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CULTURE AND CONSERVATION  
AN ACTION/RESEARCH PLAN

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CULTURE AND CONSERVATION  
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C U L T U R E   A N D   C O N S E R V A T I O N

AN ACTION/RESEARCH PLAN

1. BACKGROUND
2. DEFINITIONS
3. PREMISES
4. IMMEDIATE ACTIONS
5. PROPOSED PROJECT SUMMARIES

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Abstract

This paper contains the reasons why it is important to undertake action/research on the cultural aspects of conservation, which has been recognized as an element much underemphasized in the World Conservation Strategy and in environmental and development planning generally. Certainly there is some promising work going on or planned and the object is to build on and stimulate these initiatives. A dossier of concrete proposals are put forward, on which interested parties are invited to comment or to propose additional ideas.

# C U L T U R E   A N D   C O N S E R V A T I O N

## A PLAN FOR ACTION/RESEARCH

### 1. BACKGROUND

The 15th session of the General Assembly of the IUCN in Christchurch, New Zealand, in October 1981, recognized the importance of the cultural heritage of mankind and of the role of cultures, particularly traditional cultures in conservation and the wider processes of development. The Assembly recommended that heads of governments, ministers, members of legislatures, administrators, planners and conservationists:

- (a) take into account the still existing very large reservoir of traditional knowledge philosophy and experience within local cultures which must provide a significant basis for the evolution of future management policies and planning actions;
- (b) provide the means for local people who maintain ecologically sound practices to play a primary role in all stages of development in the area they identify with, so that they can participate and benefit directly, in a manner which is consistent with their values, time frames and decision-making processes;
- (c) seek continuous support of these local people in shaping and implementing conservation strategies, programmes and plans, in order to considerably increase present conservation potentials for achieving the goals of the World Conservation Strategy; and
- (d) foster further research into traditional life styles and human ecology.

As a follow-up to the General Assembly a meeting was convened in Morges in November 1982 by the IUCN Commission on Environmental Planning which had as a major focus the relationships between culture and conservation<sup>1</sup>. It was recognized that cultural data on behaviour and motivation vis-à-vis nature are rarely used though they often condition the success or failure of conservation projects. Such data do exist but have not been assembled, nor analysed in a conservation perspective.

It was proposed to gather general information on the ways in which behaviour, motivation and cultural patterns function and are transmitted in human societies, to analyse how they relate to nature, to see how they would apply in some specific cases and to identify which are of a general character and which are related only to a particular society.

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1. See Proceedings of the 13th Annual Meeting of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Planning, Morges (November 1982).

It was suggested that principles for the evaluation and implementation of conservation projects should be developed to enable the maintenance and reinforcement of positive attitudes towards nature and the modification of those which are less positive. The process of environmental planning must exhibit a sensitivity to the need and culture of local populations. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to involve local people in the whole process of development planning. Traditional systems of resource use often, although not always, include elements contributing to environmentally sound and sustainable use of these resources. While current population and other pressures and advances (in science and technology) may call for drastic changes in traditional systems of resource use, serious attempts need to be made to preserve and incorporate the desirable elements of traditional practices into modern systems. Conservation efforts should preferably be combined with efforts to meet other immediate needs of local populations such as health care.

A number of specific projects were generated from the Morges meeting and in discussions and reflection afterwards. This dossier contains an expansion of these reflections, including working definitions, a frame and then a set of specific projects proposals.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

One thing is becoming clear as the IUCN and Commission on Environmental Planning in particular move forward with culture and conservation programmes and that is the need to be more specific in focus and to concentrate on those elements which are essential to conservation and are most appropriate to environmental planning. There are various and confusing definitions of cultures and many gaps in information. We are clearly most interested in certain aspects of culture (in the singular understood as a set of ideas) and certain kinds of cultures (in the plural understood as groups of people).

## 3. PREMISES

From the discussions and papers the following premises may form the basis for orienting projects.

### (1) Grass Roots Ideas are Most Significant

Our interest is in what local people actually want (even though there may be conflicting wants within local groups and even individuals). Culture can be seen as a set of ideas, or popular attitudes, and can be contrasted with some earlier definitions of culture (e.g. Unesco's Encyclopedia of The Social Sciences, 1964) which stressed behaviour, what people actually did (or rather outside observations of what they did). Culture for us might also be contrasted with needs (including basic needs) which are also outside interpretations of what local people want. Culture in the sense of these ideas is comprehensive. It is worth quoting in full the translation of the definition suggested by the francophone discussion group at Morges "(culture) is the (ensemble) of sign, signals, symbols, representations, models, attitudes, values, etc. inherent to social life. Culture is not isolated from social life, it penetrates all aspects of society, from economy to politics, from food to sexuality, from arts to technology,

from health to religion/<sup>2</sup>". Culture in this sense is very diverse and can form the base for alternative, non-conventional forms of conservation and development drawn from the cultural heritage (including notably traditional art forms), as well as recent local innovations.

