, civil servants, developers, and many other interests – to seek ways of working together to influence the major global trends that are threatening the resources we are trying to maintain for future generations.

IUCN's first World Conservation Congress, held in Montreal, Canada, in October 1996, included fifty-two workshops covering a wide range of topics and drawing on a tremendous diversity of input from the 3,000 participants in the event. With hundreds of individual presentations and interventions, this wealth of input – organized largely by IUCN Members – provided a reality check for all of us, enabling us to learn what is happening in the rest of the world, and whether our activities make sense in the context of what is taking place elsewhere. The workshops gave us a chance to share our insights, information and perspectives with our colleagues from all around the world. From this great wealth of intellectual stimulation, I was asked to synthesize the major messages and new areas deserving greater attention by IUCN – its Members, Commissions, and Secretariat.

Many of us will agree that the world we want is very different from the one we are creating, and if we don't change our direction we will end up where we are heading. We need to break the "conspiracy of success" that prevents an honest assessment of experience and inhibits learning from our mistakes. Because, as one workshop pointed out, failure is the best learning experience we have, we need to risk failing, be bold in seeking solutions, learn from our failures, and build on our successes.

We heard from another workshop that a trillion dollars has been spent in official development assistance since the Second World War. That sounds like a lot of money, but in fact this is about the

same amount that is being spent ***every year*** for inappropriate incentives. According to one United Nations estimate, governments are spending a trillion dollars a year – 50 years worth of ODA – in ways that subsidize over-exploitation of natural resources. This puts into perspective the scale of problems that we need to address, and the international financial resources that are available to address them.

A unifying theme

Many workshops suggested a unifying theme: biological diversity, or biodiversity for short. The Convention on Biological Diversity, now ratified by over 170 countries, has three objectives that are remarkably convergent with the IUCN mission statement we adopted in Buenos Aires in 1993, and which was reconfirmed here in Montreal. Our mission is: "To influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable". Echoing our mission, the Biodiversity Convention's objectives are "the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources". In giving us a framework for our programme, biodiversity brings together many different aspects of our business to form a much more comprehensive approach to conservation. It establishes a positive linkage between conservation and development that eluded us when our phrase was conservation ***for*** development. This linkage has enabled us to gain the attention of a far larger constituency among governments, international agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. But we still need to give much more attention to feeding the complexity of the biodiversity concept in easily-digested morsels to decision-makers and the general public who are hungry for solutions to the problems of modern society.

Levels for action

Biodiversity also implies several different levels of action, and the workshops can be conveniently regarded from these different levels. The most basic is the local level – the farm, the village, the forest, and the individual protected area. Other levels include the bioregional, the national, and the global. While action is required at all of these levels, several workshops gave particular attention to the first level, calling for local empowerment, benefits, and responsibilities. Perhaps the best attended of the workshops and in many ways the one that seemed to strike the most responsive chord among the most people, was in the form of a drama called "Guardians of Eden". The message that came out of that play seemed to boil down to four points:

- First, communities should be empowered to find their own solutions, requiring government policies to enable such empowerment.
- Second, we need to understand the past and present in order to prepare for the future.
- Third, seemingly-unsophisticated communities can and do make profound decisions about long-term sustainability effects on grounds that are not obviously rational in scientific terms.
- And fourth, and something that we must take to heart, local people are angry that those who are living far away are making decisions for them or that affect them.

Several of the workshops concluded that we must create, nurture and enable responsibility in

landowners and resource users to manage and protect land and natural resources. We heard, for example, that in South Africa about 7% of the land is now in private protected areas. That is a development which needs our attention, for it is both an opportunity and a potential problem. One of the major challenges is how to build national policy support and a framework for such local initiatives and put them on a sound legal footing. You may remember part of the Hippocratic oath for physicians: first, do no harm. We have to ensure that governments do not advocate policy measures that discourage local initiatives such as these. The principle of local responsibility for local resources came up repeatedly in many of the workshops. This makes sense because feedback works especially well at the local level. When a local-level resource manager makes a mistake, he or she pays for that mistake in declining productivity of the system. When a local resource manager makes a good decision, then more benefits flow and sustainability of resource uses is more likely. Community-based management is a form of on-going natural selection, a sort of adaptive management based on real-life experience and locally-available resources.

