

Mobilizing IUCN's Knowledge to secure a sustainable future

The IUCN Knowledge Management Study Executive Summary

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Table of Contents

GUIDANCE FROM THE AUTHOR	3
SYNOPSIS OF THE STUDY	6
THE KEY MESSAGE	7
THE FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT	7
IUCN'S CURRENT PRACTICES FOR MANAGING KNOWLEDGE.....	8
FOUR STRATEGIC MOVES FOR 2005-2010.....	10
IUCN'S CURRENT CAPACITIES AND NEW COMMITMENTS	16
CLOSING NOTE	16

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Guidance from the author

As I finalize my thoughts and observations, I am reminded of the discussions that took place at the end of 2003 at the meeting of the Commission Chairs. Four comments stood out:

The Commissions Chair: that the Study should provide both a state of debate report, and a broader context for knowledge activities already underway.

The Director, Global Programme: that the Study should be “definitionally clear”, laying out where the field of knowledge management is going (gaps, constraints, trends). IUCN's practices should be identified along the continuum of traditional activities to innovation¹. In particular, the Director hoped that the Study would provide insight into how to build the capacity of people to influence change.

The Chair, Commission on Environment Law: That the Study should suggest five to six moves that the Union could initiate at the conclusion of the Study.

The Director General: that this Study might suggest the recalibration of some of the processes in the Union.

These four comments have significantly shaped the direction of the Study. In the first phase, I explored in some detail the “state of debate”. It should come as no surprise that the debate is wide ranging and evolving. New technologies push the boundaries of what is possible. New work on social capital is changing traditionally linear knowledge processes (research to writing to publication to delivery) into symbiotic processes (engaging the end user every step of the way).

The second phase of the Study looked more closely at IUCN's own practice. This was not designed to be an evaluation of specific IUCN's knowledge management activities or networks. Rather, it was intended to reflect back to IUCN what its own staff and Commissions believed would be the necessary steps to “recalibrate” and upgrade its knowledge management and its networks.

Finally, drawing from good practice within the Union and trends outside it, a framework of four strategic moves was drafted and the concepts tested with representatives of Commissions and regional offices, and debated during Congress.

This framework appears to resonate with all concerned. The proposed moves on how to increase influence, to strengthen relationship management and communications, and to engage young professionals more seriously and systematically have received the most attention and debate. The discussion of roles, in particular for the Commissions, will undoubtedly continue. Measures suggested in the Study for strengthening roles may be of some assistance.

¹ And this has been mapped out in Appendix A,

Fundamentally, I believe that Commissions connect individuals with individuals, and that the Secretariat connects organizations with organizations. With this perspective, it may become clearer what the tools and processes should be to connect individuals across the Union to share knowledge, and to connect organizations also.

Most Secretariat and Commission representatives appear to believe the Study has advanced the debate and put the spotlight on critical leverage points, in particular the Influencing Strategy. But they are looking for implementation and results. The challenge of knowledge management has been debated at IUCN for a number of years now, in a field that changes daily. Staff want practical solutions to immediate frustrations. Others are looking down the road with real concern – as David Brackett expressed at Congress, “if we don’t manage our own information we will be lost in the next ten years.”

The strategic moves have been deliberately broken down into relatively executable tasks, and done in such a way that no one activity is completely dependent upon another for its success, but the activities when aggregated could demonstrate real progress on mobilizing the Union’s knowledge. In fact, this may be consistent with the culture of the Union. A large scale strategy like E-IUCN has been delivered at best with only modest success over many years. Those knowledge activities that have worked well have been the ones that individual staff just got on with, like building the Intranet or creating an international learning community on gender and conservation.

