

Development “Reconciling poverty eradication and quality of the environment: What are the innovative solutions?”

TOPIC 2 – POVERTY ERADICATION AND BIODIVERSITY

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Conservation agencies such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) support conservation of biodiversity both for its intrinsic value and for its importance in providing life support for humans through ecosystem services on which livelihoods ultimately depend. From food, fuel and freshwater, to pollination, flood protection and climate regulation, biodiversity provides the ecosystem goods and services needed for people to survive and prosper. Nature has always supported the growth and progress of human societies, something which we have often taken for granted.

Recent IUCN research indicates that forests, for example, deliver a previously unaccounted for US\$130 billion of direct, tangible benefits to 1.6 billion of the world’s poorest people each year. 60 million indigenous people are almost entirely dependent on forests, and 2.2 billion people in developing countries use agroforestry farming systems. An estimated one billion people currently depend on fish for food, income and livelihood, at least 85% of whom rely principally on fish as their major source of protein.

Currently, 1.4 billion people are still living on less than US\$1.25 a day (1 billion being rural poor and 70% are women), and close to one billion people suffer from hunger. According to the study on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), ecosystems such as wetlands, coral reefs and forests account for between 47% and 89% of the so-called “GDP of the poor”, meaning the source of livelihoods for the rural and forest-dwelling poor.

The international community has put eradication of extreme poverty and hunger as the primary goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, this goal cannot be achieved without ensuring environmental sustainability and meeting social development goals. The key to not just one, but several MDGs, may well be found in rethinking the relationship between biodiversity, ecosystems and human wellbeing.

Conservationists have largely failed to convince economists and development practitioners of conservation’s long-term importance to development. As a result, the environment has been largely ignored as an opportunity for poverty reduction, and the focus on short-term development at the cost of environmental damage has often undermined longer-term efforts aimed at poverty reduction.

Addressing the issue of global poverty is an ethical imperative to which conservation and sustainable development can, and must, contribute. In practice, different actors will have different points of entry. Development practitioners may focus on reducing poverty. For conservationists, poverty eradication will be important as both an ethical prerequisite and as a practical requirement to achieve biodiversity conservation objectives. This has particular relevance to protected areas and to areas with some of the richest diversity, both biological and cultural, where many of the world’s poorest people live.

Nature’s benefits are not equally shared. Well-off people, and richer countries, are better positioned to accumulate benefits from nature – often by unsustainable means – while poorer people tend to bear the direct cost of biodiversity loss. It is the poor and disadvantaged who are often excluded from decision-making processes on natural resource use. It is, however the poor, relying as they do more directly and to a larger degree on natural resources to sustain their livelihoods, who suffer the consequences of such decision making. Sharing power, benefits and responsibility with respect to natural resource conservation and management, as well as strengthening governance arrangements to make them more transparent, inclusive and equitable, can be good for both people and biodiversity.

Investing in nature is therefore investing in development and, at the same time, investing in the achievement of the MDGs. Innovative approaches and solutions are absolutely needed—and these can only be found if conservation and development communities work together towards realizing what may well be the single biggest opportunity for sustainable poverty reduction.