Yet local communities are not the only bodies in society interested in managing natural resources and capable of doing so. In real-life situations it soon becomes apparent that a variety of actors – institutions, authorities, businesses, interest groups and agencies of various kinds – exist within and outside local communities. These actors have different concerns and capacities to bring forward, which should not be "lumped" together, not even into an (improbable) "community position". As discussed in the workshop on collaborative management, various actors can assume different responsibilities and receive different benefits for the ultimate advantage of both conservation and society. Such partnerships require much time and resources to develop and are dependent on genuine professional commitment, but they assure the best chances for the sustainability of conservation and effective resource management.

Many of the workshops also stressed the importance of indigenous knowledge. The democratic trends that we see in many parts of the world have reinforced the legitimacy of tribal and communal responsibility over many areas. Native title in one form or another has been recognized or reinstated at least partially in Brazil, Colombia, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and many other countries. But at the same time, we also heard that traditional knowledge should be on the list of endangered species. Of the world's 6,000 languages at least half are no longer being taught to young people, so we are losing cultural diversity even more quickly than we are losing biological diversity. This means that we are losing a significant part of the knowledge that people have learned over many generations for adapting to their local ecosystems.

One of the problems has been that the local knowledge has been freely used by anybody who can get ahold of it. A study that was quoted from UNDP suggested that the developing world would gain around US$5.4 billion per year if multinational food, seed and pharmaceutical firms paid royalties for local knowledge and plant varieties. While such calculations are highly speculative, that amount of money could make a real difference to local communities, if spent appropriately.

We also need to address conservation at the bioregional scale. By my count, at least eight workshops converged on this level. Protected areas must not be islands surrounded by hostile land uses, because they are never large enough to protect all the natural processes, such as evolution or predator-prey relations, that they are designed to conserve. They need to be managed as part of a larger regional landscape – what is called in many parts of the world a biosphere reserve, or in the UK a national park. A broader bioregion that is managed for purposes compatible with the Convention on Biological Diversity can be relevant to mountain systems, marine systems, wetland systems, arid

lands, and any other biome. We need to find a scale large enough to deal with the complexity of the systems involved, but small enough to enable the people involved to come together to negotiate solutions to the critical conflicts that must be resolved.

The national level we all know very well as where sovereignty is lodged, where binding decisions are made in the interest of all a nation's citizens. But national governments everywhere are under pressure today and most of their budgets are declining in real terms. Less money is available from central governments to support the kinds of activities we all care about, so we need to focus more on the highest priorities: what really needs to happen first at the national government level to enable real progress to follow at all the other levels? We need to stimulate more appropriate action at the national level, especially where IUCN members in each country can come together to put pressure on the political system toward agreed conservation objectives. One place to start may be to redirect that trillion dollars per year of perverse incentives toward more positive ends, thereby both saving money and conserving biodiversity.

And finally, we need to work, as we are doing at this Congress, at the international or the global level. One of the recurring themes throughout the workshops was a focus on international programmes and conventions. If we examine the list of international conventions that are relevant to our business, the Convention on Biological Diversity is at the top of the list. Recall that we originated this Convention back at the Third World Congress on National Parks in Bali in 1982, and developed it further through the efforts of the Environmental Law Centre of IUCN and several IUCN General Assemblies before feeding it into the intergovernmental process. The Biodiversity Convention is ours. It says the kinds of things that we need governments to say, and its objectives re-state the IUCN mission. Now that governments have agreed to it, it is time to implement it on the ground, and that remains a big challenge for all of us.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species has also been a very prominent concern, not only in workshops about species, but also those on trade and the environment, addressing issues such as fisheries and forests as well as more traditional wildlife. The Law of the Sea Convention has many aspects that are relevant to our activities in the coastal and marine environments. The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance is very closely linked to our work on wetlands. The World Heritage Convention, which next year will be celebrating its 25th anniversary, is designed to give special attention to areas of global importance, areas where we should all invest some of our time and effort. The Desertification Convention, which has not received nearly the attention that it should from IUCN, will be coming into force at the end of this year, and is especially relevant to Africa, where the problems of sustainable use of wildlife species, vegetation, fisheries, and water, are especially critical. As we heard from another workshop, the Climate Change Convention can support more effective management of protected areas, but it also affects issues like invasive species, coral reefs, biodiversity, and wetlands.

