

**STRATEGIC ROOTS**

AND

**IMPLEMENTATIONAL EVOLUTION**

**Considerations for the Future in the Sustainable Use Initiative**

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# **STRATEGIC ROOTS AND IMPLEMENTATIONAL EVOLUTION**

## **Considerations for the Future in the**

### **Sustainable Use Initiative**

**Marshall W. Murphree**

#### **Introduction**

In this introductory plenary the Robinson/Murphree duet has the role of introducing debate on where we are and where we are going in the Sustainable Use Initiative. The task has been made much easier for us by the circulation to all IUCN members of the SUI's report to the WCC, "Factors Influencing Sustainability," under cover of the Director General's letter of 1st August 1996.

These documents outline developments during the latest triennial phase in the evolution of IUCN's approach to the issue of sustainable use. Attention to this issue is not new to IUCN, or indeed the people who form its constituency. What our triennial history shows is an extension of the concerns of the past in a new configuration of emphasis and programme, the Sustainable Use Initiative.

Components of this new configuration include the following:

- . An enlarged agenda of variables for consideration.
- . The recruitment of a broader range of disciplinary specialisms in analysis.
- . Dialogue between scientists, policy makers, managers and users.
- . An iterative process of cumulative understanding involving all these actors.
- . More analytic emphasis on operative contexts.
- . Less emphasis on generalized proscriptions, more emphasis on prescriptive inducements.
- . The integration of the SSC's Sustainable Use Specialist Group and the Secretariat's Sustainable Use of Wildlife Programme, with a shift from project involvement to technical support.
- . The contextualization of activities in regional structures.

## Strategic Roots

This list of elements in the Initiative, read out seriatim, may sound like an attempt to produce a comprehensive but somewhat disjointed agenda to keep us all busy and induce donors to provide the resources for us to do so. There is however an underlying cohesion to the list, an implicit strategy which is tuned to current reality, responsive to need and workable in implementation. If we are to plan for the future we need to bring this strategy into sharp relief. In particular the strategy has five characteristics or "strategic roots" which we should note:

### *A Systemic Approach*

First of all, the strategy takes a systemic approach to the issue of sustainable use. This is a necessary and long-overdue corrective to the fragmented, bio-centric and often species-specific foci which have to a large extent characterized perspectives in the past. Such approaches have value and can record success within a discrete context. However sustainable use issues are rarely confined to closed, biologically defined systems. Thus the conservation record is one of a few small success and big failures. Sustainability in the use of any species is usually embedded in larger ecosystem sustainability, and this in turn is embedded in larger social system structures with cultural, economic and political dimensions. Issues of sustainability cannot be adequately addressed independently of these macrostructural components. As Kai Lee comments, "sustainability as an institutional value succeeds or fails at the systemic level."<sup>1</sup>

It is true of course that the systemic approach pushes the study of sustainable use toward more complex and less determinate conclusions. In science there is usually an inverse relationship between exactitude and the number of relevant variables. This is used by critics of the Initiative to raise the canard that it is unscientific. To the contrary while good science regards exactitude as desirable, it regards validity as necessary. Validity requires that analysis addresses all the relevant variables of the topic under consideration. In other words, eliminate or at least reduce the number of "black boxes". Given the nature of sustainable use, its study can only be considered scientific if it is systemic.

### *An Experimental Methodology*

Secondly, the strategy is experimental in its methodological approach to understanding, with its emphasis on testable hypotheses, grounded data, dialectic between management experience and policy, and continuous adaptation. This experimental methodology, with its assumption of uncertainty and its stochastic approach to learning, is the only scientific style which provides real debate and incremental understanding. This contrasts to other intellectual styles characterized, in Galtung's words, by "vehement monologues of different types" proceeding from entrenched a priori stances.<sup>2</sup> In the past too much of the debate on sustainable use has been conducted through such "vehement monologues" and the Initiative's experimental methodology is a strategy to raise the scientific calibre of the Union's approach to the issue.

## ***Regulatory Effectiveness***

The third characteristic of the strategy is that it has as a central objective the establishment of effective and efficient regulatory mechanisms to control use. Another canard raised by critics of the Initiative is that it is antiregulatory. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Initiative recognizes that, generally and globally, current trends in land and natural resource use place the future of biodiversity and the survival of specific ecosystems and species in jeopardy. It also recognizes that *regulation of use* is an essential component for *sustainability in use*.

