
IUCN: A Bridge-Builder for Nature Conservation

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Introduction

For most of human history, nature has been considered something to be conquered. Throughout the world people have converted nature for human use—wilderness into homesteads, forests into farmlands, water from lakes and rivers into irrigated crops and energy, and, wildlife, both flora and fauna, into food, clothes, and other human needs.

Only recently has the idea that nature needs to be protected and conserved received general support. In the second half of the last century the first national parks were established in the USA, and many countries have since followed suit by setting up various forms of protected area systems. Public interest has intensified over the last few decades and is now emerging as a major policy factor. The public have been made aware of the importance of nature conservation by a broad range of awareness campaigns—launched primarily by environmental organizations. These campaigns have been influenced by the results of scientific research on the threats to ecosystems and species. It was argued in rather powerful terms that species and ecosystems have considerable long-term biological values which are also important to social and economic development. The public was informed that a rapid depletion of many of nature's resources might adversely impact the livelihood of future generations.

Over the last half-century one of the largest and most active advocates for nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources has been the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). (More recently this has been shortened to IUCN—The World Conservation Union.) IUCN has played a continuing leadership role in global and national discussions on issues related to species and protected area systems, and also in educating the public at large regarding the scientific merits of natural resources and the experiences of practitioners in managing them. Its scientific networks include most of the scientists and technical experts used by governments, international organizations, and environmental conventions on matters related to species and ecosystems, and to nature conservation generally.

IUCN was a major actor behind the preparations for the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. At that time there was little international interest among governments to discuss these matters seriously, and perhaps

even less interest among most of the major international organizations.¹ Soon after, IUCN helped to establish several new international agreements related to nature conservation. These covered very specific topics, such as international trade in endangered species, and the protection of world heritage sites, which include many national parks and other nature reserves.

IUCN is often characterized as a 'hybrid' international organization since it has both non-governmental and governmental members. Its three major organizational parts—sometimes referred to as its 'three pillars'—comprise its membership, its scientific and technical commissions, and its world-wide Secretariat.

As a membership-based organization IUCN is open to institutions whose aims are to promote nature conservation. Its more than 800 members include non-governmental and governmental institutions, and governments/states, from a total of 130 countries.

The second component of IUCN is its scientific and technical commissions. These have personal memberships and have traditionally been based on voluntary services. On an individual basis scientists and others committed to nature conservation volunteer time and services to one or more of IUCN's six commissions. They comprise the Species Survival Commission, the Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas, the Commission on Environmental Law, the Commission on Ecosystem Management, the Commission on Education and Communication, and the Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning. About 9,000 experts are members under these commissions.²

The third component is its Secretariat, with about 650 full-time staff. Around one hundred of these work at the IUCN headquarters in Gland, Switzerland, with the others spread around a global network of regional and country offices. This network has been expanded substantially in recent years. The regional offices in particular, but also some of the country offices, have already been delegated considerable authority in programming, budgeting, and fund raising.

Governance and leadership functions are very difficult in this complex organization. At times in its history each of the three different pillars in IUCN have seemed to go their own ways—without much apparent team-work with the other



parts of the organization. Yet, whenever they have managed to function in close collaboration with each other, the three-pronged thrust which IUCN can then produce makes it one of the most interesting global institutions addressing the 'green' side of environmental problems.

Besides its strong science base, IUCN is an international organization which has been an influential bridge-builder across many different divides. It has linked scientists with practitioners, specialists with system analysts, field operators with policy makers, non-governmental organizations with governments, and nature conservation groups in the North and in the South. Such bridge-building roles are not easy to perform and they are not well understood internationally. Neither do they facilitate good access to funding sources. Yet, it could be argued that if the term 'sustainable development' is to be given a concrete meaning in practical life and become clearly understandable and acceptable to people and nations around the world, the bridge-building functions which IUCN is carrying out are not only very important today—they may become increasingly important in the future.

A major dilemma for IUCN is that, while for several decades it has played major leadership roles at both international and national levels, it is not generally well known. Its members include most of the environmental organizations around the world concerned with nature conservation, but it has little if any name recognition in the media or among public agencies outside its own field. It has wielded considerable influence on international environmental discussions and on the formulation of environmental agreements, but this has been largely behind the scenes. Its mission has focused on raising awareness and on influencing decision makers, and to a considerable extent it has been successful. The world is now quite aware of the importance of nature conservation.

With an international community broadly convinced about the scientific merits of and the economic values in nature conservation, where does IUCN go from here? With so much global attention and action shifted from non-governmental to intergovernmental forums, what is the future role of IUCN? Will it be able to show policy and decision makers how to put general policies and principles into operation? Can it lead the way in demonstrating how to *implement* sound and viable nature conservation? Does it have the necessary financial backing to maintain and possibly expand its role in the future? These issues are complex, and the solutions are uncertain. What seems sure is that IUCN is at a crossroads.

