

## CONFERENCES & MEETINGS

WORKSHOP ON SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF DEFORESTATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, HELD IN NAIROBI, KENYA, DURING 15–18 JULY 1991

Policies of governments and international organizations have played a major role in deforestation in developing countries, and measures to halt further losses have usually been ineffective and in many cases have worsened the plight of the groups that have historically protected forests — according to research workers at a recent international workshop on deforestation. The event was jointly sponsored by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the Regional Soil Conservation Unit (RSCU) of the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).

The Workshop brought together specialists who are carrying out case-studies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as part of an UNRISD research programme entitled 'Social Dynamics of Deforestation in Developing Countries'.

'Road building, dam construction, and wasteful timber-harvesting practices, have directly accelerated deforestation in most developing countries. However, poorly-conceived public policies designed to halt deforestation have hit the most vulnerable groups the hardest, including the landless, women, children, and ethnic minorities', said Dr Dharam Ghai, Director of UNRISD.

Ironically, traditional forest-dwellers, usually ethnic minorities who are pushed off their lands when governments establish national parks and reserves, are the very groups who, historically, have protected forests. Their livelihoods depend on harvesting food and material resources in a way which ensures that the forest-base remains intact for the use of future generations. New evidence gathered by UNRISD research workers proves that the active, participatory involvement of traditional forest-dwellers in official environmental protection projects is a key factor in the success or failure of such projects.

According to Dr Ghai, research findings presented at the Workshop have important implications for governments and international organizations which want to establish projects that protect the environment, yet do not deteriorate further the status of already-vulnerable groups. The UNRISD case-studies show that projects designed to protect forests which incorporate participatory decision-making by the communities affected, and which draw upon local people's traditional knowledge about their environment, have the best chance of succeeding.

The Workshop was part of a larger UNRISD research programme on 'Environment, Sustainable Development, and Social Change'. UNRISD promotes research on the most pressing social issues of development. Studies are carried out in collaboration with its global network of scholars, many of them from developing countries. Numerous workshops and occasional larger conferences are held in conjunction with the research programmes, often resulting in publication of research reports and books.

Inquiries about the 'Social Dynamics of Deforestation in Developing Countries', pertinent case-studies, UNRISD research programmes, and available publications, should be addressed to the Reference Centre, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland.

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WORKSHOP ON NATURE CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION: RECONSTRUCTION OF FRAGMENTED ECOSYSTEMS, GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES, HELD IN TAMMIN, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, 7–11 OCTOBER 1991

In October 1991, 35 ecologists, agricultural scientists, conservation managers, farmers, and an Australian Federal politician, spent a week together in Tammin, a small town in the central wheat-belt of Western Australia, discussing problems of ecology and the role of ecologists in restoring fragmented ecosystems and wider eco-complexes. The Workshop was organized by CSIRO's Division of Wildlife and Ecology in Western Australia, the Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford University, and the Tammin Land Conservation District Committee (a local group of farmers formed to combat land degradation). Participants came from Australia, Canada, England, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and USA. The workshop was designed to allow contributors to discuss their scientific specialities and the relevance of each to redressing the enormous amount of ecological damage that is being caused by humanity in the name of development.

In keeping with the theme, the participants discussed global conservation issues as they relate to restoration ecology, and then worked down to more regional problems with the extreme degradation of the southwestern Australian agricultural area providing some focus. A full-day excursion was organized by the local farming community. It demonstrated what the landscape would have looked like before development for agriculture, how it is farmed now, what problems have developed as a result of clearing for agriculture and present farming practices, and what solutions are being developed to tackle some of these problems. The excursion proved to be very successful, as international scientists came to appreciate practical problems of land-care, and farmers and the politician came to appreciate scientists as people interested in solving practical problems.

### *Ecosystem and Ecocomplex Restoration Needed*

The workshop defined reconstruction or restoration as the re-establishment of a system which emulates a healthy, natural, self-regulating system that is integrated into the ecological landscape in which it occurs. The aim is to restore as many ecosystem services and ecocomplex functions as possible, as for example in using indigenous vegetation to restore the hydrological balance in the many different regions which have been over-cleared, and which are being subjected to increasing soil salinization and other degradation. At the same time there should be planning of revegetation — both at the level of individual ecosystems and at that of their aggregated ecocomplexes — to meet Nature conservation objectives.

The major impediment to restoration of ecosystems and ecocomplexes is the increasing demand that is being