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# LINKING VALUES AND POLICY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

*An international strategy  
to build the sustainability  
ethic into decision-making*

IUCN  
1995  
051

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IUCN COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY AND PLANNING

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## NOTE TO READERS

This is a snapshot of work in progress as of September 1995. The ideas and plans set forth here will continue to evolve. Current information will be available from the IUCN Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning at the address given on page 2.

This paper argues for a broad international effort to build the sustainability ethic into decision-making. It also outlines the plans of one particular program related to IUCN—the Partnership for a Sustainable World. We who have organized the Partnership are under no illusion that it can do more than a small part of what is required. We urge others to take similar initiatives and would appreciate being informed of their activities.

Comments on this paper are most welcome.

T.T.

### DEFINITIONS

The words "values," "ethics," and "moral" do not have single or precise definitions; their meaning depends on the context in which they are used. In this paper, they are used as follows:

**Values:** Core beliefs or desires that guide or motivate attitudes and actions. Some values, such as the importance persons attach to honesty, fairness, and loyalty, are ethical in nature because they are concerned with the notion of moral duty—they reflect attitudes about what is right, good, or proper, rather than what is pleasurable, useful, or desirable.

**Ethics:** A system or code of conduct based on moral duties and obligations that indicate how one should behave. Ethics deals with the ability to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong, and propriety from impropriety.

**The difference between values and ethics:** Since only some values are concerned with ethics, ethics and values are not the same. Individuals tend to develop value systems that provide a basis for prioritizing competing values. Only those value systems which subordinate non-ethical values to ethical ones are ethical.

**Moral:** Relating to principles or considerations of right or wrong action; proceeding from a standard of what is good and right.

The first three definitions are adapted from those of the Josephson Institute for Ethics (Independent Sector 1991, 22-23).

# 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to:

- (a) Identify needs and opportunities for an international effort to build the sustainability ethic into decision-making;
- (b) Define a clear role for a program related to one major international organization—IUCN; and
- (c) Describe tools that can be used to build the sustainability ethic into decision-making and some organizations where their use could have wide-ranging consequences.

The specific program presented here, the Partnership for a Sustainable World, represents a refocusing and expansion of activities that started fifteen years ago under the auspices of IUCN - The World Conservation Union. (See Appendix A for a description of IUCN and a review of its activities related to ethics.)

Since it is important to have a common understanding about terms used in discussing ethics, some definitions are given in the box on page 4.

## *Focus: The sustainability ethic*

The focus of this paper is on sustainable development as an ethical principle. IUCN defines sustainable development as "Improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems." Sustainability is defined as "a characteristic of a process or state that can be maintained indefinitely," but it is also increasingly used as shorthand for sustainable development. The elements of a "world ethic for living sustainably" are set forth in the box on page 6.

Although the ideas in this paper emerged from an environmental organization, we recognize that environmental issues cannot be considered apart from such issues as equity, human rights, overconsumption of resources, political corruption, population, poverty, and security. Ethical behavior is inseparable from issues of governance; it requires including those affected in the decision-making process. Environmental, economic, and social problems must be faced together.

Sustainable development is many things. It is a social and political process. It is also an integrating concept, a way of bringing together the many different aspects of a problem, a holistic approach to things. But above all, it is a moral principle. Sustainable de-

velopment is not so much about what is, but what should be. It has to do with value choices.

There are also political advantages to focusing broadly on sustainable development. Alliances of groups working on social, economic, and environmental problems will increase the likelihood of institutional reform.

Since this paper is directed to people who will be familiar with the concept, it does not include a detailed explanation of sustainable development and its ethical implications. These have been covered elsewhere (e.g., sustainable development: WCED 1987, IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1991, United Nations 1993; Trzyna 1995; the ethical dimension: Brown and Kuiblier 1994, Engel and Engel 1990, Rockefeller and Elder 1992).

# 2. The need and the problem

## *(a) The need: Building the sustainability ethic into decision-making*

It has become commonplace for those who speak and write about global problems to stress the importance of values in motivating people to care for the world around them and call for a new "global ethic." But how do moral ideas translate into policies and decisions that will move the world toward sustainability? How do changes in values lead to changes in behavior?

Transforming public attitudes and internalizing values—through schools, religious groups, and the media—will be important in the long run, but what will have a *direct and immediate impact* is forcing decision-makers to consider whether actions being proposed measure up to the principles of sustainability.

In practice, of course, policy decisions are complex. As Ralph Carter observes (1988, 287), they:

usually involve tradeoffs between multiple values, and one option rarely emerges as clearly superior to others. Far from the ideal world of black and white options, the real world of political choice often seems a landscape distinguished only by the remarkable variation in shades of gray.

The trouble is that the main ethical principle underlying policy analysis as it is currently practiced is efficiency, that is, weighing benefits in relation to costs. The announcement for a new OECD manual, *Project*

## Elements of a world ethic for living sustainably

Every human being is part of the community of life, made up of all living creatures. This community links all human societies, present and future generations, and humanity and the rest of nature. It embraces both cultural and natural diversity.