From Nature Protection to Nature Conservation

When IUCN was established in 1948 the founders wanted to mobilize international support for efforts to preserve living species and for the protection of habitats for increasingly endangered species. Protecting nature against damaging interventions by human activities was a major theme. Indeed the initial name of the organization reflected this concern when it was called the International Union for the Protection of Nature.

IUCN was expected to have a strong anchor-point in scientific research and education. The British scientist Sir Julian Huxley, one of its early supporters, had also advocated a strong science base for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), of which he was Director-General when IUCN was established in 1948. Since the UN system at that time had no agency with an environmental mandate, UNESCO stepped in and acted as a sponsor for the new institution, when 18 governments, seven international organizations, and 107 national nature conservation organizations agreed to establish IUCN and signed the Constitutive Act to that effect at Fontainebleau, France on 5 October 1948.³ Box 1 presents key dates in IUCN's history.

Box 1. Key dates in IUCN's history

- 1948 Under UNESCO auspices the International Union for the Protection of Nature was constituted at an international conference in Fontainebleau, France.
- 1956 Name changed to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.
- 1959 The United Nations Economic and Social Council decided to establish a UN List for Nature Parks and Equivalent Reserves and the UN Secretary-General requests IUCN to prepare such a list.
- 1961 After years with continuing funding problems in IUCN several eminent personalities from science and business decide to create a parallel, but complementary, body called World Wildlife Fund, to focus on fundraising, public relations, and large-scale public support.
- 1969 A grant from the Ford Foundation enables IUCN to boost substantially the capacity of its International Secretariat.



- 1971 Publication of *Environment and Development*, a report by a panel of experts convened by the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on the Human Environment, in preparation for the 1972 Stockholm Conference.
- 1972 UNESCO adopts the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, with IUCN asked to provide technical evaluations and monitoring services.
- 1974 Creation of CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species whose secretariat was initially lodged in IUCN but later moved to United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
- 1975 RAMSAR, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, comes into force, with its secretariat administered from IUCN's headquarters.
- 1980 The publication of the World Conservation Strategy—with UNEP and WWF, and with collaboration from FAO and UNESCO.
- 1982 The United Nations General Assembly adopted a World Charter for Nature, based on preparatory work conducted by IUCN.
- 1993 Publication of *Caring for the Earth* (with UNEP and WWF).

The term 'nature protection' put the new institution into an unintended defensive posture. The emphasis on promoting national parks and other protected areas and saving threatened species seemed to indicate that the organization distanced itself from people and their economic and social aspirations. The term 'nature protection' appeared more concerned with wild animals and plants than with people. In 1956 the name of the organization was changed to its present one. 'Nature conservation' was seen as a term more responsive to human concerns than that of nature protection. However, Dr Lee Talbot, former Director-General of IUCN, has pointed out that the name change was necessary for the outside world to have a better understanding of IUCN, but that it did not signify any substantive difference of opinion with those who took the initiative to establish it. 'To the founders,' he noted, ' "Protection of Nature" included the preservation of species and areas, as well as natural beauty

and ethical values—and the restoration, wise use, and administration of natural resources as a basis for development to assure "the future peace, progress and prosperity of Mankind".⁴

It might have been more financially advantageous to remain with the simpler concept of nature protection. To its credit the leadership of the institution realized that, from a strategic and policy point of view, it was more important to take on a bridge-building role between those promoting development objectives and those concerned with the preservation of fauna and flora species and with protected areas for nature. Protected areas and threatened species could most effectively be safeguarded if local people considered it in their own interest to do so. Working *with* rather than *against* local people became a major working principle for IUCN.

In 1980 IUCN unveiled its major work elaborating on these ideas—the World Conservation Strategy (Box 2 gives a brief summary). A basic aim of this strategy was to open up dialogues with the promoters of human development. The rationale behind it was widely noted and applauded in international circles. Moreover, it attracted funding interest from several bilateral donors—mostly north European—which did not have a capacity to operationalize these concepts in developing countries and which also found little if any capacity to do so within the UN system and the multilateral development banks at that time. The same ideas and concepts also attracted the attention of the World Commission on Environment and Development, headed by the former Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland. The Commission's 1987 report presented a persuasive articulation of the term 'sustainable development'—which included ideas influenced by those IUCN had pioneered.⁵ Just prior to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) another major IUCN publication, *Caring for the Earth*, was co-sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF).⁶ It articulated further the ideas contained in the World Conservation Strategy and went on to examine various policy and institutional implications.