As the Senior Advisor on Knowledge Management takes up her appointment, I would strongly encourage senior management to address the following:

1. Shift the approach to programme and project development to focus on what it is you want to influence, and determine who you need to influence to effect those decisions or changes. Your knowledge needs and products will be better defined as a result.
2. Keep your eye on the relationships management challenge: if the relationships channels are clogged, your knowledge won’t go anywhere.
3. Assign responsibility for the various strategies in the Study to line managers. The Senior Advisor can work with them on strategy development, building in checkpoints and indicators for monitoring. The role of the Advisor may then be to capture the aggregation of the work, to demonstrate to the Union that real progress is being made.
4. Get some tasks underway now. In the short term, take a rapid results approach to several important issues:
 - Address the ICT technical capacity
 - Upgrade and increase the usability of the Intranet; including making groupware tools more readily available to staff.
 - Implement a policy that all current and future IUCN products should be available for download in full text from IUCN’s website; and get them online; and improve the navigation to them.
 - Initiate one or two prototype communities to tackle internal communications and planning. For example, set up a community of practice on projects and initiatives involving formal and informal learning, and in particular, relationships with the academic sector. Use this community to address the complementarities of WCLN, the network of

Mobilizing IUCN's Knowledge: Summary

schools of Natural Resources in Central Africa fostered by CEESP; the Academy of Environmental Law, the YALE-IUCN MOU, PALNet and so forth.

A youth delegate at the Bangkok Congress wryly observed that the only time he heard the word "action" was in Wangari Maathai's address at the close of the Forum. Moving beyond producing knowledge to influencing change may help IUCN recapture a sense of urgency and an emphasis on action in its work.

Synopsis of the Study

The Context

The purpose of the Knowledge Management Study is to frame discussions on knowledge management across the Union. The study is intended to provide insight into new approaches to harness IUCN's knowledge for greater impact in the world.

In response to recommendations in the 1999 and 2003 external reviews, and the 2003 Consultative Group on Commissions, IUCN has commissioned an in-depth investigation into the field of knowledge management. The goal of the Study is to move the debate within IUCN on knowledge organizations, knowledge networks and knowledge management beyond the current level of concept papers, consultations and external reviews towards implementation.

The Study is designed to:

- Raise awareness and understanding about state-of-the-art / cutting-edge knowledge management practices
- Assess where IUCN is at the moment in terms of its ambitions to be a knowledge-based organization
- Develop practical options for debate to move forward in becoming a knowledge-based organization

The Challenge

IUCN has long thought of itself as a knowledge-based organization. Its Commissions have functioned as its expert networks; it has been a prolific publisher of scientific knowledge grounded in local applications; it has shared its knowledge through networks and partnerships from the grassroots to global negotiations:

IUCN's 'core business'... is managing knowledge for biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.

But the Union believes that it could be doing more. New approaches may be available to accelerate knowledge sharing. Other organizations may have models that IUCN could adapt for its own use. IUCN Commissions and Secretariat staff have identified the following knowledge-related challenges facing the Union:

- Limited influence and impact on policy and practice
- Impediments to horizontal knowledge flows – limited interconnectivity across the parts of the Union
- Impediments to vertical knowledge flows – knowledge remaining at the project level
- Concerns about the quality of IUCN's knowledge products and services, and how to strengthen the knowledge base and expertise of staff.

The Key Message

IUCN needs an upgrade to the next generation of strategies and processes for mobilizing its knowledge, its relationships and its communications. The study suggests four strategic moves for the Union to undertake in 2005-2008.

1. Begin to reorient major projects/activities (existing and new) to focus on influence: identifying what needs to be changed, who is in a position to effect that change and building relationships with them from the beginning of the project.
2. Define and manage new roles for an expanded "DNA" of IUCN that now includes not only Commissions, Members and Secretariat, but partners, new networks, external consultants and donors; and should include roles for young professionals.
3. Develop a set of interconnected strategies for the following:
 - Relationships and partnerships management
 - Managing external communications
 - Strengthening internal communications and learning
 - Human Resources
4. Create the enabling ICT environment.

