

**IUCN - The World
Conservation Union**

Internal Review of the Biodiversity Programme

A summary of discussions held
on April 2, 1996

Internal Review of the Biodiversity Programme

Strengthening IUCN's input to Global Biodiversity Policy

Introduction

A group of people (see participants list attached) representing different parts of the IUCN programme met in Gland to discuss the focus, role, achievements, and future directions of the IUCN Biodiversity Programme (BDP). Additionally, a number of people from the field, from commissions and from Regional and Country offices submitted their comments in writing; these have been incorporated in this report. The meeting was intended to provide some ideas that would help the programme in its future work, and to provide input to the external strategic review of the Biodiversity Programme to be held in Gland on April 18-19 (see separate paper to go into Internal Review).

The meeting opened with David McDowell, Mersie Ejigu, and Jeff McNeely outlining the history of the BDP, its successes and some of its perceived shortcomings (see remarks attached). Jeff went on to add that everything IUCN does is related to biodiversity, and he wondered whether, in fact, there should be a separate biodiversity programme at all. He then said that the concept of biodiversity is a powerful one, and that it amounts to a new way of looking at conservation. He presented some statistics that showed how the term "biodiversity" was increasingly used in scientific papers, and noted that it was now a powerful way to mobilise support, influence policy, and catalyse funds for the work of the Union. Since more than 140 countries had ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), this gave them a reason to want to work in this area. In short, he felt that IUCN was not taking sufficient advantage of the biodiversity concept. He then challenged the people present to look at the present state of the programme, to determine how it could work better, and to ask themselves what their respective programmes could do to strengthen the work of IUCN on biodiversity.

With that background, the participants identified four major problems facing IUCN in its work on biodiversity. They suggested some possible solutions, and proposed a series of institutional mechanisms that would help the programme work more effectively in the future.

Priorities:

The first problem identified by the participants was a lack of clear priorities for IUCN on the issue of Biodiversity. As a result, it was felt that IUCN and the BDP were trying to do too much given the available resources. Given this lack of priorities and strategy on biodiversity, some participants questioned whether the BDP's focus on the Biodiversity Convention was appropriate. The overall lack of clear IUCN priorities on biodiversity policy was making it difficult for other programmes and components of IUCN to work together, and was leading to heavy workloads and stress for the people working in the programme.

Defining objectives and setting priorities was also seen as a way of solving another of IUCN's drawbacks on biodiversity policy: the need for more focused and targeted communications. Several people noted that out of about 140 activities proposed and undertaken by IUCN in support of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), about 80 involved the production of publications. They wondered whether all of these were targeted, and whether they were really helping achieve the goals of IUCN. Naturally, seminal publications like the "Guide to the Biodiversity Convention" produced by the Environmental Law Centre, did serve a purpose and were clearly thought out, but the aims of some of the other publications were less clear. It was suggested that by establishing clearer objectives and priorities, IUCN and the BDP would then have a yardstick against which to measure any future projects and publications.

There was no clear indication from the group on how IUCN and the BDP could help solve this problem, but the BDP was encouraged to set up a system that would allow IUCN to carefully choose how it plans to get involved in global biodiversity policy. An attempt was made to help IUCN and the BDP establish these priorities based on a matrix provided in the documentation, but this exercise merely served to highlight how difficult prioritisation can become. The participants did, however, stress a number of important criteria and considerations that needed to be kept in mind when establishing priorities and defining objectives:

- 1) Priorities should be based on the needs and expectations of IUCN's members on the ground. This is extremely difficult to do, but the participants noted that steps were being taken in various regions to better define the priorities and needs of members. It was felt that the BDP should profit from these developments and the Regional Support Group (RSG) and regional and country offices (RCOs) need to play a key role in this regard (see below). The BDP pointed out that virtually all of its work is in response to requests from IUCN members and that it regularly works closely with members in the field.
- 2) The priorities of IUCN should be based on the Union's scientific expertise as found in the Commission networks and other technical programmes. To establish this, it was suggested that the BDP should consult with each of the technical programmes, commissions and RCOs in order to establish their priorities in terms of global biodiversity policy. This long list would then allow the BDP to use its knowledge of the global biodiversity issues and of IUCN's capabilities in order to narrow that list down into a clearly defined set of priority work areas. The BDP paper on "Proposed IUCN Support to the Convention on Biological Diversity" was seen as a good beginning in this regard.
- 3) Priorities need to take into consideration existing funding capabilities. While it is important to ensure that resources exist in order to carry out the work of IUCN, it was felt that IUCN should not be a "donor-driven" organisation, and therefore this criterion was seen to be less important than the two mentioned above.
- 4) In establishing priorities, it was suggested that the BDP should concentrate on its objectives. It should define its "indicators of success" and then measure its achievements based on these indicators. Some examples of "success indicators" that were provided by the group were: significant shifts in biodiversity policy that lead to increased conservation on the ground; success in mobilizing money and other resources for biodiversity conservation on the ground; and a greater awareness and understanding among policy makers of the key issues affecting biodiversity conservation.

experience of the SSC. Thanks to this sound science base, and to effective lobbying at the Conference of the Parties, IUCN helped bring about a major shift in the way CITES operates. However, this work with CITES was based on over two years of work in the field with members of the SSC. Similarly, the relationship that IUCN has developed with CITES is the result of more than fifteen years of working closely with the CITES process. In other words, these things take time and it was clear that IUCN should not expect similar results from a Convention that has only been in existence for three years. It was also noted that IUCN takes positions on less than 5% of the subjects discussed by CITES, thereby focusing on a clear set of objectives and carefully choosing the issues it wants to target. A similar process needs to be followed for the CBD.

The meeting underscored the fact that the Convention on Biological Diversity is a highly-politicised forum. This can be both a problem and an opportunity. It is a problem because IUCN should not let itself be swallowed by the arcane politics of the convention. At the same time, if IUCN understands the politics, the opportunity exists for the organisation to play a key role in ensuring that the decisions of the convention are based on sound science, technical expertise, and experience on the ground. This was seen as a valid and important niche for IUCN within the CBD process.

The meeting emphasised that this information and these linkages need to be two-way. That is to say, at the same time that global policy discussions should be informed by technical considerations and by experience on the ground, work on the ground should benefit from the biodiversity policy discussions taking place at the international level.

Nevertheless, the meeting admitted that making the link between science, work on the ground, and policy at the international level was notoriously difficult. They did not have many solutions to propose. Some of the suggestions included:

- Ensuring that technical programmes, RCOs and commissions were properly briefed on the issues being discussed in global fora, well in advance of those meetings.
- Enabling people from other parts of IUCN to actively participate in biodiversity discussions at the global level.
- Circulating policy positions and proposed papers well in advance of the meetings whenever possible.
- Working with regional and country offices in order to inform and increase the familiarity of IUCN staff, members and partners with global biodiversity issues and thus enable them to more effectively participate in debates around global biodiversity policy.
- Work with members, technical programmes, commissions, and regional offices to ensure that any projects they develop are properly informed by the global policy debates.

Horizontal and Vertical Integration:

All of the above led to an in-depth discussion about the way that different parts of IUCN work with each other. It was felt that more could be done to integrate the work of the BDP horizontally, with the work of other technical programmes, members, and commissions on issues such as forests, species, wetlands, protected areas, law, and

Institutional mechanisms:

In order to achieve the desired outcomes outlined above, the meeting discussed various institutional mechanisms that could be established. Some of these mechanisms are described below:

- 1) **Biodiversity Consultative Group:** It was felt that the IUCN BDP should establish an internal consultative group composed of focal points from the other regional and technical programmes in IUCN. This group could advise IUCN on its biodiversity priorities, on how to work with the regional offices, members, and commissions, etc. Ideally, this group would further explore the ways in which IUCN can help make the three-way link between policy, science and experience on the ground as it relates to biodiversity. The group need not meet regularly, but tele-conferences could be held as necessary, and communication could be maintained via fax or e-mail on a regular basis. This group may be based on the BIOLINK e-mail network that the BDP has established.
- 2) **Issue Task Groups:** A variation or subset of the above suggestion would be to establish small task groups on key global biodiversity issues. For instance, create task groups within IUCN on sustainable use, the sharing of benefits from biodiversity, invasive species, agricultural biodiversity, social issues, indigenous people, etc. These groups would then be led by one person (not necessarily from the Biodiversity Programme) who would ensure that all the relevant parts of IUCN feed into the global policy debate on these issues.
- 3) **Biodiversity Network:** The group felt that the Biodiversity Programme should seek to establish network of specialists on global biodiversity policy. This network could then be used to relieve some of the current pressures placed on the BDP. For instance, when people request IUCN speakers for meetings, or technical papers for publications, the BDP could delegate some of these tasks to the network. The network could also help build the capacities of members and staff in the regions on issues of global biodiversity policy. Such a network exists informally and is being actively utilised by the BDP, but it should be further formalised and put at the disposal of the entire Union.
- 4) **Biodiversity Strategy:** The programme should attempt to develop a strategy, with clear objectives and priorities, for its work on biodiversity. This strategy should build on the excellent existing documentation (e.g. the Global Biodiversity Strategy), but it should go further in making strategic choices and thus allow for others to make comments and provide inputs. The internal and external strategic planning meetings are key steps in achieving this. A strategy is also required to develop an overall approach to biodiversity at the level of the IUCN Secretariat, Commissions, and membership.
- 5) **Communications Strategy:** The above strategy should include a communications strategy that clearly defines with whom the BDP wants to communicate and why. With these objectives in mind, it will be easier to assess the impact of any publication or other form of communication. It was noted that work has already begun on the preparation of this strategy, and this should be completed in conjunction with the development of an IUCN Biodiversity Strategy.
- 6) **Regular Briefings:** Members of the Biodiversity Programme and of the Biodiversity Network (once established) should provide regular briefings to IUCN staff and members (including the commissions) on the status of global biodiversity policy negotiations, particularly as they regard the ongoing negotiation and implementation of the CBD. These briefings on "Global

Participants list:

- 1) Mersie Ejigu (Chair)
- 2) David McDowell
- 3) George Greene
- 4) Jeff McNeely
- 5) Grazia Borini
- 6) Magnus Ngoile
- 7) Eduardo Fernandez
- 8) Simon Stuart
- 9) Paul Holthus
- 10) Lyle Glowka
- 11) Steve Edwards
- 12) Martha Rojas
- 13) Caroline Martinet
- 14) Frank Vorhies
- 15) Fernando Ghersi
- 16) Alex De Sherbinin
- 17) Jill Blockhus
- 18) Mariano Gimenez-Dixon
- 19) Meghan Golay
- 20) Ricardo Bayón (rapporteur)

Introductory Remarks:

The meeting was opened by David McDowell, who briefly explained its purpose and objectives. He lauded the Biodiversity Programme, saying it was in many ways one of the most successful in the Union. He described the programme as "timely, highly productive, and refreshingly high-profile". At the same time, he said the programme had its faults. For instance, he cited the programme's difficulty in working with other parts of the Union, from commissions to Regional and Country offices. He said that it was unrealistic for this meeting to come up with priorities, but that a smaller working group would be created and led by Mersie Ejigu to continue the work begun today.

The Director General was followed by Mersie Ejigu, who also paid tribute to Jeff and his colleagues. He spoke a bit about the tragedy of the commons, and about how this helps us explain the loss of biodiversity. In terms of substantive recommendations to the Biodiversity Programme, he focused on what he called the "missing links". He said that, in his view, the Biodiversity Programme suffered from five "missing links", namely:

- 1) The lack of a link between science on the ground and the policy advocated by the Biodiversity Programme. He cited the inability of the Biodiversity Programme to feed off the scientific work being done by specialist groups of SSC.
- 2) The lack of a link between the work of the Biodiversity programme at a global level and the work previously done by IUCN
- 3) The lack of a link between the Biodiversity Programme and the other thematic programmes in Headquarters and with the Regional and Country Offices.