Every human being has the same fundamental and equal rights, including: the right to life, liberty, and security of person; to the freedoms of thought, conscience, and religion; to enquiry and expression; to peaceful assembly and association; to participation in government; to education; and, within the limits of the Earth, to the resources needed for a decent standard of living. No individual, community, or nation has the right to deprive another of its means of subsistence.

Each person and each society is entitled to respect of these rights; and is responsible for the protection of these rights for all others.

Every life form warrants respect independently of its worth to people. Human development should not threaten the integrity of nature or the survival of other species. People should treat all creatures decently, and protect them from cruelty, avoidable suffering, and unnecessary killing.

Everyone should take responsibility for his or her impacts on nature. People should conserve ecological processes and the diversity of nature, and use any resource frugally and efficiently, ensuring that their uses of renewable resources are sustainable.

Everyone should aim to share fairly the benefits and costs of resource use, among different communities and interest groups, among regions that are poor and those that are affluent, and between present and future generations. Each generation should leave to the future a world that is at least as diverse and productive as the one it inherited. Development of one society or generation should not limit the opportunities of other societies or generations.

The protection of human rights and those of the rest of nature is a worldwide responsibility that transcends all cultural, ideological, and geographic boundaries. The responsibility is both individual and collective.

*Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living*, page 14. (IUCN/UNEP/WWF, 1991).

and *Policy Appraisal*, exemplifies how this principle is applied:

The environmental consequences of any activity should be evaluated in monetary terms, in a cost-benefit framework. How, for example, can the economic values of death or illness due to pollution, amenity losses, or the destruction of natural resources be evaluated? This manual provides a detailed description of such techniques as the monetary valuation of environmental damage . . . and the role of discounting (OECD 1994).

### ***(b) The problem: Before sustainability can be built in, there must be ways to take ethical issues into account***

This raises a larger problem: the avoidance of ethical issues by decision-makers. Values are always present when decisions are made, of course, but they are usu-

ally implicit or even subconscious. Value conflicts are often deliberately circumvented.

The methods of policy analysis developed in recent years often seem to amount to elaborate dances around the tough value choices at the crux of an issue. Environmental impact analysis, risk analysis, fiscal impact analysis, and similar methods used in both the public and private sectors concentrate on assembling facts and examining alternatives; they steer clear of looking at what is right and wrong. They are attempts to bring scientific tools to bear on policy-making and, as Herman Daly (1993, 44) has written, "Nothing makes a scientist more uncomfortable than to be shown to have made a moral assumption." Donella Meadows (1994, 11) puts it more strongly: "Many scientists believe their greatest strength is their ability to separate their knowledge from their character and their science from their souls."

An increasing number of writers in the policy field assert that efficiency is not a morally adequate principle to inform decision-making (see Appendix B). However, policy analysts usually ignore ethical issues in spite of strong arguments for their inclusion.

According to the political scientist Douglas Amy (1984), the reasons analysts usually give for shunning ethical debate—that it is impossible, unnecessary, or impractical, or that it injects personal biases into the analytical process—are not the real ones. The real reason is that ethical analysis "conflicts with the practical politics of the institutions that engage in policy analysis." There is a tendency in ethical analysis to raise annoying questions, and bureaucracies

put an emphasis on consensus and following orders. They are not debating societies, and they are not designed to encourage frank discussion and dissent. Given these institutional realities, there is little incentive for analysts to raise ethical questions (pp. 575-580).

According to Amy, policy analysts cultivate a professional image as purely technical advisors whose work is value-free and apolitical. The administrators who are their bosses "are reluctant to encourage ethical investigations both because the inquiry itself might raise questions concerning established program goals and because the style of analysis conflicts with the technocratic ethos which dominates bureaucratic politics." Ethical implications "may often be the subject of informal discussions. But the point is that such ethical deliberations are *ad hoc*, and they are unlikely to be made public or to be the subject of careful and systematic investigation in formal agency studies and reports." Like policy analysts and administrators, members of legislative bodies also tend to shy away from value questions—in their case, to avoid alienating fellow legislators and important segments of their constituencies (Amy 1984, 581-584).

But try as we may, we can't get away from values. Even the words we use are loaded. Donald Brown of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources points out that

much of environmental policy analysis is conducted in the policy languages of science, economics, and law. These languages are assumed to be ethically neutral but are in fact laden with a variety of contextual and methodological ethical positions . . . If the hidden ethical positions are not identified, decisions may be based on ethical criteria that are in conflict with a sustainable development ethic (pers. com. 1995).

These are powerful reasons for building consideration of ethical questions into decision-making. Value

judgments are always made. Incorporating ethics into the policy process, subjecting value choices to the same kind of rigorous analysis as facts, will make those in authority consider the moral implications of their decisions.

To sum up: Building the sustainability ethic into decision-making first requires making careful articulation of value choices an explicit part of the process.

