



Issue 1
January 2003

in Harmony

SAVING THE ENVIRONMENT • COMBATING POVERTY

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FEATURE

WSSD — IN THE WOODS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

by Pablo Gutman

At the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg, country delegations and other stakeholders followed up on the initiatives from Rio's Earth Summit in 1992, along with the imperative of taking on a global agenda for poverty reduction. Most environmental and social non-governmental organizations (NGOs) see WSSD as a failure or at least as a lost opportunity. From an environmental perspective, as a high-ranking UN officer who was once a ministry of the environment official commented to the author, "If we had negotiated Rio at Johannesburg, we would have got half of what we got ten years ago."

The process and the outcomes

WSSD did not get off to a good start. The run-up process lagged behind schedule, the UN secretariat was unable to muster support for its draft documents, and foot-dragging by government delegations took such proportions that by the May 2002 Bali Preparatory Committee Meeting, many NGOs were seriously discussing boycotting the whole summit. By the time delegations assembled at Johannesburg, the draft Plan of Implementation was full of bracketed text on most North-South issues, including trade, investment, financing, governance, and aid. There were no brackets around the proposals that NGOs had tabled during the preparatory process (such as committing to clear environmental and social targets and reforming the international governance system). This seemingly favorable result was really not so, as government delegations from both the North and the South managed to dump all substantial NGO proposals before arriving in Johannesburg in a rare case of effective agreement!

What remained unfinished was still very contentious. In Johannesburg, the drafting of the Political Declaration, usually a short, innocuous piece that accompanies every UN conference, became such an argumentative issue that discussions were stopped and the South African government, some said President Mbeke himself, was



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asked to come up with a conciliatory text. The final four-page "Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development" avoids fundamental issues such as environmental targets, trade reforms, democratization, market reforms, and international aid. It repeats the same wish list from the past ten years of international meetings without innovation.

Why did so many achieve so little?

What went wrong? Why did the WSSD achieve so little? Why did NGOs fail to make a difference? To a large extent, WSSD's shortcomings can be traced to unfavorable international conditions. From the very beginning of the run-up process, most participants realized that WSSD confronted difficult challenges, with the world economic slowdown, an

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anti-environment administration in the White House, terrorism concerns dominating the international political agenda, and trade/WTO negotiations dominating the international development agenda. Add to all this widespread international conference fatigue, and you have the real picture of the run-up to WSSD.

The negotiators and the negotiations

It is fair to say that self-interest dominated common interest in the positions taken and promoted by government delegations from both rich and poor countries. In addition, the UN's built-in need for consensus actually worked against WSSD's outcomes. The initial technical assessments and draft documents did carry some bold assessments and interesting proposals, but they were later dumped in a negotiation process focused on a search for a lowest common denominator. There is much to be said for consensus building, but not if it means yielding to the whims of the least committed parties.

What's next and how can we the NGO movement do it better?

We cannot predict how long the current negative international trends will last. Nor can we expect that NGOs alone can fill the void left by uncommitted governments and reluctant private businesses. There are some things NGOs could have done in the run-up to WSSD—but did not—and are worth trying in the future. By and large, NGOs around the world did little to make WSSD

a national issue in their home countries. Also, most NGOs went into WSSD with many demands but no clear central message. Because there were no central messages, there was little dialogue among NGOs throughout WSSD beyond co-signing today's leaflet and forgetting about it tomorrow. Even if broader and more daring goals than those pursued at WSSD are not attainable in the short run, campaigning for them is in itself a social education process.

To sum up, WSSD has clearly shown that we face a difficult international scene. Beyond the rhetoric of poverty alleviation, few governments and businesses seem willing to commit to social and environmental goals. Far from a call to downgrade our demands, the current state of affairs requires the NGO movement to be bolder in putting forward our central messages, to invest more in strengthening long-term civil society partnerships, to do a better job in identifying and working with the more progressive voices of government, business, and other stakeholders—while still challenging the laggards with clear and pressing demands. ●

PabloGutman

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ECPE PROGRAM TRACK

This program was designed in recognition of global economic changes that have affected policies and institutions at national and local levels. As a result of these changes, competition for environmental assets has intensified, and impacts on the rural poor have been profound. Evidence also suggests that unless the rural environment is better protected and the poor are better able to control and manage these natural assets, the societal costs will eclipse any progress being made in reducing poverty. There is a need to better link these local dynamics to policy and institutional reforms to promote favorable poverty-environment dynamics.

Towards this end, WWF-MPO's Economic Change, Poverty, and the Environment program (ECPE) is working in partnership with national organizations to develop an adaptable analytical and intervention approach to promote policy and institutional change that enables rural communities to improve their management and control of environmental resources. Pilot efforts are being carried out in five countries – China, Indonesia, South Africa, Zambia and El Salvador — in which analysis links local poverty-environment dynamics to institutions and national policies, leading to strategic interventions for their reform. We are also participating in the international policy dialogue for improved understanding and ability to integrate poverty reduction and environment programs. For more information on this program, its in-country activities, please visit our website at <http://www.panda.org/mpo/poverty>. ●

IN FOCUS

As part of the Economic Change, Poverty, and the Environment program (ECPE), WWF-China is building on a previous community level integrated conservation and development program (ICDP) for communities living in the Baimaxueshan Nature Reserve in Yunnan Province. These communities had been at odds with the Reserve since its creation because of regulations such as bans on logging, hunting, and agricultural expansion that negatively impacted their livelihoods. People's resistance was detrimental to the conservation efforts. Two years ago, WWF-China started working with communities in six villages in which conflicts had been high. The program helped encourage alternative livelihoods and involved villagers in policing the reserve and managing their use and production of forest products. As a result, conflicts over illegal extraction from these villages were virtually eliminated. However, that effort required substantial resources and was not sustainable. It was also not easily replicable, and consequently, scaling up was not easily foreseeable.

