

An Ecosystem Program for the Convention on Biodiversity

Becky Chacko

A series of protocols under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are necessary to provide comprehensive protection of the ecosystems around the world that support biodiversity. Like the Regional Seas Program, an Ecosystem Program for Biodiversity would allow the independent negotiation of each ecosystem agreement. Together, however, the protocols would work to protect biodiversity across the globe. The main benefits of the protocol approach would be expediency and specificity. These benefits could prompt movement on a front that has been stalled for over ten years. The protocols would 1) narrow the discussion, 2) allow for linkages, and 3) encourage the involvement of a diverse range of relevant stakeholders. Such an approach would allow for the specificity that could create value for stakeholders in both the North and the South, establishing the incentives necessary to build support for the protocols and to make them self-enforcing. I explore some of the specifics of how this series of protocols would work by examining a hypothetical protocol on forest ecosystems.

Background: Biodiversity

Biodiversity has been defined many ways. The most comprehensive definitions encompass three factors: variety of ecosystems, number of species within those ecosystems, and genetic diversity within each species. There is no doubt that biodiversity is rapidly disappearing. UNEP estimates indicate that the current rate of extinction is 100 to 1000 times the background level (UNEP 1994). However, since so little biodiversity data exists, we do not even know how many species are being lost, let alone which ones.

Even more uncertainty surrounds the value of biodiversity. With more than 25 percent of medicines containing compounds derived from or modeled on substances extracted from biotic materials (WWF 2004), biodiversity is clearly valuable to human life. Measuring that value, however, is difficult, especially since much depends on future, unknown uses. The complexity of interactions between organisms and ecosystems means that we cannot fully understand the way in which biodiversity sustains human life, though it most certainly does. The very nature of biodiversity makes it difficult to compartmentalize its value and then charge individuals, companies, or nations for its preservation. Since biodiversity is a “global good,” individuals who harm biodiversity are not likely to consider the benefits lost to others as they make individual decisions. Society’s inability to “value” ecosystems and their “public good” character presents distinct challenges in establishing incentives for their preservation.

Once lost, little can be done to restore biodiversity. It has been described as an “ancient nonrenewable resource,” the output of a four-billion-year-old evolutionary process (Swanson 1997). Though many hope technological advances will solve our environmental problems, few believe that it will be able to replace or replicate biodiversity.

There are many complexities to this issue. Biodiversity is a resource located mostly in the South, but one in which we all have a stake. The North has already destroyed much of its own biodiversity, although current rates of destruction have slowed. No mechanisms exist to force individuals, companies, or governments to pay for past destruction. Since little destruction is currently taking place in the North, there are no obvious mechanisms via

which Northern countries or industries can be taxed for present destruction in order to support preservation in the South (as in the carbon tax or trading schemes). The result: Biodiversity loss continues throughout the world at alarming rates.

The Convention on Biodiversity

The Convention on Biodiversity entered into force in 1993. It has been ratified by 188 parties. The Convention set forth three major objectives:

- ♦ the conservation of biological diversity,
- ♦ the sustainable use of its components, and
- ♦ the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources.

Unfortunately, no quantifiable targets or timetables for international action were established to back up these ambitious goals. Only in 2002 with COP6 was the 2010 Biodiversity Target established. This included 11 goals and 21 targets. The Royal Society Workshop, “Beyond extinction rates: Monitoring wild nature for the 2010 target,” organized by a variety of academic and nonprofit groups, found that “the agreed measures leave several important gaps” (Royal Society 2004). While many countries have developed national biodiversity action plans (NBSAPs) since the Convention, there is little evidence that these countries have made real progress towards achieving these goals. The number of protected areas has increased, but overall forest and wetland cover continues to decrease and even priority areas (i.e. the biodiversity “hot spots”) continue to be threatened.

Between 1992 and 1996, total bilateral official development assistance (ODA) for biodiversity actually fell (Global Biodiversity Forum 2004). This is true even considering GEF (Global Environment Facility) funding, which may have merely diverted resources instead of providing “new and additional financing.” Birdlife International estimates that the financial needs for biodiversity conservation in developing countries amounts to about \$20 billion per year. Current global spending on conservation approximates only \$4 billion per year (2004).