It has, however, also taken a hard look at currently prevailing regulatory structures, largely of a proscriptive and legislative nature imposed by the centre on the periphery, and asked why they have failed to stop negative trends. It has come up with a variety of answers which can be succinctly summarized by the conclusion that the profile of the incentive package for regulatory compliance is too often wrong.

Incentive is the fulcrum of regulation. Regulation usually requires an element of negative incentive, proscriptions backed by powers to enforce them. But any regulatory system which relies primarily on negative incentives is, in the long term, in trouble. Enforcement costs are high and the legitimacy of the system in the eyes of the enforced is called into question. History shows that such systems are unstable and that sustainable systems of regulation are those that rely primarily on positive incentives - economic, cultural and institutional - and which are affordable. Hardin's comment is relevant here: "We must recognize that all control operations incur costs; excessive controls generate their own kind of poverty."<sup>3</sup> The issue is thus not one of negative versus positive inducements *per se* but of finding the right mix of these ingredients in specific systemic contexts. This is a primary goal of the Initiative - to promote regulatory systems that work, efficaciously, efficiently and sustainably.

## ***Decentralized Structure***

Fourthly, the strategy is one of decentralizing structures for the implementation of the Initiative. This is an organizational response to centralized bureaucratic hypertrophy. IUCN is a world union, but the operative contexts in which its members work are primarily regional and national. The imperatives of organizational efficiency demand decentralization to these levels, where coordination must be tight and responses rapid. Increasingly it is also these contexts which must provide the funding for member activities, and our membership must be organizationally placed to aggressively address this fact. As Jeff McNeely comments, this means that "IUCN must again return to its members."<sup>4</sup> This strategy has already been adopted by the Secretariat; the SUI's record over the past two years shows that it can be done.

## *Devolution in Authority and Responsibility*

The final characteristic of the strategy which I mention is that it is devolutionist. I have just quoted Jeff McNeely: "IUCN must return to its members." I go further: "IUCN must be returned to its members." The first is decentralization, the second is the devolution of authority and responsibility. There are two reasons why this is necessary. Firstly it is important that the centre of gravity in our analytic discourse shifts to more accurately profile the spectrum of the Union's membership. This will not be an easy or rapid process. There is no question that currently this centre of gravity resides primarily in economically highly developed countries. Radakrishna's study 16 years ago indicated that twenty five countries accounted for 90% of the world's scientists, while another sixty countries accounted for only 1%.<sup>5</sup> Developing countries are no longer tolerant of this satellite intellectual status and the power differentials in international orientation which it produces. While a number of prescriptions are required to redress this imbalance, devolution is in itself a powerful stimulus to release and channel the analytic talent which our membership in the developing world possesses.

Secondly, devolution addresses the current dissonance between the abstract conclusions of international discourse and implementation. International discourse of the kind in which we are presently engaged is generally marked by low accountability content. Recommendations are made but not followed because those who make them are not accountable in the implementational contexts which count. For most of our membership these contexts are national or regional. Devolution to this level provides a much tighter accountability chain between agenda setting, analysis, policy and action, which then reflects back to more realistic and accountable international debate and decision.

### Implementational Evolution for the Future

These are the strategic roots of the Initiative. They are scientific, pragmatic, participatory and inherently robust. Our agenda for the future must build on this inherent strength, but also address current gaps in the strategy and real or potential weaknesses in structure and implementation. Both our analytic and organizational agendas have been set out in our Report to the WCC, and in conclusion I confine myself to certain structural issues which I consider to be of particular importance.

### *Decentralization*

Up to the present this process has concentrated on the initiation of regional SUSG networks and our WCC Report posits a further proliferation of these during the forthcoming triennium. This is important since the Initiative still has significant gaps in its global coverage. But is decentralization to regional levels sufficient to meet the need for administrative efficiency and properly contextualized programming? I think not, and we should anticipate a push for further administrative and programmatic intra-regional decentralization. This should be a

matter primarily for the attention of the regional networks and the form it takes is likely to vary.

### ***Devolution***

To what degree has our progress in decentralization been matched by progress in devolution? Devolution has occurred in significant dimensions. The networks determine their own membership, elect their own leadership, set their own agendas within the over-all SUI strategy, and structure their own activities. An SUSG Steering Committee comprised of regional chairs has been formed and met on three occasions, producing *inter alia* our WCC Report. That's pretty good progress in devolution. At the same time we must recognize that executive direction of the Initiative still lies within the Advisory Group, which derives its mandate at present from the Director General and the Chair of the Species Survival Commission. Is this a sign of arrested devolution?