The application of the ECPE approach here included an analysis of local poverty-environment dynamics and their links to meso and national policies and institutions. Based on this analysis, a strategic intervention plan was launched to incorporate comprehensive community co-management into the current top-down Nature Reserve management—and to mainstream it into Provincial institutions related to implementing environment and poverty policies. Acceptance of comprehensive community co-management is being targeted at various levels — in Baimaxueshan Nature Reserve management, Provincial administration, and national level planning and policy making — with a combination of capacity-building,

communications, and advocacy efforts. The new pilot co-management sites are being integrated into Reserve management. For the first time, Reserve staff will be explicitly involved in community relations and welfare. The salutary efforts of WWF-China and regional coordinator Ms. Wu Yusong have resulted in an effective bottom-up expression of interest from the Nature Reserve for co-management. The project is helping to link this demand to institutions of resource allocation and technical support in Yunnan's provincial capital inof Kunming, and it is also contributing to policy dialogue at the national level. ■



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PARTNERSHIPS

In mid 2001, WWF, led by the goals of the Economic Change, Poverty and the Environment Program to expand the policy dialogue for stronger integration of development and environment policies and programs, started to develop a partnership with CARE-International under a framework of 'Social and Environmental Justice. This partnership was further catalyzed by the opportunity for joint advocacy at the past World Summit on Sustainable Development. During the past 11 months, WWF and CARE have focused on the development of a common 'rights based' conceptual position, papers, and joint advocacy at WSSD. This Partnership will explore themes such as: rural poverty alleviation and environmental conservation; trade and

investment; agriculture; and global climate change, natural disasters and the poor. The Partnership now has developed specific plans to 'reach-in' to both organisations, searching for concrete field and policy opportunities to work together. To further this, a very small, jointly funded co-ordination unit has been created and a Partnership workshop will be held in February of 2003 with key field staff from both organisations who could possibly put the Partnership into effect in the field or in policy and advocacy arenas. For further information contact: Mario Pareja, Co-ordinator WWF-CARE Partnership, e-mail: Parejamr@hotmail.com or Tel/fax: +33 (0) 450203812. ■



LATEST WORDS AND SOME



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Poverty Reduction and Biodiversity Conservation: The Complex Role for Intensifying Agriculture, by John W. Mellor (see <http://www.panda.org/downloads/policy/mellor.pdf>).

Well before the so-called, technology-led “green revolution” in agriculture during the 1970s, noted scholar and agricultural economist John W. Mellor had predicted that this intensification would provide the means for sustainably lifting the vast majority of the world’s rural households out of poverty. Mellor argued that if correctly managed, it could also provide the means for moving large numbers of people permanently out of dependence on agriculture. Since then, adoption of new agricultural technologies has been widespread, and great strides have been made in reducing poverty and ensuring food security. However, the huge toll these processes have taken on the environment has gone largely undocumented.

Today, large pockets of rural poverty still remain, and continued growth in agricultural intensification is still considered a key solution by many. In this paper, Mellor confronts the dilemma of using agricultural intensification to raise the incomes of the poor while managing the effects it has on ecology and enabling biodiversity conservation. He analyzes the key policies and institutions that shape the course of agricul-

tural growth and their implications for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation. In the end, he proposes an action plan in which both the environmental and development communities need to take concerted action together.

Other papers in ECPE’s Viewpoint Series on Poverty and Environment, include:

Poverty is not a number: The environment is not a butterfly by David Reed

Forest Conservation and the rural poor: A call to broaden the conservation agenda by Pablo Gutman

To access these and other resources, please visit our website at <http://www.panda.org/mpo>. ■



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ON THE HORIZON

Information exchange via the Web: ECPE shortly will introduce a new Web Forum for information exchange in key themes on integrating poverty and environment. Subscribers will be able to post information and documents they have generated — on activities, results, and any related issues they wish to share with others. Please feel free to pass on this information to those who may be interested, as we will announce the details in our next Newsletter. To expand this feature step by step, we will introduce a number of thematic areas each quarter. Upcoming themes for which web information forums will be started include: experiences with integrating environment issues in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs); and experiences with compensation, market mechanisms, or other means of payment for environment services. ■



YOUR OPINION

Your Opinion Matters...

In Harmony is interested in readers’ opinions on our newsletters. Please share with us any thoughts, insights, or requests on the material you see in this issue. We would also like to hear about any recommendations you may have for future articles or features, as well as any changes that you would like to see in the newsletter. Finally, we would appreciate any general comments or thoughts on **In Harmony**. You can reach us by e-mail at mpo@wwfus.org or by fax at +1 202 293 9211.