There will be a role in this upgrade for every component of the Union -- Commissions, Members and the Secretariat; IUCN's partners and donors; its senior staff, its experts and the new generation of conservation professionals.

The Field of Knowledge Management

What is Knowledge Management?

The term "knowledge management" is elastic and can be stretched to include both internal and external processes.

- Internal processes: how an organization systematically collects, archives and retrieves the knowledge of its staff and how it manages internal communications among its staff in order to strengthen its knowledge base.
- External processes: how an organization flows its knowledge into the hands of the people it most wants to use it; how it strengthens its knowledge through its interaction with external groups; how it learns whether its insights have made a difference.

Current trends and debates

The Study explores several important trends arising out of the convergence of: management approaches in the private sector; social science analysis of networking behaviours; innovation in technologies; and consultative processes for international development. Of particular significance is the shifting of emphasis in

organizations from having knowledge to having influence. This trend draws on new work on social capital and social networks – understanding how knowledge flows through the building of social relationships. Also important is recent work on “rapid results” initiatives – injecting into the overall plan of a major project a series of mini-projects, designed to deliver a measurable result, quickly.

Success factors determined by other organizations

There are a number of practices that appear consistently across a variety of organizations, regardless of structure and mandate. Among the success factors noted in the Study, particular attention should be paid to understanding the basic components of knowledge management: good use of email functions and good design of web sites, combined with people learning how to plan and maintain interaction with each other and with external audiences. Working with combinations of strategies is becoming preferable to designing a single overarching KM strategy.

Infrastructure to support a knowledge-based organization

All organizations addressed the following in building their KM infrastructure: human resources requirements; information technology requirements and in particular the design of an Intranet to support knowledge capture and virtual collaboration; and financing. Financing considerations included not just the costs of the technology, but also staff time – financing the time required for knowledge sharing across project and program lines, and beyond the lifespan of a given project, that can't be charged to project budgets.

IUCN's current practices for managing knowledge

Information management systems and services

IUCN has a well established intranet [its “knowledge network”] and project information management system (PIMS). Both have served as essential tools for capturing and archiving operational knowledge of the Secretariat. They are valued across the Secretariat by staff, but would benefit from usability testing and upgrading. IUCN has also developed enriched information retrieval systems like Ecolex and the Species Information Service to serve external audiences. The importance of information systems to the work of IUCN needs to be reasserted, as these are critical to the dissemination of IUCN's core knowledge bases – scientific, legal and practitioner knowledge.

The Six Knowledge Initiatives

Central to each of the so called Knowledge Initiatives is the desire to mobilize IUCN's knowledge through innovative uses of partnerships, networks and technology. They include the Species Information Service (SIS), Ecolex, the Water and Nature Initiative (WANI), the Conservation Commons, the Protected Areas Learning Network (PALNet) and the World Conservation Learning Network (WCLN). A number of important KM practices, as well as gaps in capacity, are evident in these initiatives.

Good practices:

- Use of the initiative to support internal IUCN communities
- Initiatives designed in consultation with users
- Attention to learning methodologies as part of knowledge management

- Efforts to make the best use, and push the boundaries of, technology

Gaps in capacity:

- Setting distinctive and measurable goals and objectives
- Rapid results approach
- Management of key partners
- Long term maintenance and sustainability
- Technology support

Organizational knowledge sharing, within IUCN and with other organizations

Internally, IUCN has established some group mechanisms for knowledge sharing. Networks of specialists in forests, water and other areas, and on the cross cutting issues of economics, social policy and gender, have been set up throughout the Secretariat, but with limited success. Regional staff and Commissions commented extensively during the Study on the challenges in flowing knowledge more freely between Regional / Country Offices and Headquarters and between Regions and Commissions.

Externally, the CIDA - IUCN Framework Agreement provides the basis for IUCN to help inform CIDA's work; and the advice of other regional and country offices is increasingly sought out by their state and regional actors. But there is a significant barrier to success with these efforts: if knowledge is not flowing easily throughout the union, how can IUCN serve these closer interactions with key agencies?