(2) Culture Reflects the Local (small-scale) Value System

The economic dimension is very important and provides a major link with another CEP group working on cost-benefit. Many cost-benefit and other quantitative analyses give equations from the point of view of the larger social structures (particularly the nation state), rather than what is of value to the local people which may not only be in increases in income. Income opportunities in fact may be ignored if local independence or cultural identity is threatened. Local cultural values are often carried forward by local self-reliant groups, e.g. women's groups. Tradition may be significant, but perhaps more often the most effective dynamics are an amalgam of old and new.

(3) Many Cultures are Threatened

Some cultures, (possibly a very large number) are threatened and often because their ecosystems are threatened too. These cultures represent an urgent focus for research and action. Quite often they are subnational units which are socially, economically and politically deprived. An extreme example are the tribal peoples as defined by the World Bank and said to number over 200 million/<sup>3</sup> (or 4% of the world's population) and are called by the Bank "the poorest of the poor" and are maybe even an "endangered species" exposed to major health as well as environmental risks. There are many other sub-cultures; one recent estimate has put the global figure at over 2,000 many of which are also threatened both by acculturation and by the massive forces of migration.

(4) Cultures Are Not Isolated or Static

Very few cultures can maintain enough social geographical distance to retain their pristine identities. Top down forces are omnipresent and given the technological revolution (N.B. the telecommunications front) this intrusion will undoubtedly increase. It is probable that many peoples in these cultures, especially young people, want some kind of contact. There is everywhere a massive motivation to migrate, a widespread demand for imported goods and services, for prestige if for no other reason. The very preservation of indigenous or local cultural values may depend on outside institutions (including conservationists) rediscovering and offering back cultural values to

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2. S. Guindani & M. Bassand, 1982, *Maldéveloppement régional et identité* - Presses Polytechniques Romandes - Lausanne
  3. The ILO estimate is 300 million. See World Bank, 1982, *Tribal Peoples and Economic Development*, Washington.



the people as a form of consciousness-raising. In this process a maximum use has to be made of communication processes, especially involving young people. Consideration should be given to participating quite fully in the UN International Youth Year 1985.

(5) Participation and the Future

There is a necessity for local participation and direction in any projects affecting local cultures and particularly to involve them in national or local conservation strategies. Participation is now a buzz-word but is often only a token gesture in environmental planning and sometimes abused by national authorities. A fundamental task is to create situations of real (not manipulated) communication and dialogue. The telecommunications revolution may offer a golden opportunity here for cross-cultural contacts, and for including those people within cultures often excluded from planning for the future though clearly telecommunications is a two edged sword and ways have also to be found for preventing the manipulation of the media to control and even destroy traditional and subcultural ideas.

(6) Special Roles for Women, Young People and the Aged

In fact a major need is to find appropriate roles in the environmental planning process for young people and women. Efforts should be made to be involved fully in the preparations, for example, for the International Youth Year 1985. Special attention might be paid, for example, to an expanded role for youth groups, to greater youth representation in the environmental planning mechanism. Ways should be examined too of ensuring more effective mechanisms for women and young people to be able to enjoy more fully their rights to the land and the environment, to their cultural heritage, to a better quality of life as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

(7) The Importance of Integrated Intersectoral Approaches

Environmental planning cannot proceed in isolation from the other sectors and ways need to be found to link together not only the sectors but also the top-down mechanisms and the bottom up organizations.

4. IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

If we accept these premises, at least in their broad outline, a number of concrete steps seem clear first to provide a synthesis of existing knowledge, secondly for suggesting highly relevant projects.

A start has already been made by collecting together a general series of papers on the relationship between culture and conservation, both from the points of view of different disciplines (environmental planning, law, anthropology, sociology, economics, etc.) and of specific cultures in different ecosystems. Together with these case studies, will be included a special series relating to indigenous peoples in protected areas collected by IUCN's Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas/<sup>4</sup>.

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4. McNeely J. and Miller K., 1983, National Parks, Providing Material with the Means to Survive - Proceedings of the World Congress on National Parks, Bali, Indonesia.