Yet, it has been difficult to win full support and complete endorsement for these nature conservation principles from within the ranks of IUCN's own members. Among the Northern non-governmental organization (NGO) members, who for a long time accounted for two-thirds of total membership in the NGO category, several quite vocal ones were actively promoting animal rights and were strongly opposed to any form of sustainable use of animal populations. Gradually, progress has been made in overcoming most of these obstacles, particularly as more NGOs from developing countries become IUCN members. Moreover, in 1994 the IUCN's Director-General and the chair of the Species





Box 2. The 1980 World Conservation Strategy:

Excerpts from Summary in *IUCN Bulletin*, 17: 7–12

Its central theme is that sustainable development—action that alters the environment so that it caters more effectively to human needs, without depleting renewable resources—is essential if the world is to be free from poverty and squalor, but that such development must be based on resources that regenerate naturally and can meet our needs indefinitely.

The World Conservation Strategy (WCS) emphasizes that conservation and sustainable development are not enemies, but are inseparably one.

The WCS lays down three basic principles for conservation: that essential ecological processes and life-support systems must be maintained; that genetic diversity must be preserved; and that any use of species and ecosystems must be sustainable.

The WCS:

- defines the objectives of living resource conservation;
- determines the priority requirements for achieving each of the objectives;
- proposes national conservation strategies;
- recommends anticipatory environmental policies; and suggests ways of helping rural communities to conserve their living resources and advocates greater public participation in planning and decision-making concerning the use of living resources.

Survival Commission (see below) established a working group called the Sustainable Use Initiative (SUI), examining the local and the regional perspectives and experiences on this complex issue. Rather than starting with the formulation of global guide-lines, which had earlier proven difficult and controversial, SUI chose to take a more bottom-up approach. By building on local case-studies and the documentation of national experiences it might have a better chance of gaining broad membership support, as well as obtaining wider international consensus on this topic.⁷

Bridge-Building between Research and Practitioners

From the start it was intended that IUCN should link up research scientists with practitioners and policy makers. A typical link would be to network biologists or zoologists working in research or academic institutions with

administrators and technical staff employed in national parks administrations, zoos, aquariums, and other protected areas. In an age where there is widespread international concern about vanishing species and losses of biological assets which may be of considerable importance to the future of mankind, IUCN provides the largest global network of scientists and technical experts concerned with fauna and flora conservation. Furthermore, it has the largest network of scientists and administrators with practical expertise from managing national parks and other protected areas. However, IUCN's bridge-building roles are not limited to individual species and protected areas. It is also involved in ambitious efforts to synthesize and broaden its knowledge and experience into larger ecosystem issues and into broad policy and institutional issues at national and international levels. As a follow-up to the World Conservation Strategy it offered planning and policy support to countries interested in formulating national conservation strategies.

The world-wide membership in the six scientific and technical commissions provides IUCN with an impressive roll of scientists, national park administrators, lawyers, educators, and other professionals who have strong personal motivation to promote nature conservation. The commissions embrace membership by research scientists and also by many others with largely practical experiences. The largest of these commissions—the Species Survival Commission (SSC)—has seen an almost explosive growth in membership over the last decade. It has at present about 7,000 members, compared with 1,200 members in 1984. They include most of the best-known biologists, zoologists, ecologists, and other natural scientists involved in research on flora and fauna species around the world. It constitutes the most internationally respected and distinguished peer review group devoted to studies about individual species. SSC was a principal actor in establishing the global convention regulating trade in endangered species, CITES, whose Secretariat was first set up under IUCN before it later was moved to UNEP. IUCN continues to play a very active role in CITES.

With its more than 1,000 members, the Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas is the second largest commission in the IUCN system. This is the premier professional network for administrators, technical staff, and scientists involved in national parks and other protected areas and it has high professional recognition around the world. With this background of expertise IUCN has been contracted by UNESCO to provide technical support and conduct field investigations for the World Heritage Convention, since this was established in 1972.

Among the other four commissions, the Commission on Environmental Law also has high international standing in its professional field. It has been very active in providing technical support and advice on legal matters to many



environmental conventions and also on national environmental legislation for a number of developing countries. The Commission on Ecosystem Management (formerly the Commission on Ecology) has a more modest membership list but is also attracting international interest. It has had a pivotal role in IUCN's operational programmes on topics such as wetland management, forestry, and coastal zone management. The Commission on Education and Communication is focusing on issues related to one of IUCN's most basic aims—finding strategic approaches for the education of the general public on the merits and importance of nature conservation as part of broader educational efforts. The Commission on Environmental Strategies and Planning provides assistance and expert advice to national planning and programming of conservation activities in many developing countries. Expertise from all six commissions has been called upon by the Secretariat and the Parties to the new Biodiversity Convention. In addition to the work of the commissions themselves, on specific issues of particular concern IUCN often sets up scientific and technical task forces drawing upon expertise from several or all of them.