Knowledge production and delivery

IUCN has recently developed a methodology to track where and how IUCN's knowledge products and services are being used. But although many IUCN products may be well targeted, by themselves those products may not lead to changes in the field or to the influence that IUCN seeks to have in the world.

The Knowledge Products Study also raised concerns over quality assurance. In addition to the more traditional approach of vetting products through an in-house committee, the Knowledge Management Study suggests the exploration of new approaches for quality assurance that are based on broader discussion and interaction with users.

Working together in networks and partnerships

Networks, alliances and partnerships are important structures for sharing and applying knowledge. IUCN has a wealth of experience in the regions in the development and management of networks and partnerships with other organizations. The Commissions have over many years invested in building networks of experts. Nevertheless, staff and Commissions alike view their practice of partnership as uneven and lacking basic principles and guidelines.

Recognizing the challenge of the "pluralism" of knowledge

The underlying values and beliefs within different knowledge systems – whether faith-based, or rooted in traditional understandings, or stemming from local cultures -- can influence how information is gathered, enriched through dialogue and applied to conservation. IUCN's regional offices undoubtedly have significant understanding of how to "recognise, respect and promote dialogue between different knowledge systems", as the Union has pledged to do in its Knowledge –

Empowerment – Governance Framework. But this knowledge needs to be systematically documented and transformed into tools for project managers.

Four Strategic Moves for 2005-2010

In order to upgrade IUCN's knowledge management practice, actions should be planned around several critical leverage points. Acting on these points now rather than designing a single, enterprise-wide strategy will have the following benefits:

- Simple things that need to be done and can be done now will not get overlooked as easily.
- Faster implementation with an emphasis on measurable results. Each of these strategic moves can be started through a series of initiatives designed to deliver their results quickly and produce measurable results.
- Responsibility can be delegated to various managers and parts of the Union.

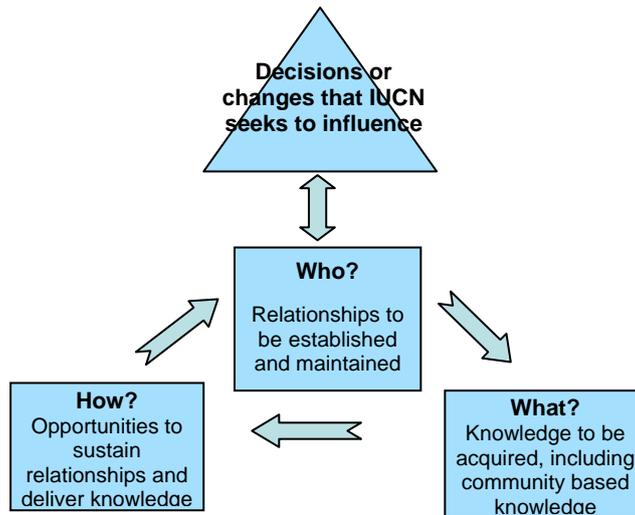
Strategic Move #1. Move beyond producing knowledge to influencing change

Questions of the lack of purposefulness of IUCN knowledge products, the supply model versus the demand model, all derive from the more fundamental challenge of how to identify what needs to be changed in the world. Organizations are beginning to learn that too often, they begin with what they want to know, and then do their research. Only when their research is done do they consider how this knowledge might be communicated to others. In order to mobilize knowledge to have influence, organizations may need to change their starting point.

There needs to be a shift in approach to programme and project development: Having influence begins with determining what exactly it is you want to influence – what decisions do you want to influence; what specific changes do you want to see in the world. From there, you determine who you need to influence -- who is in a position to make or influence that decision or effect that change. Only then do you consider the knowledge question: what knowledge does that person need; what do you need to know in order to advise them, and how are you going to share that knowledge with them.²

IUCN should consider how it can more clearly and explicitly anchor major projects (existing and new) in changes desired; and to emphasize the importance of building relationships from the beginning of its work.