### 3. An international agenda

#### (a) A broad effort

A broad effort involving people and organizations in many countries is needed to accomplish the following objectives:

- Promote sustainability as a moral principle by building systematic consideration of values into decision-making;
- Determine the most effective ways of institutionalizing the consideration of values in different kinds of organizations whose activities can have an important influence on sustainable development;
- Ensure that statements of principles, codes of practice, and international legal instruments related to sustainable development are based on sound reasoning and will result in bringing ethics into decision-making;
- Achieve wide awareness and understanding of the benefits and methods of building systematic consideration of values into decision-making to promote sustainability, particularly in the international development, environmental, public policy, ethics, and philanthropic communities. In a few years, these methods should start to be routinely incorporated in training courses, textbooks, and donor and lender guidelines.

#### (b) A partnership related to IUCN

A collaborative program related to IUCN, the *Partnership for a Sustainable World*, has been organized to provide leadership and serve as a catalyst for this effort. Its structure and methods of operation are described in Part 7 of this paper. The Partnership will:

- Use a variety of **tools**, including policy analysis, policy dialogues, declarations of principles, codes of practice, and informal interventions;
- In a variety of **groups and institutions**, including intergovernmental organizations, governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, the business and investment communities, professional schools and associations, and key opinion-makers;
- In a variety of **geographic settings**, concentrating on those in which the partners have special expertise;
- On a variety of sustainability **themes**, including biodiversity, climate change, forests, air and water quality, overconsumption of resources, population, and poverty—as well as the broad, integrating idea of sustainable development.

The Partnership is under no illusion that it can carry out this task alone. It encourages similar initiatives and is eager to discuss opportunities to cooperate.

Part 4 of this paper discusses some tools that can be used to incorporate the sustainability ethic into decision-making. Part 5 looks at groups and institutions in which the use of these tools could have far-reaching effects. Emphasis is given to tools and groups that are of particular interest to the Partnership for a Sustainable World.

## 4. Tools for building ethics into decision-making

Six techniques for incorporating systematic consideration of ethics into decision-making are described below. They are not listed in order of importance or priority, since different methods will be useful in different situations. They are: (a) incorporating ethics in policy analysis; (b) including ethical analysis in collaborative decision-making; (c) declarations of principles and ethical codes; (d) representing ethics in organizational structures; and (e) informal interventions. Another approach, adversarial methods, is briefly discussed under (f).

### (a) *Incorporating ethics in policy analysis*

Governments, international agencies, businesses, and other organizations can adopt a requirement that ethical implications be considered as part of policy analysis.

Such an action-forcing measure would be analogous to a requirement that an environmental impact statement be prepared in advance of a proposed government action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. First called for in the United States National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, such requirements now exist in many countries and international agencies (Roe, Dalal-Clayton, and Hughes 1995). An environmental impact statement has certain specified elements, including a discussion of alternatives. Its main purpose is to force full disclosure of the environmental consequences of a proposed action, but an important and intended result is to build into the decision-making processes of governmental agencies a continuing and systematic consideration of environmental factors.

In promoting an ethical assessment requirement, an obvious starting point will be to encourage governments and agencies that already have environmental impact procedures to incorporate consideration of ethical issues into those procedures. Many jurisdictions now require social impacts to be considered as part of an environmental impact assessment. However, the ethical questions raised in such statements are usually limited to issues of distributional ethics (for example, poverty and ethnic discrimination), rather than issues of intergenerational ethics or the value of natural resources.

Another way of incorporating consideration of ethical issues into the environmental assessment process would be to bring it in at the review stage. A team of experts and stakeholders reviewing the findings of an environmental assessment would be required to address the ethical implications of those findings. This could be done with the help of someone professionally trained in ethics and policy analysis.

Ethical assessment requirements need not be limited to decisions that are considered "environmental." They can also be used in making decisions that are considered to be primarily "social" or "economic." In fact, these distinctions are artificial. In practice, ethical assessments will force policy-makers to examine the interrelationships among environmental, social, and economic considerations.



### ***(b) Including ethical analysis in policy dialogues***

Ethics has much to contribute to multi-stakeholder approaches to decision-making, variously called policy dialogues, collaborative policy forums, roundtables, or consensus groups.

Moving toward sustainable development requires not only breaking down conventional ways of thinking, but reaching out across many different institutions, professional disciplines, and sectors of society. The structures in which issues are framed and discussed can have a profound effect on outcomes, particularly if they include groups that have been excluded from conventional policy arenas. Policy dialogues, in which participants come to the table with sufficient respect for the legitimacy of each other's needs and concerns to operate by consensus procedure, are increasingly used for this purpose. Examples are Canada's widely publicized Round Tables on Environment and Economy, and the International Dialogue on Plant Genetic Resources (Trzyna and Gotelli 1990; IDRC 1993).

However, experience indicates that it is not enough to bring stakeholders around a table, even with an expert facilitator. Without the vision of a common higher purpose, such discussions tend to remain at the level of searching for the lowest common denominator among the participants' special interests. Those interests usually reflect basic conflicts in values. Ethics can help to clarify the value choices and move the discussion toward higher ground. Jean Monnet, father of the European Common Market, said, "Do not come together to argue and negotiate, come together to solve a common problem."

