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## Developing Countries lose Partner in Fight against Ecosystem Degradation

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**On 31 March 2010, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced its decision to end the financial support to most of IUCN NL's projects in developing countries starting 1 January 2011. This is bad news for nature and people in the south and in the Netherlands.**

In the past 16 years, IUCN NL realized with this financial support a sustainable method of poverty eradication: the conservation of natural resources on which many of the poorest in the world are fully dependent.

IUCN NL submitted together with Both ENDS and Wetlands International a five year, 69 million euro proposal to the ministry entitled 'The Ecosystem Alliance: Empowering People and Nature'. The Ecosystem Alliance is currently developing a formal objection to the decision, a possibility in Dutch administrative law.

### *Bad News for the South*

Hundreds of organizations from the south are at risk of losing a faithful partner in their struggle against the loss of natural resources. Globally, more than 2.3 billion people survive on less than 1.5 euro per day (2 US dollar). It is these people that are most dependent in their livelihoods on nature and the services ecosystems provide.

Ecosystems offer not only food and products such as wood, these natural systems offer more: Mangroves, for instance, offer coastal protection and forests are crucial to the delivery of water in river basins.

Through the Ecosystem Grants Programme, IUCN NL provides funds to innovative local initiatives of organizations in the south who want to fight the degradation of ecosystems.

### *Bad News for the Netherlands*

Investing in ecosystems in the south is also of great importance for the Netherlands. The Dutch are major importers and traders of commodities like wood, soy and cocoa. The Dutch economy can not indefinitely use the 'free of charge' services of ecosystems without supporting their conservation.

That the degradation of ecosystems also threatens western wealth, economic growth, sustainable development, and security was stated by the Dutch government itself in the National Biodiversity Policy 2008-2011. Therefore IUCN NL also works to help reduce the ecological footprint of the Netherlands: through lobby, and through sharing knowledge and expertise on CSR and sustainable commodity chains like fish and soy.

With its Leaders for Nature program, IUCN NL succeeded to grow the interest of businesses in biodiversity issues and ecosystems.

Through the Ecosystem Grants Program it is possible to link the demands of local organizations and communities in the south with these activities; furthermore it can also give these organisations a voice in negotiations about sustainable commodity chains. With the decision to stop the financial support, this part of IUCN NL's work could be under pressure.

Through IUCN NL's Natureandpoverty.net partners and experts from both the south and the north exchange knowledge, and discuss experiences with strategies in issue areas such as CO2 emission trading schemes in forestry projects. This cooperation does not only have a positive impact on the quality of projects, it helps parties with their international lobby. In a short time, the natureandpoverty.net has grown into a globally acclaimed knowledge and data-resource.

### *Tradition of pioneering with sustainable results*

In 2007-2010, more than 4,5 million hectares of land in developing countries have been better managed and protected as natural areas or more sustainably managed as agricultural land through the Ecosystem Grants Program. This has contributed to visible improvements in the living circumstances of the people that live there. Furthermore: in many cases the biodiversity in the area increased. An analysis of 49 projects tells us for example that the living conditions of approximately 14.000 households are expected to improve through better management of their living environment. This is due to, for example, the introduction of better fishing techniques or more sustainable agricultural methods.

In Surinam, a partner helped the local community conserve the forest by generating a better income from non-timber forest products like honey, rotan and medicine. By doing so, they also contributed to a better protection of threatened species on the IUCN Red List, like the giant otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*) and the jaguar (*Panthera onca*).

In Latin-America our partners succeeded in convincing the governments of five different countries to get engaged in safeguarding a vast wetland corridor over 3000 km in the Parana Paraguay River Basin.

Through the Ecosystems Grants Program, IUCN NL has over the past 16 years built up a tradition of financing and supporting small new initiatives of local organizations and communities in their fight against the degradation of their own living environment. These projects contributed to a sustainable form of poverty eradication, of which the results will be visible long after the end of the project itself.

The turned down proposal of the Ecosystems Alliance of IUCN NL, Both ENDS and Wetlands International continued this tradition, including continuing with the flexible project-based approach for initiatives from people in the south.

### *Few funds available in the world*

From around the world IUCN NL is receiving heartwarming statements of support and also disbelief, especially from its partners in the South. The reality is that many of these partners will have a more difficult time in finding the needed funding for their work.

IUCN NL received in 1994 the request from the same ministry of Foreign Affairs to set up a "Small Grants" programme. From this work the Ecosystems Grants Programme emerged, again with support from the ministry, and became one of the few funds in the world that is specifically focused on this form of nature conservation and ecosystem management.

There are many organizations that undertook their first work on the green agenda with a small grant from IUCN NL: through carrying out projects in the field, as watchdog, or as supporter of their own government in the development and implementation of policy. These organizations could be organizations representing indigenous peoples, development organizations, nature conservation organisations or environmental groups. The current minister of the Environment of Paraguay worked at an organization that received its first funding from IUCN NL. IUCN NL was also one of the firsts to support the development of the Forest Stewardship Council, which supports the globally recognized forestmanagement certification label (FSC).

It is the way in which IUCN NL used small grants for innovative ideas from local communities and groups that led to global critical acclaim. This way of working has now been copied in for example France, but also by major global institutions. Still there is a shortage of this type of funding in the world.

### *Hope*

We hope that the decision by the ministry of Foreign Affairs does not mean that the Dutch government is distancing itself from the need to green development aid. Sustainable development is based on the three pillars Ecology, Social and Economy. Yet without ecology, there is no chance in long-term sustainable development. That is what the Ecosystem Alliance: Empowering People and Nature was going to focus its energy on!