² Based on IISD's Influencing Strategy. More information on the Strategy appears in Appendix C to the Knowledge Management Study.



Global Communications may be well positioned to develop this approach further. It should seek out the experience of regional programmes on how they build relationships; develop training in the preparation and implementation of Influencing Strategies; and guide the development of a number of pilot strategies, monitoring their success, and adapting both the pilot strategies and the approach as necessary.

Strategic Move #2 Make better use of IUCN's DNA for strengthening relationships and sharing knowledge

The IUCN DNA is now much more than the triple helix of Commission, Members and Secretariat. How can the Union manage the relationships that it now has in order to realize the value of the organization beyond the sum of the parts?

A: Clarify roles for the "triple helix".

Commissions

As mandated by the Statutes, the role of the Commissions is to bring experts together "to develop and advance the institutional knowledge and experience and objectives of IUCN".³ The knowledge of experts can be advanced through actual work on projects and through planned interaction with other experts in their field.

The Commissions should therefore be working networks, and every member should be expected to contribute in one form or another.

The Knowledge Management Study also suggests the following about the role of the Commissions in mobilizing IUCN's knowledge.

1. That Commissions review and act on the recommendation of the 2004 External Review of IUCN Commissions on strengthening communications within and between Commissions. Commissions essentially connect individuals with individuals. They should therefore also consider how to open their knowledge sharing systems to individual staff of the Secretariat, in the regions and at HQ, beyond the designated focal points.

³ IUCN Statutes Part VIII, section 73

2. That all Commissions consider whether their current operating structures are best suited to "broaden knowledge and competence on matters related to their mandates"⁴. Network structures can and should change and evolve. Some models might be more suited to some Commissions than others. But, **the structure is dependent on the mandate, not the other way around**. If a Commission mandate is not clear or connected to the Union's Programme, then better or different knowledge sharing models won't help a Commission to provide the knowledge that the programme needs.
3. That, as suggested by the Bossey report, the Commissions should undertake to strengthen their networking capacity.

Members

Member organizations should serve both as a source of knowledge and as recipients of IUCN's knowledge that will help them in their own actions.

1. HQ should review how it communicates with members – how often and through what vehicles. Members should be among the most receptive to IUCN's knowledge, but the promotion and delivery of IUCN knowledge products to members appears to be ad hoc.
2. IUCN should continue efforts initiated by the CEC to promote best practices in knowledge sharing and communications to members, in order to build member capacity in this area.
3. In order to strengthen its policy influence, the IUCN Secretariat should consider greater involvement of those Members with policy experience, as well as work with other Members to assist them in understanding the policy context in which they work.
4. IUCN's Membership unit should be tasked with articulating more fully how members can contribute to and gain from IUCN's knowledge, and then develop the appropriate mechanisms to support that.

The Secretariat

IUCN is a Conservation Union, rather than a Conservation organization. Consequently, an important role for the Secretariat is to manage the Union – build alliances, manage networks, and flow knowledge through the Union and beyond. The Secretariat requires expertise in the substance of conservation but it must complement that technical capability with expertise in communications and the management of relationships. This will require strengthening the capacity for communications and relationships across many, if not all, of IUCN's regional and country offices.

At both the regional and global programme level, the Secretariat should envisage for itself a role as the Union clearinghouse to manage explicit, tacit and implicit knowledge⁵ throughout the Union. In addition, it should:

- Set the standards and good practice in KM for the Union, and address gaps in capacity across regional and country offices, and the Commissions.
- Recognize and build on the complementarity of the knowledge initiatives.
- Address quality assurance concerns.

⁴ IUCN Statutes Part VIII, section 75(d)

⁵ For fuller definitions of explicit, tacit and implicit knowledge, see the full report and Appendix B.