Including ethics in a process usually leads to increased participation and cooperation. As Dale Jamieson notes (1992, 150):

One of the most important benefits of viewing global environmental problems as moral problems is that this brings them into the domain of dialogue, discussion, and participation. Rather than being management problems that governments or experts can solve for us, when seen as ethical problems, they become problems for all of us to address, both as political actors and as everyday moral agents.

### ***(c) Declarations of principles and ethical codes***

These include broad, global statements such as those included in the proposed International Covenant on Environment and Development and Earth Charter; general statements adopted by governments and intergovernmental organizations; and statements specific to professions, business corporations, and associations. An inventory of such documents was recently prepared for the IUCN Ethics Working Group (Callewaert 1994).

Ethical statements are important for two reasons: They set the tone for debate of issues and direction of policy; and those who subscribe to the statements can then be held accountable to them, at least morally and politically, if not legally. Ethical statements can be important steps in reforming the system and should be designed with that purpose in mind. However, experience shows that they succeed only if they initiate a continuing conversation within an organization or community. Ethical statements therefore should provide for formally bringing ethics into the decision-making process.

### ***(d) Organizational units to represent ethics***

One conventional way of ensuring that a viewpoint is taken into account in an organization is to create a formal position or group to represent it. Ethics might be represented by a staff advisor, an advisory committee, or a dedicated position on the governing body. Any such unit should have as part of its responsibility training and raising awareness throughout the organization as a whole.

An example of how this is done in another field, medicine, is the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in the United Kingdom. The Authority was created in 1990 to regulate treatment and research for assisted conception, and it was recognized from the beginning that ethics would be central to its work. Its twenty-one members are appointed to reflect specified views and qualifications, including religion, which is represented by an Anglican bishop and a rabbi. It has working parties on ethical issues. A section of its annual report is set aside to report on such ethical issues as surrogacy and sex selection. (A member of the IUCN Ethics Working Group, Professor R.J. Berry of the University of London, is a member of the Authority.)

### *(e) Informal interventions*

Some of the most productive ways of incorporating ethics in decision-making may well be a variety of informal interventions tailored to specific situations. These would include, for instance, having experts in ethics working with policy-makers and their staffs, organizing workshops, participating in meetings, and drafting and reviewing policy documents.

### *(f) Adversarial methods (a note)*

Proposals have been made for processes that would deal directly with moral conflicts in ways similar to those used in courts of justice. One such proposal has been made by the political scientist Kristin Shrader-Frechette (1985). A "technology tribunal" would hold adversarial hearings at which people speaking from different perspectives could present their cases. Advocates would debate the issues, call and cross-examine witnesses, and defend policy recommendations. The tribunal would then render a formal decision.

Such formalized, quasi-judicial methods have serious drawbacks that include magnifying conflict and focusing attention on procedures rather than real issues (Nagel 1994; Vallinder 1994). The Partnership for a Sustainable World will emphasize consensus-building and conflict resolution, rather than adversarial methods.

## **5. Focal organizations**

In identifying organizations that might pioneer in building the sustainability ethic into decision-making, a number of institutions and groups are prime candidates because they are likely to be receptive and their actions would have wide-ranging consequences for sustainable development. These organizations are discussed in six categories: (a) intergovernmental organizations; (b) groups working on international legal instruments; (c) national and subnational governments; (d) business corporations; (e) the professions; and (f) the investment community.

From these categories, the Partnership for a Sustainable World will select a small number of focal institutions and groups to work with. We will encourage others to collaborate with additional organizations.

The following list takes into account the principles of building on existing relationships and activities and choosing initial projects that have a high likelihood of

success. The organizations listed vary greatly in size, structure, and corporate culture; the tools needed to encourage change will vary accordingly.

In addition to these groups, the Partnership will work closely with non-governmental organizations concerned with sustainable development and experiment with ways of reaching key opinion leaders.

### *(a) Intergovernmental organizations*

The **World Bank** is an obvious prospect. The Bank, which lends money to developing countries to further their economic and social progress, is the largest single lender in the world, making commitments of over \$20 billion a year. Its impact is even larger, however, because its lending often leads to additional multilateral and bilateral funding and private loans, and it has a strong influence on countries' development paths.

The Bank has been widely criticized for using an outmoded economic development model that has usually failed to reduce poverty and has often led to environmental destruction and social dislocation. Starting in the late 1980s, the Bank's management announced a series of major reforms, including the creation in 1993 of a Vice-Presidency for Environmentally Sustainable Development. The Bank seems receptive to new ideas, is giving increased attention to social analysis, and may be willing to experiment with an ethical assessment process and training in policy ethics for its staff.

Another prospect is the **Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity**. The Convention was signed at the Rio Conference in 1992 and represents a historic commitment by governments to conserve biodiversity and ensure that biological resources are used sustainably. Other conventions have dealt with certain aspects of biodiversity, such as wetlands or trade in species, but this is the first international agreement to cover biodiversity as a whole.