All of these international negotiations are central to our work. The people who are representing governments at the negotiating table, however, are seldom as well briefed as they should be about our concerns. Negotiators at the Climate Change Convention do not understand the importance of their Convention for biological diversity, protected areas, or marine conservation. They may have been briefed about trade issues for the World Trade Organization, but are they informed about the impact of trade on the environment? We need to take advantage of the opportunities these conventions provide at the global level to get better performance out of our national governments.

But at the same time, what about governments that are already over-stretched? Governments have

less money available for the environment, yet we have a proliferation of international environmental conventions requiring seemingly-endless meetings. The documentation for the Convention on Biological Diversity held in Argentina the week after the WCC was over 15 centimetres thick! What government has enough resources the enable its relevant staff to even read all of that material, much less respond to it in a thoughtful way? And that's only one of the conventions. Like the ticking of a metronome, or a time bomb, meetings of Conventions, Panels, and Programmes keep coming one after another. We are in real danger of spending all of our time talking to each other, reading papers, and going to international meetings. What can we do to streamline this international programme – this international proliferation of very useful and very important legislation? One suggestion made by Maurice Strong is that we should have a World Environment Organization that would bring all of these different pieces of legislation together in a more comprehensive way and help enable governments to respond in a more productive manner. These multiple obligations are in danger of becoming a burden, and if they become a burden to governments they won't be implemented – an outcome that would represent a tragic lost opportunity.

That said, we also need to recognize that the negotiation process has been very useful for the conservation movement, bringing our concerns to the attention of governments and political leaders (with all the risks attending such exposure). For example, the policy dialogue known as the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests certainly is influencing national forest policies, so we need to influence our national delegations to those discussions and use them to further our conservation interests.

One last global point: the global economy means that we are now globally tied together in a global market. If you walk down the street in Montreal you can buy goods from just about anywhere in the world. It can be 40° below zero outside, and you can still purchase fresh tomatoes. This is wonderful. But what happens back where those tomatoes are being grown? The consumers of the traded tomatoes here in Montreal don't have any idea – there's no feedback loop between the global economy and the local production of the resources, between the way those resources are being managed on the ground and the way that we're consuming at the global level. We need to build better feedback into our system so that consumers are made aware of the environmental impacts of their consumption. We also should be aware that global economic integration increases the chances of sudden and rapid economic destabilization. If we all become highly dependent on global forces over which nobody seems to have much control, the whole system could unravel like a cheap sweater and we could face unprecedented problems whose solutions may well come from the locally-available resources and knowledge we are able to conserve.

Emerging issues

The workshops identified numerous emerging issues. One of the most interesting was the **increased emphasis given to people**. We need to consider many different social classes, groups, and both genders in the work that we are doing. Why is that? The benefits from using resources historically have been flowing to the wealthier sectors: the export producers, the commercial farmers, the investors in extractive industries. But the costs have been shouldered especially by the poor, by subsistence farmers, the informal sector workers, and women. Women throughout all societies and at all levels have often been left out of the environmental equation – their actual and potential contribution, the consequences of their behaviour, and the potential effects of environmental activities on their lives

and livelihoods have been ignored. So a special effort was made during the Congress to introduce **gender perspectives** and the need for gender analysis, and a Gender Resource Team was formed to monitor the integration. This exercise showed that we still have a long way to go. Some workshops did discuss empowerment of the real resource users, both men and women, calling on conservation to include the most marginalized and to understand the differences not only between the genders but also within them. And while some workshops made a passing reference to projects involving women, serious discussions of gender issues in most was conspicuously absent. We have not yet understood that we need a fundamental re-thinking of our approach to conservation, not a simple "add on" of projects or project elements for women. We have not yet realized that ignoring the importance of gender-determined roles is detrimental to both our conservation efforts and to the men and women of the communities with which we interact.