B: Focus on young professionals

Young professionals can bring new ideas, new theories and cutting edge research into IUCN, including its Commissions. And IUCN needs to open new channels for transferring its knowledge by working with young professionals who will become the new field officers, resource managers, policy analysts and decision makers.

A deliberate, long term strategy should be put in place to find and support the emerging young leaders in conservation and development.

C: Define and manage new roles for organizations and individuals in IUCN.

- Partner organizations (who are not members)
- Regional intergovernmental bodies (who may include state members)
- Experts who are not members of Commissions
- New networks of experts
- Donors

The Key Results Areas need to be examined to determine what suppliers of knowledge – whether individual partner organizations, regional bodies, experts, new networks or donors -- are needed to achieve these. Rather than establish new Commissions, or expand the mandates of existing Commissions, strategic alliances with other organizations, individuals and networks may well be warranted.

These new relationships in IUCN need to be mapped out to see whether and how these networks are contributing new knowledge to IUCN and how they are supporting the delivery of IUCN's knowledge and contributing in general to IUCN's mandate.

Strategic Move #3: Implement several interconnected strategies to strengthen both external and internal aspects of managing IUCN's knowledge.

IUCN should develop and deploy several strategies that are related, but are not dependent on the others for their success. With all four strategies, the Secretariat should lay out what the guiding principles and standards should be, build a repository of good practice, and provide training and support throughout the Union and Commissions to those who will be actively involved in implementing these strategies

Strategy for the management of IUCN's relationships, networks, partnerships

Purpose: To move the building and management of relationships, networks and partnerships to the same level of importance across the Union as the management of programme and communications.

Key considerations:

- The assignment of responsibility for this strategy to a "relationship" or "partnership manager"
- The development of principles and guidelines (including ensuring consistency when two or more projects involve the same partner)
- Identification of partners who can fill gaps in IUCN's knowledge base

- Design of a simple system for tracking, monitoring and assessing partnerships
- Building the capacity of staff to work in partnerships and networks

Strategy for the management of IUCN Communications

Purpose: To flow the knowledge of the organization to target and broader audiences.

Key considerations:

- Global Communications should institute a policy that all current and future IUCN products should be available for download in full text on IUCN's website.
- Standards and guidelines for electronic publishing need to be put in place. In particular, the process for posting IUCN products online needs to be standardized.
- Roles for all those involved in communications across IUCN should be clarified.
- Capacity needs to be built with programme staff and with Commissions to better understand the range of options available for communications, and how to plan and budget for communications from the beginning of proposal and project development.
- People with skills for writing synthesis pieces need to be brought into the Union.

Strategy for strengthening internal communications and learning

Purpose: To organize and support dialogue and learning among IUCN staff and experts.

The strategy should address:

- Creating an environment that will encourage and support staff and commission members to interact with each other on an individual and group basis. The most important resources needed will be:
 - Time – providing space in budgets for staff time to engage in what will initially appear to be an additionality to their work load; and
 - Tools – the electronic tools and services that can support individual and team collaboration.
- Building that environment through a number of "rapid response initiatives" that will:
 - address some immediate communications issues and deliver real, measurable results
 - test tools and procedures for internal communications and
 - demonstrate the value of facilitating internal communications.
- Exploring both structured and more informal approaches for sharing lessons learned from project work.

Strategy for Human Resources Development

Purpose: To broaden the role of human resources development to include working with program teams to identify gaps in knowledge and skill sets and to champion innovative ways to fill those gaps.

Key considerations:

- Bring online learning opportunities into IUCN, to support IUCN staff in their ongoing professional development; consider PALNet and WCLN as two potential mechanisms.
- Consider using annual performance evaluations as the point where the new knowledge of individual staff is recognized and systematically recorded.
- With program staff, actively seek out academic liaisons.
- Build a young professionals programme that will bring in new ideas and exposure to the latest research to both Secretariat and Commissions.
- Finally, create alumni systems, so that IUCN will continue to have access to the knowledge gained by former staff, interns, etc.; and in turn they will continue to promote IUCN and flow its knowledge into their new organizations and networks.