While the commissions are not exclusively networks for scientists, there are some imbalances in the scientific disciplines represented in their membership. First of all, there is a large majority of natural scientists in the commissions, but few social scientists. Given IUCN's origins this is to be expected. Yet, as IUCN is reaching out for a better understanding of the links between development and environment, its commission members, as well as the Secretariat staff, would need to interact more directly with social scientists in various fields, including economists. Secondly, relatively few have practical experience in the formulation and the implementation of broader government policies relating to economic and social development. Improving such imbalances would enhance IUCN's bridge-building role.

With this combined strength of science and world-wide experience from the practical application of nature conservation principles, IUCN was an influential actor in international discussions leading up to the establishment of UNEP in 1972. It has played a major role in setting up several international conventions related to the protection of nature (e.g. the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, for which it provides the secretariat). It has also been a main driving force behind the principles that led to the term 'sustainable development' and a significant actor at the UNCED in 1992. More recently, it provided considerable technical and strategic support for the initial planning and for the start-up of the Biodiversity Convention.

Linking Governmental and Non-governmental Members

From its very beginning it was agreed that the two IUCN categories of non-governmental and governmental members would be given equal weight in policy and decision making. IUCN thus has a bicameral system of governance. Agreements can only be reached if there is majority support in both these membership categories. A government may become a full state member in IUCN, but it is also possible for governmental bodies, such as national parks administrations, to obtain separate IUCN membership as governmental institutions. Non-governmental members include international, regional, or national institutions.

Traditionally most of the members have come from more affluent countries in Europe and North America. More recently considerable efforts have been made to reduce this 'Northern' dominance among IUCN membership. Many of the newer members—both governmental and non-governmental—are from developing countries. National NGOs constitute the largest block—about two-thirds—of IUCN's membership. In 1972 there were 172 such members, rising to 286 in 1985, and to 563 in 1995 (see Table 1). While the Northern share of this membership category has been numerically dominant through most of IUCN's history, the recent rise in Southern memberships has reduced this imbalance considerably.

Table 1. Membership growth

Year	State members	Government agencies	National NGOs	International NGOs
1970	29	54	172	9
1975	38	108	210	18
1980	51	114	249	29
1985	50	113	286	24
1990	50	94	358	37
1995	68	92	563	55

Source: IUCN (1996), personal communication, July 29.

The hybrid governance structure is both a strength and a weakness. Its strength is that IUCN provides a unique international forum where governmental and non-governmental viewpoints can interact and be discussed on virtually equal terms. Unlike the intergovernmental organizations, such as those under the UN system, IUCN offers equal opportunity for governmental and non-governmental considerations to be heard and discussed. Such an inclusive forum becomes particularly valuable when international environmental issues are being discussed,



including those related to environmental conventions. Many official members of these agreements, particularly from the North, are keen to see environmental discussions become more open and transparent in their operating modalities by, *inter alia*, providing opportunities for non-governmental viewpoints to be heard in intergovernmental forums. The lessons derived from IUCN's experiences, and the opportunities which IUCN itself can offer, could become increasingly important.

On the other hand, a problem and continuing concern among its members and staff is that decision making in IUCN is often cumbersome and can be very time-consuming. Governance issues need to be examined at two different levels—at the global level and at the regional or national level. Global governance problems have been consistently difficult. At times even insiders in the institution can feel despair that IUCN seems 'ungovernable'. While IUCN can launch pioneering initiatives that are at the cutting edge of environmental thinking—such as the World Conservation Strategy of 1980—it seems to need considerable time before these ideas and recommendations can become full realities within their own programmes and activities. An illustrative case relates to the numerous attempts to reach consensus on principles for sustainable use of wildlife and other natural resources. At the policy level this was implicit in the World Conservation Strategy, and since UNCED most intergovernmental agreements such as the Biodiversity Convention seem to take this objective for given. For many years IUCN was not able to galvanize full support for common guide-lines and operational policies on how to put this generally accepted objective into practice. Only very recently—at the 1996 World Congress in Montreal, Canada—was some progress made on this point.

Some Northern NGO members are opposed to any form of commercial use of wildlife, or indeed any type of animal killing, even culling of non-threatened wildlife species. Such emotional stands may be popular with their own members at home and their own sources of funding, but may be quite contrary to the views and objectives for sustainable development among many governmental and non-governmental IUCN members in developing as well as developed countries. Opposition from some NGOs in the North might mean that they can delay or stop agreements from being concluded under IUCN's governance structure, since Northern NGOs are still more numerous than Southern NGOs among IUCN's membership.