Although the word "ethics" is not used in it, the concept undergirds the Convention and there are important moral issues in carrying it out, for example, in defining fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources. How the Convention is implemented is of major interest to IUCN, which has close working relations with the Secretariat in Geneva.

**Other intergovernmental organizations** that have been mentioned include additional multilateral development banks and convention secretariats and various specialized agencies of the United Nations concerned with environment, development, and population.

## ***(b) Groups working on international legal instruments***

The Partnership will support the ongoing efforts of the IUCN Ethics Working Group to provide expert advice on the ethical foundations of two important legal initiatives: the draft International Covenant on Environment and Development, and the proposed Earth Charter. The Partnership will also consider how it can help promote and implement these agreements once they are in effect.

The **International Covenant on Environment and Development**, a "hard-law" (binding) instrument drafted by the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law, seeks to consolidate existing and emerging principles of international law concerning environment and development. Work on the Covenant began in the mid-1980s. Plans are to submit it to the United Nations in 1995.

The **Earth Charter** will be a "soft-law" (non-binding) document analogous to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Seen as complementing the Covenant, it is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations: the Earth Council, headed by Maurice Strong; and Green Cross International, led by Mikhail Gorbachev. The Charter will set out the moral imperatives of sustainability and norms and standards for state and interstate behavior. Plans are for presentation of an outline document to the United Nations in 1995, followed by a two-year, worldwide process of discussion and negotiation. The final document will be submitted to a special "Rio review" session of the UN General Assembly in 1997, with the aim of obtaining enough signatories to enable proclamation of a UN Earth Charter at the start of the new millennium. The Ethics Working Group is discussing with the Earth Council how it can best contribute to this project.

## ***(c) National and subnational governments***

Several national governments have been mentioned as prospects, including those of **Canada, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.**

The **United States** Government is an obvious candidate. The impetus for the Partnership has come from that country. U.S. consumption patterns and U.S. Government decisions and activities have an enormous impact on the world. It could therefore be argued that the Partnership has an obligation to work toward incorpo-

rating ethics into U.S. Government decision-making processes.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has expressed interest in participating. Other candidates are units of the Congress and the President's Council on Environmental Quality, which administers the national environmental impact assessment process.

Within the United States, the **California State Government** is another good prospect. California traditionally has an innovative role in environmental and social policy, with many of its ideas adopted by the U.S. federal government and other countries. Several members of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning have worked with California institutions for many years. The Senate Office of Research of the California Legislature has expressed interest in cooperating.

## ***(d) Business***

The movement for sustainable development will not succeed unless business leaders become part of it. Much is being done to promote sustainable development in business (Davis 1991), and a number of organizations have been established for this purpose, notably the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Ethical analysis could be an important tool for getting business corporations to face essential value questions.

The big transnational corporations tend to set the tone. Probably the most productive approach would be to start by working informally with a few enlightened **major corporations**, companies that are acknowledged leaders in their industries. Trade associations are another possible path, but they tend to be held back by their more conservative members and are less receptive to new ideas.

Another approach would be through the **field of business ethics**. This has become a large field of activity, with its own professional societies, consulting firms, journals, textbooks, conferences, and training courses. Business ethics typically deals with the rules of the business game, for example, keeping promises and being fair to competitors. However, there is a trend toward redefining the field of business ethics to include the impact of a company's operations on the world at large. Some firms are now taking into account the "whole-life cost" of products, for example (Drummond 1994). Some progressive companies are banding together in such groups as Business for Social Responsibility in the United States. Ethical assessments and similar mechanisms can help to ensure that

proposals are measured against company or industry-wide statements of principles and codes of practice. The ultimate goal must be changing corporate culture.

### *(e) The professions*

Like codes of business ethics, the ethical rules of the professions commonly define their members' obligations in terms of integrity and excellence, giving little or no attention to relevance to social needs.

Ashok Khosla, President of Development Alternatives, a leading Indian group that is one of the initial members of the Partnership for a Sustainable World, relates the story of a very senior civil servant in the Ministry of the Environment in New Delhi who

was fighting tooth and nail against a [bad] project . . . It so happened that the next morning he was appointed head of the ministry to which that project belonged, so the next day he was telling me how proudly he was fighting tooth and nail for it . . . This was a gentleman who had been secretary of the Ministry of the Environment, who had been advocating the internalization of the environmental dimension into everybody's work, and how each ministry ought to have an environmental capability, and yet he saw it as a professional—his job was to do what the minister said he ought to do (Khosla 1989, 100).

Khosla believes that professional communities need to develop "value systems, enforced if possible by their internal mechanisms, to ensure that their work does not undermine the objectives of the wider society within which they operate but rather reinforces them" (1994, 2).

Incorporating the sustainability ethic in professional codes of practice and education for the professions will have far-reaching benefits. This is particularly true of professions directly related to sustainable development such as public policy analysis, engineering, development studies, natural resource management, and environmental planning—and those whose members often take leadership roles in their communities, such as clergy and business management.

The Partnership plans to work through selected professional associations and associations of professional schools. It will be able to draw on the experience of those who have succeeded in including environmental matters and more traditional ethics in business school curricula (Post 1990).