Strategic Move #4 Create the enabling ICT environment.

During this study, IUCN Secretariat staff and Commission representatives often mentioned concerns with technological bottlenecks that they felt limited their effectiveness. Addressing seemingly small problems can often open the way for major transformations.⁶

Knowledge management should not be driven by technology; nevertheless, this field is supported by ICTs. IUCN needs to review its current ICT capacity. More and more demands are going to be made for better Intranet service, for significantly more web publishing, for managing virtual communications among dispersed groups, including engaging the Commissioners more consistently, not to mention supporting knowledge systems like the Species Information Service, PALNet and others.

1. Strengthen the IT Backbone. Sustaining an enterprise wide backbone is going to require at least one to two additional technical staff. IUCN needs to move from virus crisis management at HQ, regional and country offices to longer planning cycles for IT system upgrades, security and redundancy, to support applications development and to support a culture of end user training and service across the Secretariat.
2. Revise and upgrade IUCN's Intranet (currently called its "Knowledge Network") and the Project Information Management System. While most value the Intranet, many also find it less than user-friendly. Formal user testing should be conducted, both to identify what is not on the Intranet that should be, and to determine how the system could be made more simple and intuitive. PIMS also requires some fine tuning, to address issues of complexity, user friendliness, anachronistic content and whether it adequately serves as an archive of all project reports.

It is recommended that IUCN contract a specialist in usability testing, who can organize the evaluation and set directions for redesign. Implementation of system enhancements can either be contracted out or managed through IUCN's in-house capacity.

3. Develop a new edition of IUCN's public web site to focus attention on IUCN's knowledge rather than on its structure. While significant advances have been made in getting content up on IUCN's public site, there are

⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, The Tipping Point

some major issues to be addressed. IUCN is all about research and action; but the website does not yet reflect the depth of its research or the breadth of its action on the ground. It is still difficult to find out what IUCN knows and who it works with.

IUCN's current capacities and new commitments

Throughout the Union there are significant pockets of expertise that should be drawn upon over the next four years.

- **To support influence, building and sustaining relationships and managing networks and partnerships:** There is rich experience within the region and country offices on how they develop partnerships and networks to address the challenges in their backyards.
- **To strengthen communications:** The Global Communications team at Headquarters, regional communications staff, the Commission for Education and Communications, and the communications professionals in member organizations need to become much more integrated across the Union, to present a stronger, common pool of professional guidance to program/project work.
- **To provide planning and technical support for knowledge sharing:**

IUCN Canada is exploring in depth how to focus on a single institutional relationship in order to influence individuals within that institution: their lessons learned on trust, timing, finding areas of common passion will be important for the Union.

IUCN Pakistan brings many years of lessons on developing information technology applications and providing capacity building in using technologies.

The information technology group at Headquarters likewise has much to offer in creating the online spaces for Secretariat staff and Commissions to exchange knowledge.

New Commitment

IUCN has now appointed for a period of two years a Special Advisor on Knowledge Management to facilitate – in collaboration with all IUCN components – the shaping of a fully networked Union with highly effective knowledge management systems.

Closing Note

The next steps for IUCN should be focused on implementation. Resources will be required, in particular to increase staffing for ICT support and to build capacity for managing relationships. Some time will need to be invested in rapid results initiatives to demonstrate real and immediate progress within the next year. However, much of what has been proposed in this study requires instead changes in how IUCN develops and implements its work, to focus on influence, on roles and relationships, on communications, and on strengthening the internal dialogue, interaction and sharing within the organization. These are changes in

culture and practice across the Union rather than incremental and intensive investments.

TILCEPA [CEESP and WCPA]: Knowledge is a means to an end; to action and results—better policies, better implementation.