Issues of **equity** and the **collaborative management** approaches that were discussed in many workshops provide powerful pathways towards both a more effective and efficient management of natural resources and a more just and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from this improved management. We should keep in mind, however, that the richest 350 people in the world control capital assets that are equivalent to those held by the poorest 50% of the world's population. We have a long way to go to correct the inequities that characterize today's world.

Apart from equity issues, it is evident that when people are not involved in reaching decisions, the chances of their compliance are slim. And yet powerful mechanisms are available to involve various actors in collaborative management partnerships. Collaborative management agreements can take many forms, including active consultation of stakeholders, negotiation of a specific share of rights and responsibilities, involvement in a formal management body, partial devolution of functions, and so on. Only the relevant actors can identify the approach best suited to the context at stake.

Other workshops examined **why resources are being over-consumed**. In one workshop economists told us that global resources are being consumed especially by citizens of countries that have very well defined property rights, and resources are over-produced (that is, depleted) especially by those countries with ill-defined property rights. As a result, the full costs of production are being ignored – in economic terms, these costs are "externalized". The system has no feedback, so it cannot adapt to change. If economic factors are leading to over-exploitation, then we need to correct these institutional failures through mobilizing economic tools for conserving biodiversity. For better or worse, economics is now the language of discourse of decision makers, so we must learn to use the language of economists. If we are able to quantify the economic value of water-based ecosystems, for example, and to specify the role of those systems in supporting local communities downstream, then decision makers may be able to see the wisdom of conservation upstream and enact the laws that provide an appropriate property rights regime.

We heard many good examples of things that are working, at least in some places. One of the most interesting was **restoration ecology**. "Restoration ecology" may sound as if it's rather abstract science, but the workshop that addressed the subject said: "Restoration ecology allows people an opportunity for personal self-transformation, community renewal and a way to resonate with the ancient traditions of world renewal". Thus ecologists, too, are beginning to see that conservation is a social movement, calling for profound cultural change.

Many of the workshops discussed the dynamism of systems. We heard that the protected area systems of the world are constantly changing. A report from one part of the world said that they hope "to complete the protected areas system by the year 2000". But I don't believe we should think in

terms of ever completing protected area systems, because conditions are dynamic. With climate change, changing patterns of land use, and changing economic systems, protected areas too will constantly change. And we don't need to devote much time to discussing whether they should cover 10% or 12% or 15% of the landscape. What really matters is the way that we manage the entire landscape, the way that protected areas relate to the surrounding lands. If we manage our lands well, a protected area estate of 10% is ample, but if we abuse the rest of our landscape, then 15% is not nearly enough.

We heard a lot about ecosystem management, which is strongly endorsed by the CBD, but the regulatory mechanisms used in most countries are often very species-specific. CITES, endangered species laws, and many sustainable use programmes are all aimed at individual species or populations, so we need to complement the ecosystem approach with improved approaches to species conservation. And surely one of the most interesting products for the general public is the **Red List of Endangered Species**. The release of the latest edition the week before the WCC attracted tremendous attention and people started to renew their concern about what is happening to the species on the Red List. Given the communications power of such tools, it was suggested that they should be extended to ecosystems as well.

All the workshops addressed the cross-cutting issue of **communications**, either directly or indirectly. It is clear that communications are critical to building a broader constituency. We need clear communications, influential input from the stakeholders, and apparent and obvious support for the initiatives of other interests and other ways of ensuring that people understand the processes, the results and the impact of the conservation initiatives that we're trying to push.