A number of members of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning, including members of the IUCN Ethics Working Group, have a strong interest in this approach, including some who are on the faculties of leading universities. The working group is already involved in the Program on Ecology, Justice, and Faith, funded by the MacArthur Foundation, which seeks to reform curricula of North American theological schools.

### *(f) The investment community*

Little progress will be made toward sustainability unless there is a great deal more private investment in businesses that engage in such activities as sustainable forestry, recycling, and low-input farming.

One of the barriers to such investment is the system of ethics governing the investment community. In a recent article, two officers of a New York foundation quoted as representative the statement of an institutional investment manager responsible for many hundreds of millions of dollars of venture capital portfolios:

As a fiduciary, I have a moral obligation to my investors to maximize return and minimize risk. I simply cannot take into account exogenous factors like social or environmental impact, or I will reduce the opportunity set and thereby reduce the rate of return (Tasch and Viederman 1995, 127).

A dialogue is needed with leaders in the investment community about what can be done to promote private investment in enterprises that foster sustainability. This dialogue should include exploring how sustainability as an ethical principle can be included in investment decision-making processes.

## **6. Issues**

Almost without exception, those who commented on earlier versions of this paper strongly endorsed the approach taken, that is, to connect ethics, decision-making, and sustainable development in a practical way; to work with the kinds of tools and institutions described; and to operate the IUCN-related program through a consortium of organizations from different parts of the world. However, a number of issues were raised, some of them frequently:

***(a) This won't be easy to sell***

Bringing ethics into decision-making will not be easy to sell. This is the point made most often by those consulted about this initiative. For some people, "ethics" seems airy-fairy. To others, it sounds elitist. Still others are threatened by the value shifts that it implies. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that any such effort must be politically nonpartisan and conducted in a highly professional manner. How it will gain acceptance must receive serious attention.

***(b) Adopt the style of the policy arena***

A related point, also made frequently, is that this effort will not succeed if it has an academic style or moralistic tone. Because it is directed at policy-makers, its style must be the style of the policy arena. Among other things, this means being able to respond quickly to requests and opportunities; politicians and business executives have very short time-scales.

***(c) Are we promoting a universal ethic?***

The most difficult issue in dealing with ethics in an international context is the issue of unity and diversity. Ronald Engel recently wrote (1994, 4-5):

For many, to speak of a global ethic smacks of a forced unity—something that will be imposed by one part of the world on other parts of the world, a new kind of colonialism. And surely, given the course of world history, such fears are justified. On the other hand, there are many who are worried that we are drifting into a situation of "cultural relativism"—whereby it is assumed that no one, except those who belong to a particular society, can or should say anything about the values of that society.

Engel believes the answer is to recognize that there can be unity in variety, that it makes sense "to speak at one and the same time of 'a world ethic for living sustainably' and of 'world ethics for living sustainably.'" In other words, there should be global consensus on broad goals, but there can be a variety of ways of achieving them. The required balance can be difficult to achieve in practice.

***(d) Don't ask people to become ethical***

Most people see themselves as ethical. As Richard Tucker of the University of Michigan points out, "many of them would be startled and put off by what I think they would perceive as the implication that ethical issues are not already pervasive in their work." We must be clear that we are not asking people to become ethical but rather, as Tucker puts it, to carry out "more systematic analysis" of ethical issues "on a more consistently explicit level than is yet generally the case" (pers. com. 1994).

***(e) Tough cross-cutting tasks are involved***

Bridges must be built between scholars and practitioners, between those trained in the sciences and those with backgrounds in the humanities, and among people from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. Any one of these cross-cutting tasks is hard enough; facing all of them concurrently compounds the difficulty.

***(f) This isn't a panacea***

Finally, bringing the sustainability ethic into decision-making isn't a panacea. There are limits to what it can accomplish. Considering ethical issues may point to a "right" decision, but there is no guarantee that such a course will be chosen. A good deal of patience will be required. It must be realized that building the process is more important than any individual decision. Raising ethical issues can start a conversation that will eventually change organizational culture.

## **7. The Partnership for a Sustainable World**

***(a) A consortium***

The IUCN-related program to build the sustainability ethic into decision-making will be conducted by the Partnership for a Sustainable World, a consortium of organizations including IUCN.

Other possibilities examined were:

- Making the program an integral part of IUCN and centering it in the IUCN Secretariat. There are sev-

eral disadvantages to this approach, including a strong sense in IUCN that its Secretariat is already involved in too many fields of activity, and that the Secretariat has a scientific and technical ethos.

□ Setting up an independent institute or international commission. A lot of energy would be diverted to organizing a new entity, and it would have to compete for attention with a number of new international non-governmental organizations working on related issues. The need is not for more international groups to promote sustainable development, but for more cooperation among existing organizations.

The advantages of the approach presented here are that it will build on existing personal and organizational relationships; it takes advantage of the legitimacy, political contacts, and intellectual resources offered by the IUCN community; the members of the consortium offer a diversity of styles and can contribute knowledge and contacts from their own professional fields and geographic areas; and synergy will result from bringing together several actors working on similar problems.