This collection, which will also contain a bibliography will be published in the middle of 1983<sup>5</sup>. Although not intended to be a comprehensive survey of the field or a detailed analysis, 20 or more papers in the collection will be representative of our present knowledge and indicative of where more research and action is needed. There exists no comparable volume in the literature and it is most important that such materials are widely disseminated and discussed. The programme will then build on this publication and the reactions to it.

The relevant information available on the cultural contexts especially amongst tribal peoples is then quite large but generalized, spotty in coverage, geographically scattered, and often submerged in other materials. Efforts should be made to gather this information together quickly and systematically and in a form which can easily be retrieved and used. A set of cultural traits, which could be most relevant for conservation and environmental planning should be compiled - especially relating to tribal and indigenous peoples. Such a checklist could be used to compile a sort of redbook of cultures. The sources for such a compilation would be existing accounts (as the World Bank for example has suggested in Tribal Peoples and Economic Development, 1982) extended to cover most threatened subcultures, based on data assembled by such bodies as Survival International, Minority Rights Group (London), Cultural Survival (USA), the Fourth World Movements, etc. together with anthropological materials already classified for example in the Human Relations Area Files or in some specialized libraries (e.g. at Oxford). However, such materials are not always fine tuned enough for our specific interests nor necessarily up to date in what are often fast changing situations. Also necessary would be some kind of questionnaire - to a variety of networks (including notably CEP) and local correspondents in the subcultures themselves especially those who have identified environmental planning needs, e.g. as at the 1981 NGO meeting in Geneva on Indigenous Peoples and the Land. Such networks already exist and information might be quickly assembled. Such information might be presented qualitatively at first simply to give an indication of situations at high risk, needing urgent research/action. Such preliminary materials might be used to select some peoples where case studies of greater depth might be carried out.

The question of tribal and indigenous peoples though very important is only one aspect of the Culture/Conservation problematique. It is necessary as well to link conservation more closely to major development issues. One of these is certainly population, though as the preparations for the International Population Conference in Mexico (1984) are showing the population-environment relationship is not simple and population planning has suffered too from the neglect of cultural factors. The specific proposals which follow reflect then the parameters for a closer linking of conservation and environmental planning to the cultural dimension within national plans.

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5. McNeely J. and Pitt D.C., 1983, Culture and Conservation.



## 5. PROPOSED PROJECT SUMMARIES

- I Culture and Conservation Amongst Tribal and Indigenous People
- II Guidelines for Incorporating Population Factors into Environmental Planning Processes for National Conservation Strategies
- III Grass Roots Ideas on the Links Between Population Growth and Conservation
- IV The Role and Potential of Women's Groups in Population Related Conservation Activities
- V Youth and the Future Environment
- VI The Promotion of Culture Related to Conservation and Environment Planning Themes

1. Short Title - CULTURE AND CONSERVATION AMONGST TRIBAL AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE.
  
2. Brief Purpose - To provide summaries of cultural features which relate to conservation and environmental planning of those peoples generally recognized as tribal groups, i.e. small populations relatively isolated from and subordinate to the dominant society. These summaries should reflect primarily the interpretations and aspirations of the local people themselves.
  
3. Definitions - There are many definitions, the most explicit perhaps being that of the World Bank (Economic Development and Tribal Peoples - Human Ecologic Considerations, 1982 - 1981 p. 5).  
  
"The term "tribal people," often shortened to tribal or tribe, is employed here to characterize a specific type of population. Such groups typically have stable, low-energy, sustained-yield economic systems. More specifically, the people may be hunter-gatherers, shifting agriculturalists, herders, simple farmers, or fisherfolk."  
  
Such a definition may give over 500 tribal groups, though these are not explicitly named, in the World Bank Report. Elsewhere the notion of 'aboriginality' (e.g. for the organization Survival International) or 'indigenous' has been added, implying also a long term occupancy in, and rights to a given piece of territory and environment. As important are the labels the people themselves put on their own social groupings, e.g. as defined at international conferences like the NGO Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the Land convened in Geneva in 1981. These definitions would all give a long list and possibly a start could be made with those tribal people in whose territory there are also significant conservation problems, particularly where the people themselves conceive that there is a problem. In many cases tribal peoples so concerned are those where a subsistence economy closely linked to the environment is (or was) important.
  