What then is the future of IUCN's complex governance structure? Is it an anachronistic liability? Or does it have the seeds of growing importance as non-governmental organizations increasingly demand more attention—and some governments seem to welcome this—in forums trying to reach international agreements on environmental topics?

Can it bring about more 'common ground' between Northern and Southern views on nature conservation and on the implementation of broader sustainable development principles?

It is not easy to predict where this will lead IUCN. The principle of equally shared powers between governmental and non-governmental members seems unique and highly commendable. None the less, governments may possibly lose interest if IUCN's decision-making machinery becomes too complicated, and if it only seems capable of moving at a snail's pace towards realizing linkages between developmental and environmental objectives. In particular, governments in developing countries may lose interest if the IUCN governance structure allows Northern NGOs excessive influence.

On the other hand, some promising developments have taken place recently within IUCN. First, encouraged by the Director-General and the Council, a growing number of NGOs from the South are joining IUCN. This is providing a much stronger geographic balance in its membership base. Second, IUCN has been able to offer its long practical experience and its technical skills in conducting environmental dialogues between non-governmental and governmental actors to the new intergovernmental forums discussing these topics. In most of these forums the deciding actors are member governments. The final say in policy making and decision making lies exclusively with governmental representatives—with only relatively modest opportunities for non-governmental bodies to be heard, and without their having any direct part in decision making. IUCN's experience and skills in this regard constitute a potential of increasing international importance.

A third new development may be even more important. With the regionalization and decentralization of IUCN, it has now become evident that at the regional and country levels IUCN's governance issues become less complex and more effective. The decentralized responsibilities for regional and country work programmes make the bridge-building roles of IUCN more manageable. Particularly at the national level there is considerable scope for effective interaction between IUCN's governmental and non-governmental members. Already a number of governments in developing countries have requested IUCN to provide its good offices in solving disputes between NGOs and governmental agencies. IUCN's experiences in carrying out such exercises have been generally positive and encouraging.

Continuing Funding Crises

While IUCN has always been a membership-based institution, the dues from members have never been substantial enough to become a major revenue source. At



present membership dues amount to a small part of total income—about 12 per cent—and thus constitute only a minor source of funding for IUCN's global programme activities. During its history IUCN has continuously been searching for outside funding sources. Initially private sources of funding were given main attention.

During its first few decades it was a fervent hope that fund raising from the general public could become an important source of revenue. Those in leadership positions in IUCN in the 1950s and 1960s, specially those with a US or UK background, hoped that IUCN could develop means to tap into such funding. However, the name, the policies, and the complex governance structure were difficult to explain to the general public. For that reason several key people in IUCN favoured the development of a separate fund-raising mechanism. Some hoped that the World Wildlife Fund could be set up with that as an objective. Max Nicholson, one of IUCN's pioneering supporters, who became chairman for the committee responsible for setting up WWF, has pointed to the continuing financial problems for IUCN as a major rationale for setting up the other institution. He noted that IUCN's Executive Board was 'unable to cope with the mess into which its finances had fallen. —In close concert with IUCN under its President Jean Bear, plans were rushed through in London to set up a matching but complementary body, called the World Wildlife Fund. Composed of businessmen and other leading figures it was to concentrate on massive fundraising, professional public relations, influencing governments, and recruiting large-scale public support. IUCN, being its scientific and conservation partner, would be entitled to appropriate financial support from it.'⁸

When WWF was established in 1961, it was anticipated that WWF would have separate national 'appeals', or chapters, to conduct fund raising. The sponsors of WWF expected the two organizations to work very closely together and the headquarters of both were located in Switzerland. For many years they shared the same building and common administrative services. WWF did indeed become very successful in fund raising, but it soon began to go its own way and develop an institutional life of its own. As a result, considerable tension and frustration arose within IUCN towards the institutional 'distancing' which seemed to take place between WWF headquarters and the IUCN Secretariat. This split caused considerable resentment among many in leadership positions in IUCN over the last two decades. WWF has continued to provide funding to IUCN but never at a scale originally anticipated within IUCN. In 1995 WWF provided 1.3 million SFr—or slightly more than 2 per cent—to IUCN's annual budget of 55.4 million SFr. More recently the leadership of both organizations have agreed to encourage more opportunities for joint programming of field activities.

IUCN's leadership may have thought that there was little

hope of setting up another means of fund raising in parallel with WWF. Once WWF had demonstrated its success in this area, such a funding option might seem pre-empted for IUCN. Its leadership understood that IUCN would have considerable difficulty in competing with WWF in such activities. Yet, IUCN has not given up hope. New attempts are under consideration.

So far the search for funding has been continuing largely in other directions. Grants from charitable foundations and endowments have provided strategic support for many key activities. One such grant of considerable organizational importance came from the Ford Foundation in 1968, which for the first time allowed IUCN to recruit full-time senior staff in the Secretariat. Funding from such sources has always been significant, but never large enough to cover major needs.