In addition, this approach is cost-effective: much of the Partnership's work will continue to be done through members of the network volunteering their time or through a convergence between the Partnership's needs and the needs of cooperating organizations.

### **(b) Initial partners**

The six initial members of the Partnership for a Sustainable World are: IUCN - The World Conservation Union; the California Institute of Public Affairs, an affiliate of The Claremont Graduate School; Development Alternatives, New Delhi; The Environment Council, London; Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano (Latin American Future Foundation), based in Quito, Ecuador; and the Zimbabwe National Environment Trust.

Other organizations will join in cosponsoring individual projects. The first of these is a leading Brazilian group, the Fundação Brasileira para a Conservação da Natureza (Brazilian Foundation for Conservation of Nature), which is participating in a project on investment.

The Partnership's steering committee is composed of representatives of its member organizations and others chosen by them.

### **(c) IUCN's contribution**

IUCN is represented on the steering committee of the Partnership for a Sustainable World by the IUCN Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning, the IUCN Ethics Working Group, and a designee of the IUCN Director General. (See Appendix A for a description of IUCN.)

The Ethics Working Group, part of the Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning, currently has over 200 members in its worldwide network. It will be an important source of intellectual expertise in ethics for activities carried out under the Partnership. It is also well-positioned to build connections among ethicists, conservationists, and others interested in the ethics of sustainable development, particularly those working to elaborate a new global ethic. The working group maintains contact with ethics-related organizations, including religious groups, and monitors new developments in the ethics field. It works with two scholarly associations that have been involved in discussions about this initiative: the International Association for Environmental Ethics, and the International Development Ethics Association.

There are opportunities for links with a number of programs in the IUCN Secretariat, for example, those on population and environment, sustainable use of wildlife, and sustainable development strategies. The Washington office has offered to help the Partnership work with United States Government agencies and Washington-based intergovernmental organizations. The IUCN regional offices in Mesoamerica and Southern Africa have expressed interest in including an ethical dimension in field projects.

Connections with other activities of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning will be explored. These include work on various policy tools, landscape approaches to sustainable development, and defining and measuring sustainable development. Partnership activities will be publicized in the newsletter of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning, *Environmental Strategy*, which is distributed to some 1,200 organizations and individuals around the world, including members of the Commission, IUCN member organizations, and other key groups. Information will also be supplied to the quarterly *IUCN Bulletin*.

### **(d) Operation**

This kind of enterprise is more akin to diplomacy than advocacy or policy research. It requires people with

experience in high-level political work, as well as people with backgrounds in ethics.

Teams will be assembled for each major task—for example, helping to draft the Earth Charter, or working with an agency to incorporate ethical analysis in its decision-making processes. Typically, each team will include a senior person with political skills and resource people with strong credentials in ethics. They will be backed up as required with research, editorial, and administrative support. The different project teams will meet periodically with the Partnership steering committee to exchange experience and refine strategy.

It is not possible to be very specific at this time about how the Partnership will work with focal organizations. One of the main purposes of the program is to develop methodology. The focal organizations are diverse and the choice of methods for each will require study, discussion, and often some experimentation.

Major emphasis will be given to analyzing and disseminating results. Case studies will be prepared describing both this program's and others' efforts to institutionalize the sustainability ethic. Similar efforts in other fields (law and medicine, for example) will be examined. The results of experimenting with different mechanisms will be synthesized and put in the form of guidelines and eventually a book-length study.

Experts in ethics from diverse cultural backgrounds who are able to work effectively in the policy arena will need to be identified for this program. Short courses may be required to prepare them for their assignments.

Specialized postgraduate training may be required as demand increases for specialists in policy ethics. Needs and solutions will be explored with universities. An inventory is needed of existing training programs related to this field.

Regular contact will be maintained with other organizations working in this general area, with a view to cooperating and avoiding duplication.

Sources of funding for Partnership activities will include foundations, business corporations, and the "client" organizations with which the Partnership is working. There will be substantial in-kind support from IUCN, members of the Partnership, and members of the IUCN Ethics Working Group.

Responsibility for projects and joint activities is being divided among the members of the Partnership. Current information on specific activities and responsibilities will be available from the IUCN Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning at the address given on page 2.

## 8. A consultative process

This initiative was developed through a consultative process involving successive draft plans and increasingly wider circles of IUCN member organizations, councillors, staff, and commission members—as well as other leaders in conservation, development, ethics, and international affairs.

Between January 1994 and August 1996, the author met with over fifty people and received comments from over forty others (see the Acknowledgements below). They included officials of governments, international agencies, foundations, and national and international non-governmental organizations, as well as scholars, writers, and consultants. They included citizens of Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Denmark (Greenland), Ecuador, France, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom, the United States, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe.

## 9. Appendixes

### A. Background: Ethics and IUCN

IUCN, formally known as the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, was founded in 1948. It brings together sovereign states, governmental agencies, and a diverse range of non-governmental organizations in a unique world partnership—over 800 members in 131 countries. Its mission is "to influence, encourage, and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable." IUCN's headquarters are in Gland, near Geneva in Switzerland.