In the ten years since the CBD entered into force, just one protocol has been adopted. To make matters worse, the protocol that has taken shape deals with perhaps one of the most irrelevant aspects of biodiversity, at least in terms of protecting a global commons. The Biosafety Protocol addresses only the third of the CBD’s three main objectives, to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources. While tackling international concerns regarding GMOs, the protocol makes few large steps towards actually preserving biodiversity in the natural world or ensuring the sustainable use of biodiversity’s components.

Incentives for the North and the South

Up to now, the fate of biodiversity has largely been a “tragedy of the commons.” The major problem is how to provide incentives for the North and the South so that both feel compelled to participate in the preservation of a resource that is valuable to them but for which individual actors experience minimal gains for costly actions.

The South lacks the financial, scientific, technical, and institutional capacities required to preserve biodiversity. As southern economies attempt to compete with northern ones, development and money-making ventures tend to take precedence over conservation. Other priorities, such as debt servicing and providing basic services like health care and education, absorb the resources that might have devoted to the preservation of biodiversity. Although the South benefits directly from essential services provided by ecosystems, including clean water, clean air, food, and pollination services, the North shares many of the benefits, including carbon sequestration and existence value. The South cannot fairly be expected to bear all of the cost of preserving these shared resources.

Most of the literature on incentives for biodiversity conservation focuses on the above issues. The South certainly needs both financial and technical assistance if it is to progress towards environmental goals. Where, however, will the help come from? The assumption seems to be that the North has a great interest in actually achieving environmental goals and since it has more financial resources available the funds will flow automatically from North to South. Such has not been the case.

The North is not offering financial support to encourage the South to meet common goals. In fact, the South has had to push for increased financial support, which it did, for example, at the Rio conference. The result, however, was nothing more than a recommitment from those countries which had accepted the ODA pledge of 0.7 percent of GNP established in the 1970s. Countries that had never accepted this target, such as the United States, continued to reject it (Porter 1996). The failure of the South to win more substantial financial concessions indicates the North's strong resistance on this issue.

The fact that even the 0.7 percent level remains unmet reveals the northern lack of motivation to make real financial commitments. The truth is that ODA has decreased since 1992. In 2003, only five countries met the 0.7 percent goal, and the net ODA as percent of GNP for the OECD countries was 0.25 percent in 2003 (OECD 2004).

France and West Germany took the lead in proposing the GEF. However, the amount of funding is small, with just \$1.2 billion for the three-year pilot phase and \$2 billion for the following three years (Porter 1996). Furthermore, it is not clear that this is the "new and additional" money GEF was supposed to provide. In addition, the South strongly resisted the GEF mechanism, fearing that northern countries would have too much control over how the money was spent in yet another episode of northern imperialism, with the North determining Southern priorities.

Northern countries do not appear to be committed to solving environmental problems if there is nothing in it for them. In addition, the North seems to have become accustomed to the current situation, benefiting from biodiversity goods without paying anything for the resource. This is especially true in the case of genetic information; for example, pharmaceuticals developed from forest products are patented and the resulting medicines are often unavailable to local communities.

How might countries be encouraged to act for the global good? The free-rider problem seems to be just as prevalent in the North as it is in the South. The North must have incentives both to help developing countries preserve biodiversity and to protect and restore

their own reserves of biodiversity. The incentives are not obvious. This paper argues that the key to establishing useful incentives is specificity.

Can the Biodiversity Convention Be Fixed?

Some have suggested that the Convention on Biodiversity is so ineffectual and flawed that it should be abandoned. Critics claim that more progress could be made by starting over rather than by working within the confines of the framework as it has been defined. However, the current situation is so dismal that moving forward quickly (a relative term) is more important than crafting the perfect convention. (Perfection, after all, is an elusive goal in international treaty making.)

The Convention on Biodiversity is clearly too ambiguous. A global scope for the already unwieldy topic of biodiversity has created an agreement that is too vast to be anything other than vague. CBD needs a set of protocols that can advance its goals in a concrete, systematic way.

