

The World Conservation Congress

Barcelona, 5-14 October 2008

Theme Framework

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This paper, endorsed by the Congress Preparatory Committee, provides the theme framework for the next World Conservation Congress. The Congress to be held in Barcelona from 5-14 October 2008 is organized by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and hosted by the Governments of Spain and Catalonia.

It is primarily written for the IUCN Secretariat, members and host governments to use when developing and implementing various aspects of the congress, including developing the communications and fundraising strategies; planning the Forum; and engaging member organizations, Commissions and partners.

Introduction

Combining unique convening power and scientific authority, IUCN is the change agent that helps the world find pragmatic, sustainable solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges. Founded in 1948 as the world's first global environmental organization, IUCN is a democratic union with more than 1,000 member organizations, including states, government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as 10,000 volunteer experts in six domains or Commissions. The Union's work is supported by a professional secretariat with more than 1,000 staff in 60 countries and is conducted with hundreds of partners from the public, private and NGO sectors.

For almost 60 years, IUCN has defined the conservation agenda at its global congresses. The congress is a unique event: part global marketplace of ideas, knowledge and solutions; part global environmental parliament. No other event brings together leaders from governments, non-governmental organizations, academia, business and civil society to network, learn and shape the world's environmental agenda for the coming decade and beyond.

The Congress in Barcelona will be a touchstone for the global environmental movement and provide a unique opportunity to showcase how the environment underpins all economic, social and cultural development. The Congress itself will also be a landmark for green and sustainable event organization.

Coinciding with IUCN's 60th anniversary, the Congress will provide a platform to share our accomplishments and highlight the Union's core strengths including biodiversity conservation and the sustainable management of land and seascapes.

To make Barcelona the most successful Congress yet, active participation from all Union components is essential: 1,000+ member organizations, 50+ regional and national

committees, 10,000 commission members and partners including community groups, indigenous associations, companies and local authorities.

Challenges

The grave environmental problems facing our planet and its communities are now recognized by people from all walks of life. Businesses, spiritual communities, trade unions, scientists, political leaders, schools and universities, indigenous peoples, women's organizations, local government authorities, community groups, consumer associations, health workers, farming groups and cultural organizations are all concerned about conservation issues.

Less understood is the fact that ecosystem health underpins economic, social and cultural wellbeing. The increasing degradation of our natural resource base is directly impacting the quality of life of millions of communities and billions of women and men.

The challenges are enormous. Fifty-two percent of marine fish stocks are now fully depleted and 58% of coral reefs are endangered. More than one billion people still live without clean drinking water and more than 2.2 million people die each year from water-borne diseases. More than 16,000, or 40%, of species assessed in the 2006 IUCN Red List are endangered. Despite dramatic economic growth worldwide, poverty continues to increase in many parts of the world. Two billion people do not have access to regular energy sources and women in developing countries spend between two and nine hours each day collecting fuel and fodder. Climate change is happening faster than previously thought and will likely have an enormous effect on already vulnerable regions and communities.

IUCN's more than 1,000 member organizations and 10,000 Commission members are addressing these issues from many different aspects. But the environmental movement alone cannot solve these challenges. All domains and sectors must be engaged, new alliances created, and new ethics explored, to find and implement truly sustainable solutions.

Finding Solutions

Progress has been made over the past 20 years. Tools have been developed to restore ecosystems and better manage natural resources. International agreements and national and regional laws are in place to protect our biodiversity and ecosystems, stop desertification, and regulate use of natural resources. Businesses from all sectors, governments and communities are demonstrating environmental and social responsibility. There is a greater understanding of the economic drivers of sustainability, and an increasing consensus on using market mechanisms to achieve environmental objectives.

Communities and individuals are more aware than ever before of the impact of climate change, the insecurity of energy supply, the impact of globalization, the loss of biodiversity, the inequitable access to resources amongst poorer populations, and the importance of changing consumption patterns and lifestyles. More importantly, they are seeing how these are impacting, or will impact, their daily lives.

But why are the trends generally not improving enough to make a difference? Why are things getting worse and not better? What will happen in the next 20 years if things don't change?

There remains an urgent need for more concerted action across all sectors and generations – public, private and NGO; north and south; economic, social and cultural; indigenous and non-indigenous, young and old; urban and rural; and local and global - to work for a just world that values and conserves nature. The world cannot continue on its current trajectory. Things must fundamentally change; and they must change quickly.

Building on IUCN's long history of bringing together diverse stakeholders and providing scientific leadership, the next World Conservation Congress will bring these different sectors together to network, share knowledge and experiences, develop creative solutions and partnerships and make practical and moral commitments to help take us forward on a truly sustainable path for the next 20 years and beyond.

The Congress will showcase the links between natural, and socio-cultural diversity and the role biodiversity plays in underpinning development, as well as an array of practical solutions to the major environment and development challenges confronting the global community in the 21st Century.

The Congress Theme: *A diverse and sustainable world*

What are our alternatives for a more sustainable future? The Congress theme – *a diverse and sustainable world* – will provide the basis for developing a compelling vision of how the world can be in the next two decades.

Throughout the world, innovative sustainable development initiatives are underway in government, civil society and the private sector that are making a difference and charting a new course for our communities, nations and planet.

These efforts demonstrate that in many different settings and in many different sectors, integrated and longer-term approaches to restoring, protecting and sustainably using natural assets can lead to new livelihood opportunities and renewed environmental vitality. Our challenge is how to scale-up and mainstream these encouraging innovations and how to create the enabling conditions for sustainable and equitable alternatives to flourish.