There are in my mind certain considerations which should be factored into the answer. Firstly we must recognize that the regional networks are themselves at different stages of development. They themselves have the fundamental responsibility to ensure that their membership covers the spread of perspective and competence that the regions profile. At the moment, I suspect that they would score differently on this indicator. Secondly, devolution in control must be matched by ability to assume the responsibilities involved. These include greater self-reliance in the funding requirements of regional network activities and they must carefully consider their progress in creating the kind of structures of fiscal administration which provide confidence for donor, public and private sector support. Thirdly, it should be clearly recognized that however far the Initiative wishes to take devolution, it needs a global Secretariat Support Centre. There can be no doubt that much of our success to date can be attributed to the fact that we have had a dedicated and efficient such Centre to provide global coordination, facilitate inter-regional communication, assist in fund-raising, initiate expansion to regions not yet organized and service the Advisory Group and the Steering Committee. Finally, it should be recognized that at the global coordination level we require a tightly-knit executive unit, currently provided by the Advisory Group. The Steering Committee is too large to provide this, and it is likely to become larger.

All of these points must be considered as we contemplate further devolution. The principle should be that devolution should proceed as far as is necessary to realize the dynamics of its potential but that its pace should be determined in light of the considerations I have just raised. In my personal view two further steps could be taken immediately, both of which relate to constituency mandate. The Chair of the SUSG and Steering Committee should be elected by the Steering Committee rather than appointed by the Director General and the Chair of the SSC. Secondly, the executive direction of the Initiative needs further examination. Should it continue under the Advisory Group and if so should the Advisory Group include appointments made by the Steering Committee? Or should its membership be determined solely by the Steering Committee, becoming in effect the Steering Committee Executive?

## *Scope*

One aspect of the Initiative's evolution which is important but not amenable to precise prescriptions is its location within other topically defined activities of the Union and its relationship with them. Intrinsically sustainable use is an issue of pervasive salience for most of what IUCN considers and does. This leads to fuzzy boundaries and potential replication. What should be the limits of the Initiative's agenda within the total configuration of the Union's various parts? One approach to answering this question would be a topical boundary-setting exercise, a vertical intra-Union compartmentalization of focus and activity replicated at regional and national levels. My own view is that this approach leads to competitive agendas, waste of resources and dissonance between need and demand at these levels. Here the division of labour should be tailored to configurations of systemic demand rather than to topical definition. While there are good reasons for topical foci at the Secretariat level these should be non-intrusive and service-driven in their relationship to national and regional programming. This suggests that the profile of the Initiative's "fit" with other IUCN activities will vary from region to region, and should be determined within them.

## *Cohesion*

I return in conclusion to another quote from Kai Lee. Sustainability, he says, "cannot be reduced to a recipe because we have neither a list of ingredients or a kitchen".<sup>6</sup> The Initiative's response has been to produce an analytic agenda to search more effectively for the ingredients, to suggest that diversity may need several recipes, and that efficacy requires a number of kitchens. Continuing the metaphor, if there is a core ingredient in the cuisine it lies in effective, systemically situated packages of incentive for sustainable use. But this emphasis on contextualization should not lead us into an era of fragmented and autarkic Initiative activities. We are part of a global union, we participate in the search for a global vision of our planet, and our systemic approach requires that we maintain cohesion at the international level. This cohesion can be assisted by the way we structure our activities, but this is not the fundamental solution. That solution lies rather in taking our core ingredient - effective, situated incentive packages for sustainable use - and searching for incentive compatibility<sup>7</sup> at international levels on matters that are genuinely global in their significance.

In other words, cohesion requires judgement and tolerance. Good judgement about what matters for all of us and what matters for some of us, good judgement about what works and what doesn't, and tolerance in allowing others to do what works for them.

## Endnotes

1. Lee, K.W. (1993: 199) Lee also observes that "what counts is the whole, which may have integrity even though its parts are flawed."
2. Stolte-Heiskanen, V. (1987: 191) Stolte-Heiskanen is drawing from John Galtung (1981).
3. Hardin, G. (1985: 224) Hardin adds, "We must face two questions *"How much are we willing to pay to achieve a specified amount of good?"* And *"Who is the 'we' that is called upon to pay?"*."
4. McNeely, J.A. (1995: 55).
5. Radakrishna, S. (1980)
6. Lee, K. (1993: 199)
7. cf. Bromley, D. (1994: 429-430)

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