Creating a new convention would be a time-consuming process. It would require the formation of a coalition that could bring all relevant issues to the table. Once the essential parties were convinced that biodiversity was a priority and the necessary momentum was established another 10 years (on average) would be necessary for the negotiation of the convention. Since real action depends on the formation of protocols that add specific targets and timetables to the concepts developed in the more general conventions, additional time would be needed to adopt those protocols as well.

Simply adding protocols to the existing convention has some disadvantages. It does not provide the same flexibility that adopting a new convention or series of conventions would. While a protocol can be amended, amendments traditionally have not involved substantial additions or modifications. This disadvantage is outweighed, however, by the advantages of the protocol approach. Focusing on protocols enables more rapid results. It also allows for the specificity that can create real change.

While the Convention on Biodiversity is far from perfect, it does create a framework that can be useful for future action. The three main objectives set out by the convention are still the most pertinent. They are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. Protocols that work towards advancing these goals could make substantial progress towards actually preserving biodiversity.

Creating a Series of Protocols

A call for more protocols would not be very effective if their creation continued in the current vein. The CBD needs more than a haphazard set of protocols to be discussed and negotiated as constituencies gather the force necessary to bring specific issues to the table. Unfortunately, this seems to be the precedent set by the single protocol adopted to date. Approaching biodiversity topic by topic only fragments the issue and precludes holistic approaches.

Such a framework might result in additional protocols on intellectual property rights, trade, and protected areas, for example. While these topics are relevant to biodiversity,

conversations based solely on them would most likely result in a list of prohibitions rather than a proactive response. Furthermore, as we have witnessed in the case of the Biosafety Protocol, the limited list of prohibitions produced by these negotiations may be segregated from the most essential biodiversity concerns. Integrated responses would become almost impossible under this framework.

The real key to success is the creation of a series of protocols that can address biodiversity in a comprehensive way. Such a set of protocols would work together to ensure that all aspects of biodiversity in all of the world's regions are protected. Finding the appropriate unit of action for each protocol will be essential for the proposed series of protocols to be effective.

Getting the Unit Right

Proposals that approach biodiversity on a regional basis make it possible to begin to identify manageable protocol units. The Regional Seas Agreements adopted this approach. Conventions and protocols have established 13 regional seas programs, with 140 countries participating (UNEP 2003). The limited geographic scope has enabled countries to channel the energies of a wide range of interest groups toward a common goal. Emphasis has been placed on regional knowledge and activities are customized to fit the needs and priorities of the regions.

Unfortunately, the same discrete regional unit (a sea) is not available for the study of biodiversity. The "sea" framework creates a sense of ownership and, thus, responsibility. The same sense of ownership would not be possible for a regional agreement that focused on biodiversity in Sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia, for example. Regional agreements on biodiversity would have to deal with a variety of jurisdictions. An agreement that protects an assortment of forests, deserts, wetlands, etc. would not create the same sense of cohesion, unity, and ownership that has made the individual regional seas agreements so successful.

The other benefit of the Regional Seas Agreements was that each involved a small number of countries. However, limiting the number of countries involved in biodiversity negotiations to governments from a specific region would preclude progress on many fronts. As stated earlier, southern countries will need participation from the North in order to make real progress on biodiversity goals. A protocol on biodiversity in Central America involving only Central American nations would prevent the necessary collaboration.

Attempts to request the involvement of far-flung governments while defining biodiversity issues regionally would not only preclude participation, it would also risk the implication of burdens of responsibility and blame. This is not a constructive format for treaty making and could easily deteriorate into cycles of accusations and demands that would prevent agreements from being reached.

For these reasons, regional segmentation of the Convention on Biodiversity does not solve the problems related to multiple issues or multiple stakeholders. At the same time, focusing on discrete ecosystems, such as the Amazon forest or the Congo river basin, would narrow the scope, but lead to a proliferation of overlapping protocols. Resources, energy, and willpower would be wasted in the attempt to frame so many protocols. In the end, some

essential ecosystems would inevitably be left out. The correct unit for action seems to be somewhere between the region and the individual ecosystems.

Unbundling by Ecosystem

“Ecosystem type” is a more appropriate protocol unit. This approach builds naturally on the progress already made by the Conference of the Parties (COP). In decision VII, the COP defined the ecosystem approach as a strategy for the integrated management of land, water, and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way. In this plan, the ecosystem approach becomes the primary framework for addressing the three objectives of the Convention in a balanced way. In addition, it has developed thematic programs in seven biodiversity areas: agricultural, dry and subhumid lands, forests, inland waters, islands, marine and coastal zones, and mountains.