Later, new opportunities arose. When bilateral development assistance agencies began to knock on IUCN's doors in the early 1980s, this new source of funding became a life-saver for the institution. It allowed for a substantial growth of headquarters staff and technical programmes—and for an expansion of new regional and country offices whenever enough field projects made this possible. Most of this new support came in the form of funding for field projects. The most active funding sources were the aid agencies in the Nordic countries, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Further government funding was obtained from the UK, USA, Canada, and Germany, and others followed.

The ease with which public sector money became available to IUCN had not only positive effects. The Secretariat in Gland became very heavily engaged in recruiting field staff and in planning and running field projects. The perception gained ground that membership issues and the commissions were given less attention.⁹ In carrying out tasks related to project implementation on behalf of donor agencies, the Secretariat came into conflict with local members. IUCN members in the countries concerned often aspired to donor funding from the very same bilateral aid agencies. Moreover, as implementers of projects funded by official donors, IUCN was seen as a supporter of government-approved projects. This has worried the non-governmental side of IUCN membership. The concern was that IUCN's image as a bridge-builder may have weakened in the process. On the other hand, the IUCN Secretariat vigorously defended this path of action—pointing to its strength as a 'hybrid' organization for giving it unique advantages in implementing development projects. The 1990 General Assembly in Perth, Australia, requested a new strategic plan to ensure a close co-operation between IUCN's three pillars. A specific point on which there was broad agreement within IUCN was the policy to focus on programme support, rather than exclusive project funding, from official donors.



The multilateral agencies, including the UN organizations and the multilateral banks, have provided relatively little funding support for IUCN. Some finance has been forthcoming from UNEP, but very little from others. Frustration has often arisen within IUCN that many international staff, particularly from the World Bank, seek information and advice from IUCN without any parallel interest in contributing money to it. IUCN also provides considerable technical and policy support to the new Biodiversity Convention without securing financial arrangements to cover such tasks.

Today IUCN seems determined to reduce its relatively heavy dependency on project funding from official donors, and has had some success in obtaining funding for broader programmes rather than many individual project-funded activities (Table 2). Generally, this has not been easy, but a few government donors have been very forthcoming in that regard, particularly Sweden. In 1995 the donor framework agreements for unrestricted and restricted programme support totalled about 14.7 million SFr.—or about 27 per cent of annual income. Yet, most other official donors still seem to prefer to provide funding in smaller and more concrete project formats. In 1995 such project funding amounted to 30.3 million SFr.—or 55 per cent of total annual income.

At present IUCN is facing a major financial dilemma. Contributions and dues from the general membership have been very modest, private fund raising has so far held out little hope, and, although broad programme support has been forthcoming from a few official donor agencies, the funding base is still very weak and too dependent on short-term project support. A key question is how IUCN can expand and strengthen its insecure funding base in ways that can enable it to carry out effectively its global programme activities and its multiple bridge-building roles.

Linking the Three Pillars of IUCN

IUCN has experienced constant problems in keeping together its three main organizational parts. During its early years, when the institution was small, this caused few serious problems. With continuing growth in IUCN's institutional membership, however, and with even faster increases in the membership base of the Commissions, it has appeared increasingly difficult to interact the membership activities with those of the Secretariat and the commissions.¹⁰ Part of the problem was the complex nature of IUCN's organizational structure. Lack of funding has also been a significant contributing factor.¹¹

The drive towards better integration of IUCN's three pillars has focused on the headquarters itself, the commissions, and also on activities in its network of regional and country offices. IUCN's funding base has always been very thin, but the continued scrambling for money to fund its operational programme activities and field offices has caused the Secretariat to spend considerable time and effort on fund raising. Such attention to outside funding sources may have weakened the managerial focus on solving the internal organizational problems of the institution. The Director-General and the Secretariat should not have to take exclusive responsibility for this task. The Executive Council should be expected to take on a more pro-active role in fund raising. Only very recently does the Council appear to understand that this is one of its own major responsibilities.

The Council is very large, cumbersome, and costly. The majority of the Councillors—24—are elected on a regional basis by the membership at each three-yearly General Assembly. Additionally there are the President, six chairs of the IUCN commissions, and five co-opted Councillors. The 36 Councillors usually meet twice a year to provide the policy setting for IUCN's global activities and the executive supervision and overview of the Director-General and the tasks of the Secretariat. Yet they represent a constituency which only contributes a very minor part of the funds needed to carry out these tasks. The separate informal steering group

Table 2. Main sources of funds (000 SFr.)