IUCN has been a leader in promoting sustainable development, defined as "improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems." The idea of sustainable development was first given currency in the *World Conservation Strategy*, published in 1980 by IUCN, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World Wide Fund for Nature. In 1991, the same three organizations issued a successor document, *Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living*. Based on



wide consultation, *Caring for the Earth* sets forth broad principles and an array of actions required to move the world toward sustainability.

IUCN has also been a leader in recognizing the importance of people's values in achieving a sustainable world, and the need for a new ethic. The 1980 *World Conservation Strategy* included a statement that a new ethic "is required for human societies to live in harmony with the natural world on which they depend for survival and well-being." *Caring for the Earth* spells out the elements of a "world ethic for living sustainably" in more detail (see box, page 6) and calls for developing, promoting, and implementing the ethic.

The IUCN Ethics Working Group was formed in 1984 with the premise that ethics needs as much disciplined and deliberate attention as any other aspect of conservation. The working group has been chaired from its inception by J. Ronald Engel, Professor of Social Ethics at Meadville/Lombard Theological School and the University of Chicago. It now has some 220 members in fifty countries in its network, including scholars and practitioners from many disciplines and cultural and religious traditions. Its accomplishments include: sponsoring a consultative process leading to the ethics chapter in *Caring for the Earth*, producing a cross-cultural, multi-faith, multidisciplinary text on the ethics of sustainable development (Engel and Engel 1990); contributing to a volume on the environment as a religious issue (Rockefeller and Elder 1992); advising on the draft International Covenant on Environment and Development; contributing to the ethical dimensions of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere program; participating in various other projects of IUCN and other organizations; and building and nurturing an extensive global network. Since 1992, the working group has been part of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning.

In 1993, with strong encouragement from IUCN's leadership, the Ethics Working Group began to look at how its activities—until now, conducted largely through a voluntary network—could be expanded into an international program with the funding and institutional support needed to implement the recommendations on ethics in *Caring for the Earth*. Professor Engel organized a workshop in April 1993 and followed up with extensive consultation and planning. However, his time became limited because of academic responsibilities. I worked closely with him in developing the general approach presented in this paper, which represents a marriage of IUCN's ethics and policy interests.

A report of the Ethics Working Group, *Advancing Ethics for Living Sustainably* (Engel and Denny-

Hughes 1993), provides further background on the IUCN ethics initiative and discusses issues involved in formulating a universal ethic.

## B. Isn't someone doing this already?

One question that is being asked about the effort described in this paper is that bringing ethics into decision-making seems like such a good idea; isn't someone doing this already? The answer is a qualified No.

There appears to be little movement along these lines among scholars or practitioners of public policy analysis. Most of the literature on ethics and public policy is about the conduct of the individuals involved in the process (such issues as bribery, whistle-blowing, or bias in project evaluation), rather than the content of the policies—in much the way business ethics has to do with the rules of the business game, not the impact of business operations on the larger world.

A small but increasing number of writers have pointed to the need to integrate ethics into policy analysis (Anderson 1979; Bergerson 1988; Schelling 1981). For example, one political scientist (Gillroy 1993b), in an article on the analysis of environmental risk, concludes that efficiency is not a "morally adequate principle" to inform decision-making in that area of policy. A policy specialist looking at the reasons that courts overturned land-use decisions (Linder 1986, 282), cites the "ineffectiveness of existing procedural mechanisms for incorporating the public's values into the decision process." For another scholar (Dorfman 1976, 162), the "missing ingredient" in policy analysis is the ability to address moral issues directly.

However, in spite of this trend in the professional literature, Douglas Amy found (1984, 574), at least in the United States, that

most practicing policy analysts still largely ignore ethics despite the strong arguments for their inclusion in policy analysis and despite the availability of methods for including normative evaluations in policy studies. Furthermore, there is little indication that analysts are moving in the direction of more systematic analysis of ethical issues in their policy reports.

Unfortunately, scholars and practitioners who would like to see this remedied usually stop short of making concrete proposals. One process idea found in



the literature, an adversarial method of assessment, is discussed above under 4 (f).

As to whether another organization is already working to bring ethics into decision-making in the area of sustainable development or a related field, no references have been found in the literature. Those who commented on this paper in draft, including people with extensive knowledge of international organizations, the conservation community, and the fields of public policy and ethics, were unable to think of anything like the initiative outlined in this paper.

But good ideas have a habit of emerging in different places at around the same time. It would not be surprising if others were working on similar efforts. If that occurs, we will look for opportunities to work together.

### C. Acknowledgments

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I met with or received comments from the following people about the initiative described in this paper between January 1994 and August 1995. Meetings were held in most cases; those from whom comments were received in writing or by telephone are marked with a diamond (♦). Members of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Strategy and Planning are marked with an asterisk (\*). I greatly appreciate the help of all those listed and apologize to any others whose names may have been omitted inadvertently. Listing here does not indicate endorsement of the ideas presented in this paper, for which I bear sole responsibility.

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