Generating a protocol for each area would establish the targets, timetables, and incentives necessary to make substantial progress toward preserving biodiversity. Together, the set of protocols would provide comprehensive protection for biodiversity around the globe. Unbundling the framework by ecosystem would allow the conveners to focus on issues relevant to each ecosystem and to address the concerns of specific stakeholders. It would also keep the scope of each protocol to a manageable size.

At the same time, specificity would allow for maximum linkage possibilities. A negotiation on marine and coastal biodiversity would enable the discussion of issues that pertain specifically to, for example, coral reefs. These discussions would be unlikely in a broader negotiation on global biodiversity or even regional biodiversity simply because of the multiplicity of issues such a negotiation would have to address. Similarly, focusing on specific issues would allow experts and relevant stakeholders to participate in a meaningful and manageable way.

The fact that some biodiversity issues are common to more than one ecosystem would not necessarily lengthen the process. Each protocol would establish a proto-model for following protocols. The ability to refer to prior templates would facilitate the negotiation process and lead to speedier resolution. It might also create potential for more favorable outcomes by establishing points of departure for brainstorming sessions.

The “cross-cutting issues” identified by the COPs would still be important. While many of them could be addressed in the ecosystem protocols themselves, it would also be possible to create separate protocols that address these concerns. (Interestingly, the Biosafety Protocol does not seem to directly address any of the identified cross-cutting issues.) The essential first step, however, is to create a set of protocols that can protect biodiversity worldwide. Second in importance are protocols on cross-cutting issues, which, while important, cannot extend comprehensive coverage for biodiversity.

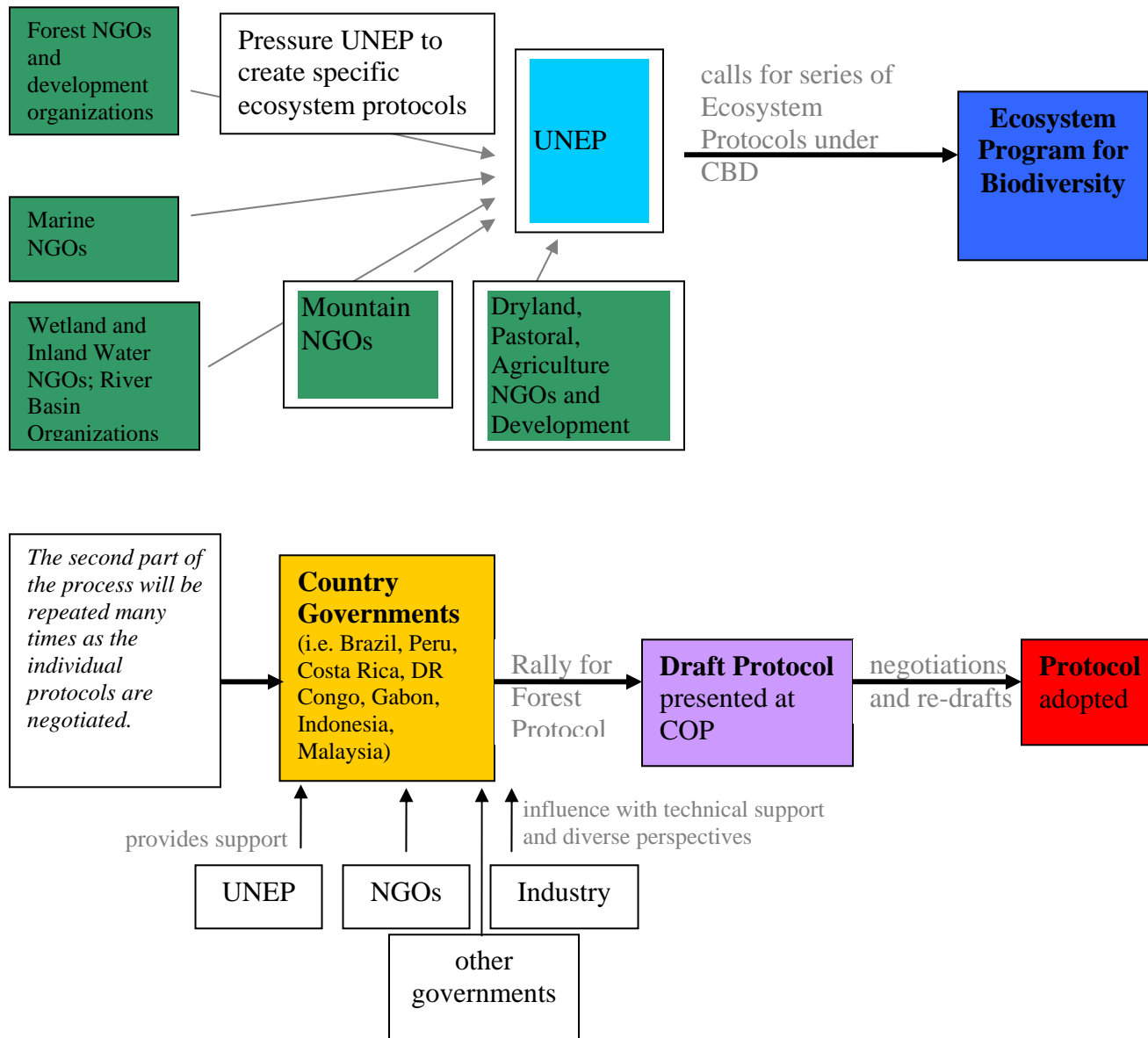
The following sections discuss the mechanics of structuring and operating such a system of protocols.