Shaping sustainable solutions. A range of these innovations will be showcased at the Congress. These will include community and local level initiatives, policy and governance reforms, solutions based on traditional and indigenous knowledge, the development of new and more sustainable business models and investment opportunities, initiatives that inspire ethical behavior and youth, innovative methods for integrating gender equity into conservation work, the latest technologies and emerging multi-sectoral partnerships.

A major focus will be the role of economic tools and markets in supporting the transition to sustainability by stimulating new production practices and consumption patterns that enhance social justice and environmental resilience. Alternative models for a sustainable future will be explored as will the necessary governance reforms, partnerships and political alliances required to reinvigorate the sustainable development movement.

Key challenges, opportunities and potential solutions will be addressed at the Congress through three streams, with an emphasis on making change happen from local to global levels, across all sectors and domains, with young and old, men and women, in cities and rural areas, and from all cultural perspectives, to shape sustainable solutions for our future.

Stream 1: *A new climate for change*

Four distinct early warning signs tell us that rapid climate change may soon become a self-perpetuating process – accelerating beyond our power to avert catastrophic consequences. The Greenland ice cap is melting, permanently frozen arctic soils are thawing, oceans are becoming more acidic and the capacity of forests and grasslands to absorb ever more CO₂ is limited.

The need to avoid crossing these thresholds sets a limit to the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gasses. Setting – and meeting – such a target is essential for protecting the Earth's Climate System as a natural resource for all. Setting a target is a difficult policy task; one that requires informed social choices. Meeting such a target may be even more difficult, requiring extraordinary efforts to restructure the transportation sector, de-carbonize the energy sector and substantially reduce emissions from agriculture, forests and wetlands.

In this stream the impact of climate change and environmental degradation from overexploitation of ecosystem services and human security will be explored. How forests and marine ecosystems control the impact of greenhouse gases and sequester carbon will be examined. The different adaptation strategies and how countries and communities can be assisted to be prepared for coping with the impacts of climate change will be explored. The need for corridor planning for species to migrate in response to climate change, and the role of protected area networks can play in this will be analyzed. The methods and tools to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change will be showcased.

Stream 2: *Healthy environments – healthy people*

Human communities are dependent on fundamental environmental services such as the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soils we use to grow our food, the seas we fish in, and the materials we use to construct our homes. Environmental security is a fundamental to human security.

Nevertheless, the capacity of ecosystems to deliver these vital ecosystem goods and services is being eroded at an alarming rate due to unsustainable consumption and energy demand; conversion of land for industry, agriculture and urban development; inequitable access to natural resources; excessive exploitation of the seas; and the spread of alien invasive species. The loss of life and property from natural disasters can also often be linked to mismanagement of the environment.

In this stream the impact of over-use of natural resources on human health, security, cultures and equity will be explored. Lessons learned from different parts of the world will provide insights on how land and seascapes can be sustainably managed to meet the needs of growing populations and improve human security.

Stream 3: *Safeguarding the diversity of life*

Countries and communities are dependent on their biodiversity and the rich variety of species to fuel their development. Ecological diversity underpins social, economic and cultural diversity. Seventy percent of the estimated 1.1 billion people living in extreme poverty, two thirds of who are women, live in rural areas and conservation of biodiversity resources is essential if development is to be sustainable.

How managed land and seascapes, including protected areas, sustain delivery of ecosystem services will be investigated. The strong links between economic, social and cultural factors contributing to the sustainable use of species will be showcased including success stories from the Mediterranean region. How to conserve and manage marine and fresh water resources will be emphasized, with particular emphasis on the Mediterranean Sea due to Barcelona's location.

The role protected areas, land and seascape management, and innovative governance structures can play to conserve these resources and prevent biodiversity loss in all countries will be explored. The means to monitor the status of species and threats to them will be examined.

Congress Outcomes

Along with sharing knowledge and experiences and forming new partnerships, the Congress will showcase an array of practical solutions to the world's major environment and development challenges. These will collectively form the Barcelona Legacy, a roadmap of action for the next 20 years and beyond. Below are some of the Congress outcomes.

Shaping the future:

- How women and men can **fundamentally change** the way we live, with **commitments** on sustainable consumption and production from global to local levels to make it happen;
- A new **vision for sustainability**, supported by action-oriented policy, innovative and equitable solutions, and a renewed vitality in the global environmental movement;
- New approaches to governance and accountability that **empower all citizens**, especially youth, to hold public and private sector leaders accountable for their actions;
- Networking and innovative **partnerships** that empower inter-sectoral collaboration.

Tools to make it happen:

- Sound **scientific approaches** to solving environment and development challenges for a wide range of public and private sectors;
- Practical approaches to mitigate the impact of **climate change**, adapt to environmental change and lessen the impact of natural disasters;
- Strategies and implementation plans to reduce poverty through more sustainable management of natural resources;
- Greater understanding of traditional and **indigenous knowledge** and sharing experiences of local communities in sustainably managing their natural resources;
- Consensus on the need to institutionalize **equity and gender equality** as key elements for the sustainable use of natural resources;
- Assessments of opportunities and risks associated with alternative scenarios for meeting future **energy needs**;
- Tools for key players from various sectors to mobilize the **economic drivers** of sustainability and increase investment in social and environmental well-being;

- Practical solutions for safeguarding **marine biodiversity**, particularly in the Mediterranean and High Seas;
- Greater awareness of new **technologies** and innovations for assessments, restoration, monitoring, communication and stakeholder engagement;
- Improved understanding of the process of **globalization** and opportunities to reduce poverty, improve equity and enhance human development while minimizing adverse social and environmental impacts.

More information on the World Conservation Congress is available at www.iucn.org/congress.