Year	Dues	Other income	Subtotal unrestricted	Program	Projects	Total
1970	223	493	717	113	822	1,653
1975	402	699	1,101	294	2,101	3,496
1980	1,348	967	2,315	1,893	3,266	7,474
1985	2,524	793	4,317	2,199	7,240	3,756
1990	3,925	3,508	7,433	6,674	23,128	37,235
1995	6,311	4,093	10,404	18,749	30,255	59,408

Source: IUCN (1996), personal communication, 29 July.



of donors which are active in funding IUCN can wield more clout, should it so desire, in determining IUCN's programme priorities and direction.

On one particular point IUCN seems to have adopted one of the less fortunate institutional practices in the UN system. As noted in the report on the 1992 Nordic UN project, the trend towards large executive bodies has weakened the governance functions of many large UN organizations.¹² It specifically recommended a significant trimming down of the large executive boards of these organizations.¹³ IUCN has a similar problem and should re-examine its own governance structure. A smaller Council, perhaps half of its present size of 36, could be expected to become more efficient and cost-effective. In that regard it seems highly questionable whether the six chairs of the commissions should continue to be represented formally on the Council. While from a historical perspective this might have made sense when, early on, most of IUCN's activities were carried out through the work of the commissions, this situation changed long ago. A smaller Board needs to concentrate its efforts more on measures to promote the effective interaction of the three major organizational parts of IUCN and also to establish a sounder financial base.

At IUCN headquarters there has been a tendency to divest certain key functions to other institutions. While the first attempt to divest tasks to other institutions, in the case of WWF, was not very satisfactory from IUCN's point of view, a later spin-off proved more harmonious. In 1979 IUCN established within the Secretariat a separate centre for information services and data management. Examples of its products were reporting and data on endangered species. In 1988 IUCN agreed to set up this centre as a separate organization under the name of the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), co-sponsored by UNEP and WWF. The new institution would take on the important functions of data management and monitoring services related to nature conservation. In this case quite harmonious relations have been established, but it has still left some complications for IUCN's own structure. Why would it wish to divest such strategically important functions to a separate institution? Furthermore, it soon became clear that often IUCN and WCMC found themselves competing for funding support from the same bilateral and multilateral organizations. Both continue to suffer from insecure funding sources.

With rapid growth in donor funding in the 1980s, the Secretariat found the means to increase the number of staff substantially as did the network of IUCN field offices in developing countries. The Secretariat's main work programmes focused on activities carried out on behalf of various international development assistance agencies—mostly related to field-work in Africa, Asia, and Latin

America. These activities were sometimes carried out in competition with IUCN's own members. The result was that in the late 1980s there was considerable resentment among members about this direction. Furthermore, in many cases these field activities had little connection to work undertaken under the commissions. Still, the new network of field offices had certain advantages. It made IUCN more visible as a global institution. It also made it possible to build up an institutional infrastructure that provided scope for operational decentralization and for setting up new mechanisms for much more effective interaction between the three 'pillars' at country and regional levels.

The Secretariat also suffered from internal fragmentation of its own programme activities. With so many different sponsors funding programme and project activities, the proper integration among headquarters programmes was lacking. Also, headquarters programmes at times were out of touch with similar activities being carried out in the field offices.¹⁴

In recent years corrective action have been taken on several important points:

- it has been recognized that the desired integration of IUCN activities must be more vigorously pursued, but that it would be difficult to conduct it exclusively, or predominantly, from the headquarters;
- there has been a thrust towards regionalization and decentralization of programme activities;
- membership committees were to be encouraged at national and regional levels;
- commission membership was urged to stay in direct contact with regional and national offices; and
- active attempts were made at forging jointly sponsored activities between the Secretariat and the scientific and technical work of the commissions (as in the case of the Sustainable Use Initiative (SUI)).

These efforts have proved very promising, although it is still too early to declare them entirely successful. While there are active functioning field offices in many parts of Latin America and Africa, and in Pakistan, the Asia regional network is not yet well established. The new network for Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States countries has historical traditions. Already at the end of the 1960s IUCN was pioneering bridge-building efforts between countries in Eastern and Western Europe on nature conservation problems in the Arctic areas. Today the substantial expansion which has taken place among the IUCN networks in Eastern Europe has boosted the scope for regional co-operation. Overall, there is now a strong conviction among IUCN's leadership that an expansion and further strengthening of the global field office system has



strategic significance for the entire institution. This emphasis seems wise.

Perhaps one of the most important new institutional developments within IUCN relates to the National Committees and the regional advisory bodies which are being set up among members in several subregions. These bodies are now in the process of becoming recognized as official parts of IUCN's structure. Both the national and regional committees provide opportunities for IUCN members to become directly involved in determining IUCN's programme framework in each country and subregion. These committees provide scope for interaction of members' viewpoints with high-quality scientific advice from the commissions, and with professional advice and guidance from the local regional and country offices of the IUCN Secretariat.