Exploring Potential Linkages: A Protocol on Forests

The major advantages of the approach outlined above are: 1) the specificity enabled by unbundling, 2) the potential for linkages, and 3) the involvement of relevant stakeholders.

An exploration of a hypothetical protocol on forests demonstrates how these factors might play out. The objective of this scenario is not to draft a model protocol, but to reveal some of the benefits of specific protocols based on ecosystems. Figure 1 shows how the stakeholders involved in the hypothetical scenario would work together.

Figure 1. Stakeholders involved in the establishment of an ecosystem approach and hypothetical example for the adoption of a forest protocol



Forests are threatened by a variety of human activities including logging, hunting, land conversion for agriculture, and fuel wood collection. Any protocol that attempted to protect biodiversity in forests would need to address these threats. The fact that forests are also important for carbon sequestration enables further linkages based on climate change. Some potential linkages include:

1. Trade, especially in reference to logging and agriculture

While Article 11 of the Convention acknowledges the importance of incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, it leaves the development of those incentives up to individual governments. The CBD states that “Each Contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate, adopt economically and socially sound measures that act as incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of components of biological diversity.” Creating ecosystem protocols would allow a more specific examination of those incentives, providing country governments with needed support. It would also allow an examination of those incentives on an international level. Incorporating those incentives into the way international trade plays out could have massive benefits. This could include the development of an international certification process to garner higher prices for wood that is harvested in a “sustainable” manner.

Addressing perverse incentives such as subsidies that encourage unsustainable practices is also important. Subsidies and other policies in rich countries reduce the income of developing country exports. Eliminating these subsidies would ease the pressures that cause developing countries to unsustainably harvest or farm more in their efforts to earn more profits on low-priced goods.

2. Carbon Sequestration

While incentives are often difficult to incorporate into biodiversity policy, connecting them to other incentive programs could have the desired effect. For example, carbon-trading programs to combat global climate change could involve bonuses for conservation efforts that prioritize biodiversity. In such a plan, a carbon sequestration project that preserves a biodiversity hotspot would get more credit than one that simply replants trees.

3. International Waters

Since deforestation can lead to massive siltation of rivers, its linkage to transboundary water issues is also apparent. Action to preserve forests maps easily onto the clause of the Convention that calls for “the protection of ecosystems, natural habitats and the maintenance of viable populations of species in natural surroundings.”