4. Basic Idea - The basic idea is to produce a loose leafed book which can be used in the conservation process, by both planners and the people. For each tribal people there could therefore be a dossier of information which is likely to aid the process of achieving the maximum of self-reliance in the conservation and development process, but also aid those planning national and

international strategies. The material would be classified into a variety of headings which should include the following broad sections (not in order of priority):

1. Demography - Population size, Trends, Distribution.
2. Development Indicators (e.g. Physical Quality of Life Index - infant mortality, expectancy of life, literacy.
3. Outside Intrusions on the Environment and Culture.
4. Traditional Environmental Cultural Practices relating to conservation (with indications of whether these have positive or negative interferences).
5. Introduced Conservation Measures.
6. Recent Relevant Social Changes.
7. Peoples Aspirations Relating to the Quality of Life and Environment in the future.
8. Local conceptions of Nature and the Environment.
9. Local Cultural and Art Forms related to the Environment.
10. Improvements for the future.
11. Possibilities for Participation in the Planning Process.

5. Methods -

1. A survey of the existing literature and documentation.
2. A rather openended Questionnaire to both outsiders who know the culture intimately and to insiders who may wish to express opinions or give advice.

6. Output -

20-30 pages per tribal group.

7. Time-table -

An effort would be made to cover 20-30 groups, per year, starting as soon as possible. The case studies could be started in the second year.

1. Short Title - GUIDELINES FOR INCORPORATING POPULATION FACTORS INTO ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING PROCESSES FOR NATIONAL CONSERVATION STRATEGIES.
  
2. Basic Aims - It has been recognised that there are inadequacies and gaps in the social and cultural aspects of the World Conservation Strategy. The population element is one of the weak links. It remains unclear as to how exactly population and conservation strategies should be linked up as part of an integrated, intersectoral approach. This requires first the creation of an analytical model where the two elements are combined emphasizing the common ground. A special focus of attention should be the cultural dimension, how people conceive of the population/environment links now and especially in the future and how their maximum participation in both activities can be best assured in a mutually reinforcing fashion. Finally there should be an exploration of those intersectoral mechanisms, at national, district and integration, wherever possible, particularly at local level working in the context of grass roots and traditionally accepted cultural norms.
  
3. Methods & Plan of Work - Case studies in those countries where national conservation strategies are most advanced. Particular attention would be given to the developing countries in this category (Belize, Madagascar, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Zambia) as well as in a selected number of developing countries where family planning strategies are working well. However a smaller number of case studies could be carried out in developed countries especially those where some measure of integration has been achieved and where some useful lessons might be learnt from these successes (e.g. New Zealand, Italy, Czechoslovakia).  
  
National Consultants would be commissioned to write a paper on their own country, summarizing the situation and making concrete suggestions for more effective future planning. The reports would be published, offered to governments and also prepared in a form which would add complementary material to the general discussion on alternative approaches to the World Conservation Strategy.

1. Short Title - GRASS ROOTS IDEAS ON THE LINKS BETWEEN POPULATION GROWTH AND CONSERVATION.
  
2. Brief Purpose - To gather information on the different ways in which particularly traditional cultures view the relationships between population numbers and conservation of resources and the environment. The idea is to see to what extent traditional social practices relating to both population control and sustainable use of resources might be used in "bottom up" population and environment programme. A basic premise is that too often both population and environmental programmes ignore what people actually want, and therefore impose on them inappropriate and ineffective technologies and policies.
  
3. Plan of Work - To carry out case studies in situation where there are different population environment/conservation relationships. For example IUCN/CEP is planning work on indigenous and tribal peoples which often have had a static or declining population as well as a very close relationship to the environment and a considerable conservation lore. The dynamics of these situations may afford useful lessons on attitudes and behaviour relating to population control. A small number of such groups would be chosen from different ecosystems. Comparative groups could also be studied where there is major population growth. In both the high and low population growth groups another variable could be the degree of penetration of outside ideas, capital and institutions.
  
4. Methods - From existing documentation including the archives and materials being gathered at the IUCN, possible supplemented by an information questionnaire to the IUCN/CEP culture and conservation network.
  
5. Output - A book containing both analyses and the case studies, and including policy recommendations.



1. Short Title - THE ROLE AND POTENTIAL OF WOMEN'S GROUPS IN POPULATION RELATED CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES.
  
2. Brief Purpose -
  - (i) to collect together case studies of situations in developing countries where women groups at grass roots level have carried out conservation activities or where there are plans for such activities;
  
  - (ii) to see what is the potential of women's groups involved in population related activities extending their work in the conservation field.
  
3. Methods -
  - (i) Analysis of the existing literature and documentation;
  
  - (ii) questionnaire to national conservation correspondents;
  
  - (iii) analysis of studies and experiences in population related organizations like the IPPC.
  
4. Outputs - A short book.

YOUTH AND THE FUTURE ENVIRONMENT -  
A PROGRAMME FOR IYY, 1985

1. The Need for a Programme

There are very few activities planned yet for IYY which involve young people in relation to better planning for the environment/<sup>1</sup> and conservation.