We also heard from the people who are working on **information and electronic communication technology**, one of the most dramatic innovations of the late 20th century. Here is what they say: "Many information technologies are available and are being used by IUCN members and partners. Now is a good time to get started as the conservation community has people who can help give advice on which are best to use". Perhaps IUCN could offer a useful service by providing a framework for packaging conservation information into easily digested and applied portions. Indeed, the newly-created Biodiversity Conservation Information System, bringing together the efforts of several parts of the greater IUCN family, is an important step in this direction.

We also talked a lot about **trade and the environment**, and especially about how we can work more productively with **the private sector**. Over the past few years, official development assistance has been declining slowly, while private sector investment has been growing so quickly that it is now by far the dominant player in developing countries (though the vast majority of this investment is in about 15 rapidly-industrializing countries, while most others are largely ignored by private investors). As one indication of their economic influence, the ten largest multinational corporations now have sales that exceed the combined GNP of the 100 smallest countries. The private sector is also the primary vehicle for transmitting cultural values through advertising, cinema and popular music. These facts indicate that a constructive cross-sectoral dialogue is needed between business and conservation, based on mutual interests in the sustainability of resource use. We need to encourage industry to move beyond compliance and risk management and into building conservation principles into their corporate planning as a strategic opportunity.

But a question that will be on all of our minds is, who will be able to oblige the private sector to internalize its social and environmental costs, especially when these cross national borders?

Conclusions: What IUCN can do

So what kind of a future do we want? Here are ten suggestions on what IUCN can do, seeking to synthesize the key messages from the 52 workshops into just a few words.

- First, we need to build a stronger constituency through providing or publicizing the benefits of conservation to more people and interest groups. We need to develop partnerships by which the benefits and responsibilities of conservation are equitably shared in society.
- Second, we need to help raise conservation issues and define what should be the public priorities. This will depend on improved communications with multiple audiences on subjects that have eluded media attention, such as how biodiversity loss and ecological degradation affect and are affected by cultural loss, poverty and human disease, and the linkages between trade and the environment.
- Third, we need to provide a forum for discussions of issues that are not yet on the international agenda, for example the impact of decentralization on biodiversity, underlying causes of threats to biodiversity, issues of land tenure, unsustainable consumption, and even the impact of corruption on conservation.
- Fourth, we need to give more attention to invasive alien species and restoration ecology, the former as a major conservation challenge and the latter as a major conservation opportunity.
- Fifth, we need to provide positive examples of best practice, including self-reliance, gender issues, and equity. And perhaps we need also to provide bad examples or good examples of bad practice. We need to work on monitoring and evaluating successes, failures, and trends, leading us in productive new directions.
- Sixth, we need to greatly expand our use of legal and economic tools for conservation, including economic incentives, green taxes, charges, compensation, debt relief, environmental funds, and many others. Couching our positions in economic terms will enhance our credibility with politicians and other decision-makers.
- Seventh, we need to provide scientifically credible information that is readily accessible to the public and to policy makers and in a form they can use – another task for information technology and communications.
- Eighth, we need to promote productive new partnerships between different sectors, between governments and NGOs, between the private and public sectors, and between different scientific disciplines. We need to help promote institutional and intellectual hybrid vigour.
- Ninth, we need to find ways to promote a diversity of solutions to local conservation problems, support more effective national conservation policies, and use global conventions and other measures to give greater legitimacy to conservation action on the ground.
- And finally, we need to do what we did at the World Conservation Congress: promote and facilitate exchanges of views, and help to get people in touch with each other so that they can pursue their own diverse interests and concerns more effectively.

In short, we need action that is economically practical, ecologically sound, politically palatable, socially acceptable, and legally enforceable. That of course will require site-specific responses in each individual country, built on sound national policy and supported by vigorous international cooperation. We need to look for incremental improvements, not to expect revolutionary changes necessari-

ly, but to continue to take significant steps along the way toward a more sustainable future. We need to combine a rigorous scientific analysis with the socio-economic and spiritual values embraced by society to shape a landscape that can adapt to the changes that the 21st century will surely bring.