4. Intellectual Property Rights

While the CBD devotes a fair amount of space to intellectual properties rights, a lot more detail is needed to make this text useful in practice. A forest protocol could begin to examine frameworks for bioprospecting that would facilitate access for research while ensuring developing countries fair compensation and access to knowledge and products derived from their natural resources. Devoting a proportion of bioprospecting fees to the GEF could create an additional source of funding for biodiversity projects. Work on intellectual property rights under the forest protocol could establish a foundation on which protocols dealing with other ecosystems could build.

5. Financial Support

A detailed look at the root causes of forest degradation could also clarify how a GEF funding mechanism might function. Encouraging the development of value-adding industries would allow developing countries to reap more of the benefits associated with their natural resources, for example. In addition, GEF should be encouraged to support

projects that work towards multiple focal areas. For example, an alternative energy project being considered under the climate change regime could also get credit for benefits to biodiversity as well if the project is proposed for an area where consumption of wood fuel is a major cause of deforestation.

Involvement of Multiple Stakeholders

As stated earlier, involving multiple stakeholders is the real key to “enlarging the pie.” Unbundling by ecosystem would allow the truly relevant parties to get involved. The ecosystem structure would focus and redefine the issues on the table; limit the possibility of blocking coalitions; prevent the discussion of superfluous issues that can stall agreement on key concerns; and create an atmosphere that encourages creative solutions.

For example, some of the stakeholders concerned with forest issues include indigenous groups, local and international NGOs, development organizations, trade ministers, logging companies, carbon polluting industries, and seed and pharmaceutical companies. Involving these stakeholders would ensure creation of value for both the North and the South.

The presence of trade ministers and local and international NGOs at the negotiating table could help garner a “win” for the South on some of the trade issues that have long been among their top priorities. Indigenous groups and local community representatives could also ensure that the South is fairly represented on intellectual property rights issues.

From the northern perspective, involving industry could result in a “win” for them as well. Certification programs, for example, could actually provide ways for northern logging companies to increase profits. Establishing the rules of the game is also beneficial to logging companies and other industries because it removes the elements of uncertainty. Fear that the rules will change in the future increases risk and does not allow companies to base decisions on full information. It also results in increased degradation (i.e. harvesting as much as possible immediately). Linking biodiversity to carbon sequestration programs would provide northern polluters with more options and flexibility.

Stimulating value-added industries could improve conditions for northern investors by mitigating some of the risk associated with projects in developing countries. Northern investors could then benefit from low labor costs while southern countries benefit from foreign direct investment. Addressing intellectual property rights would involve pharmaceutical companies, seed companies, and similar interests. These companies seem to benefit from the current situation in which they have free range to gather genetic information and traditional knowledge in most developing countries. However, these companies operate in constant fear that the rules could change and might be applied retroactively. Greater certainty regarding intellectual property rights would help them plan their businesses more reliably.

Developing biospecting frameworks could even be a win-win situation. Northern companies would benefit from formalized structures that would grant access to genetic information at a relatively low cost (compared to the research and development budgets of such firms). Developing countries would gain fair compensation and access to knowledge.

Incentives

This approach may not increase incentives for northern countries to contribute directly to the financial pools established to help the South meet biodiversity goals. Getting countries to contribute randomly assigned amounts of support for no direct reciprocal benefit has proven a challenge in all international environmental negotiations. However, individual protocols could establish specific mechanisms through which northern governments and companies would be required to contribute specific amounts related to specific actions. (Bioprospecting fees would be one such mechanism.) These mechanisms would provide funding beyond the ODAs currently being contributed.

The linkages outlined above would also incorporate additional incentives into market structures. This would create an agreement that would be at least partially self-enforcing. Furthermore, enabling the North to participate in biodiversity conservation through market mechanisms would offset the problems associated with the conditionalities and lopsided power differentials that so often complicate schemes for foreign aid.

The protocols under the Ecosystem Program for Biodiversity would foster the specificity that could support the development of incentives on the national level as well. The protocols could establish a framework and UNEP could provide support for allowing governments to create a system enabling them to charge for ecosystem services provided by forests, wetlands, coral reefs, etc. These fees could then be used to protect the ecosystems in question as financial support is distributed to those responsible for management of the ecosystem (both professionals and local people). The fees could also provide compensation, which would encourage local users to preserve ecosystems that provide services to others. These are just a few examples of how the specificities allowed by examining protocols within the narrow perspective of one ecosystem type are the key to developing incentives that will ensure continued involvement in the protocols.