Youth and youth groups are vitally interested in their environment, in both the natural and cultural heritage, and are most anxious about the future of the environment and the need for conservation.

Youth have relatively few opportunities to participate in environmental planning processes.

The various relevant environmental declarations of the United Nations/<sup>2</sup> over the special rights of young people provide guidelines for conservation whilst human rights declaration call for young people to have full access to the environment to be protected from exploitation, and to be assured of living their future in situations where the quality of life is assured/<sup>3</sup>.

There is a need to bring together the two streams of concern for the environment and young people in joint programmes.

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1. The Report of the Ad Hoc Interagency consultation on IYY, Vienna, 10-11/6/82 Annex II, p.22, mentions only the UNEP 'For every Child a Tree' Project which was to celebrate the anniversary of the 1972 Stockholm meeting, some educational activities and an ESCAP workshop. Nothing is mentioned in 1985.
  2. E.g. the World Charter for Nature proclaimed by the General Assembly, 14 October 1982 and the important environmental declarations on the 70s (Stockholm, Founex Cocoyoc) provide the framework but do not specifically spell out the role of young people. Similar comments may also be made about the World Conservation Strategy.
  3. A key clause is in the International Covenant on Economic & Social Rights, Art. 25, which guarantees the full and free use of natural wealth and resources. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has many clauses relating to standards of living (e.g. Art. 25) rights to a healthy environment, participation in the cultural as well as physical heritage (Art. 27), freedom from all kinds of exploitation (see also the Covenant supra Art. 10 whilst the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace Mutual Respect and Understanding emphasizes the need (e.g. Principle V) to encourage youth associations. Although work is also proceeding in the UN on protecting and promoting the more specific rights of young people, these declarations are slow moving and unlikely to be ready by 1985.

## 2. What the Programme Would Do

Several activities are suggested:

- National and local studies of what young actually want, what are their environmental plans for the future. These would include studies of both those cultures who still live close to the natural environment (e.g. tribal/indigenous peoples) as well as minorities, migrants sub-cultures, etc.
- A Charter for Young People (to include significant number of Environmental and conservation elements).
- A public awareness campaign linking youth and the environment, calling for a new approach.
- A series of studies to prepare informative books and audio-visual materials on existing knowledge about the environment and conservation especially traditional and cultural aspects, for use in new Curricula in schools and in open learning systems.
- The identification of youth organizations who are interested and prepared to participate in workshops, seminars etc. and in activities related to the planning process. The supply of materials or other assistance to these groups.
- Preparation of a directory.
- Guidelines for use of the media (TV, radio, press) to encourage debate and dialogue on the role youth should play in the protection of the environment.
- Establishment of a continuing mechanism to continue collecting, disseminating information, animating activities, etc.
- Facilitating the exchange of students from different cultures to work on courses related to conservation and environmental planning.

## 3. Who Should Carry Out the Programme

UN Division of Human Rights and the Commission for Environmental Planning, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the latter working through local commission members and local youth groups.

## 4. Time-table

The activities should start well before 1985; in fact as soon as the necessary resources are obtained by the end of 1983. The commissioning of papers should be completed during the first part of 1984 so that all the materials are ready by 1985. A comprehensive final report would be prepared by the early part of 1986.

1. Short Title - THE PROMOTION OF CULTURE RELATED TO CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING THEMES.
  
2. Brief Purpose - To collect innovative art, music, literature, theatrical and craft expressions from local communities relating to grass roots ideas on conservation and environmental planning in developing countries. These cultural forms often crystallize both popular wants and the traditional heritage and are a potent form of promoting social, economic and political development by communicating key ideas relating to culture and identity.
  
3. Plan of Work - Four tasks are planned:
  - (1) It is hoped to have a consultant prepare a study summarizing the state of the art, noting available cultural materials relevant to conservation and environmental planning and the uses to which these materials should be put. Some work has been started, e.g. the IUCN/CEP has already collected a number of poems and songs from Africa. The consultant report would be published as book with much illustrative material and recommendations for further action.
  - (2) It is also hoped to produce pilot country studies for particular art forms, through subcontracts to country institutions or individuals. Some suggestions that have been made are Zimbabwe (traditional songs), Botswana (folk theatre), Samoa (novels), Nepal (film). These will also be summarized in the consultant's report.
  - (3) It is hoped to start at the IUCN an archive of cultural materials related to the promotion of conservation and environmental planning.
  - (4) It is hoped to prepare a curricular suitable for multicultural use in schools and open learning systems, using cultural materials to promote conservation and better environmental planning.