At this stage IUCN has promising possibilities for close interaction between IUCN's three pillars at the local levels. In some countries the national committee has already become an active focal point for bridge-building efforts between government and the civil society. An early lesson is that a national committee can best function when it avoids taking on activist activities as an environmental advocacy group, but instead focuses on establishing a credible and non-emotional basis for continuing dialogues between the various parties in government and among non-governmental players. With IUCN in the process of developing a global network of well-functioning national committees, it will have a unique comparative advantage among both intergovernmental and non-governmental international organizations.

The Future

Some may fear that IUCN has fallen between two stools in the present constellation of international organizations with environmental programmes related to nature conservation. It is neither well known, like WWF, nor is it a media-seeking advocacy organization like Greenpeace—with its highly centralized control structure and its very professional fund-raising ability.¹⁵ IUCN normally only has observer status in the intergovernmental forums now dominating the global environmental agenda. It does not have a good financial base from its non-governmental or private sources, and its members pay very little in the form of dues to the institution's activities. From government sources it has mobilized bilateral aid mostly for short-term projects. The large international agencies and the new Global Environment Facility (GEF) provide IUCN with little direct access to funding.

Yet, while it plays a more behind the scenes role at international forums, IUCN has unique capabilities which have placed it in a position to carry out important functions not well served by other institutions. There are good reasons

to believe that the bridge-building roles of IUCN are, and will continue to be, of critical importance to conserve nature for the future.

Nature conservation cannot solely be done by fiat—by political and legislative action. Local people and governments in developing countries must understand and accept that this is also in their own best interest. This will require actors which can build bridges between nature conservation and development interests, between the natural sciences and other professional disciplines, between government and non-governmental bodies, and between the South and the North. IUCN is in a good position to become an increasingly influential actor on the international scene in this regard.

For one thing, the new global environmental conventions and the associated funding mechanisms such as GEF have become arenas for intergovernmental action and in this process there is a danger that environmental issues become excessively politicized and out of touch with solid scientific analysis, and with non-governmental viewpoints. IUCN has a unique advantage in these regards. In its hybrid organizational structure it has a strong and rapidly growing NGO membership base. Furthermore, for most issues related to nature conservation, it is likely that governments will have to rely on the scientific expertise and technical knowledge which IUCN has developed through its commissions, task forces, and global programme experiences. In addition, broad global guide-lines are not always the best solution to international environmental problems. While many broad issues may be of legitimate global concern, the most appropriate responses to these issues may often have to be tailored to the specific needs of regions and countries. In this regard IUCN experiences and its regional and country networks have much to offer international conventions and other global forums concerned with policy and programme responses from different types of countries.

Global and regional environmental agreements should be encouraged to make better direct use of IUCN's existing scientific and technical competence, and also, through WCMC, its information and data management expertise. IUCN is already involved in monitoring tasks in most of the world's protected areas and concerning most of the species, of both fauna and flora, which are at significant risk. Monitoring systems must have a strong science base and should build on operational experiences and technical knowledge about what is feasible under conditions of continuing resource constraints—within nations and under international agreements.

It would seem reasonable to encourage countries participating in environmental conventions to come to international forums with a willingness to consider entering



into longer-term contractual arrangements with IUCN for technical support and, jointly with WCMC, for information and monitoring services required under each convention. There should be ample scope for replicating co-operation similar to that which exists between UNESCO and IUCN for the World Heritage Convention. It should be possible to encourage international agencies and the global environment conventions to provide IUCN with long-term contracts for its unique services built on half a century of global experience.

In order to accelerate action on these points there are at least three major issues that would benefit from more vigorous attention within IUCN. First, it must become better at drawing on the lessons of its operational experience and the policy relevance of its scientific and technical work. It must be able to communicate them more clearly and succinctly to decision makers and to the public at large. Second, the complexities of its organization structure should be critically examined—with a view to simplifying and clarifying the respective roles of its governance and management structures—in order to demonstrate convincingly its own cost-effectiveness. Third, it needs a much sounder and more stable financial base. Reliance on a few bilateral donors is not viable. Fund raising from the public may to some extent be pre-empted by WWF, although more joint field activities could provide some mutual benefits. Even more important, now is the time for IUCN's own members to consider how they may provide more financial resources to the organization.

As a science-based institution with knowledge and experience essential for considering action on topics related to nature conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources, IUCN would seem to deserve increasing global interest. Indeed, political leaders may wish to find ways of using more regularly the immense expertise at the disposal of IUCN in fact finding and monitoring, in contributing to sound policy options, and in building bridges between the various constituencies which will determine the future of our highly complex global biodiversity system.

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