Making Ecosystem Protocols a Reality

NGOs and development organizations may be able to initiate a movement toward ecosystem-based protocols. Organizations interested in ecosystem protection should begin to push for binding protocols with the force to seriously preserve biodiversity in the different ecosystems. In the area of forests, a number of groups are currently discussing the need for a convention on forests. The CIDA Forestry Advisors Network (CFAN), UK's Overseas Development Institute, German Development Institute (DIE), International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), and Malaysian Timber Council are just a few of the groups that have called for an international convention on forests.

Others, such as the Forests and the European Union Resource Network (FERN), claim that pushing for a convention is a waste of time and energy. In 1997, over 80 forest organizations from six continents announced opposition to a global forest convention. They believed it would enshrine weak standards, favor commercial trade interests, undermine the biodiversity convention, avoid the real issues, threaten citizen initiatives, and delay decisive action.

Organizations from both camps could come together in support of a forest protocol (as opposed to a forest convention) that would 1) create the necessary international forest regime; 2) allow for more meaningful and expedient action; and 3) fall under the auspices of the Convention on Biodiversity. Together they could create the momentum necessary to

make a protocol on forest ecosystem biodiversity a realistic possibility. Organizations concerned with other ecosystems could follow suit.

These combined efforts should be directed toward UNEP, which has the structure and expertise necessary to foster a regime of ecosystem protocols. The goal is not simply to create a forest protocol or a drylands protocol, but a system of protocols to cover all of the world's ecosystems. In organizing an Ecosystem Program for Biodiversity, UNEP could play a role similar to the one it has played in the Regional Seas Program. This program did not immediately pursue conventions that would cover all of the world's seas. It announced the intention of global coverage, but initially concentrated on only four regions.

This approach would enable UNEP to provide global coverage of biodiversity. It would organize the support necessary to make a series of ecosystem protocols feasible. More importantly, it would generate the momentum necessary to activate the process.

Once UNEP announced the new initiative, it could begin by creating protocols for the ecosystems that seemed to have the most support. At this stage, the support of national governments would be essential to bringing a protocol to the table. Each protocol would probably be introduced by countries having a large share of the ecosystem in question. For a forest protocol, this might include Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, DR Congo, Gabon, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The NGOs and UNEP could provide technical support to the presenting coalition, but the national governments, as parties to the convention, would have to submit the draft proposal.

As momentum built, other stakeholders would get involved. Their perspectives and their expertise would add considerable value to the effort. This diverse group of players would explore a variety of linkages, as discussed above. The goal of exploring linkages is to discover creative and specific ways to interest stakeholders who might not otherwise support the protocol. Linkages can certainly enlarge the pie, but each should be carefully assessed for their potential to add value and build support for the protocol. Each linkage should promote biodiversity by protecting the target ecosystem in some way. Each should be monitored and curtailed when and if it becomes too unwieldy, makes the negotiation process too lengthy, or begins to erode instead of enhancing support.

The Governing Body

The CBD Secretariat would also provide much needed support for this initiative. Currently, the Secretariat is organized into five main programs under the office of Executive Direction and Management: Scientific, Technical, and Technological Matters; Social, Economic and Legal Matters; Implementation and Outreach; Biosafety; and Resource Management and Conference Services. Scientific, Technical, and Technological Matters, which houses the biodiversity areas of inland waters, marine and coastal regions, agricultural land, forests, dry and sub-humid lands, and mountains, would provide initial support for the formation of a series of protocols.

As a protocol for a specific ecosystem is addressed, however, a new program area would have to be established within the Secretariat to handle that protocol. Under the Ecosystem Program for Biodiversity, UNEP would convene regular global meetings between the staff of each new ecosystem program area, other global environmental conventions, and

international organizations. In addition, the staff of the new ecosystem program areas and of Scientific, Technical, and Technological Matters would meet regularly to discuss common interests, set priorities, and establish lasting links with one another.

Linkages with Other Conventions

This structure would work for collaboration with other relevant conventions as well. Synergies are most readily apparent between the CBD with its Ecosystem Program for Biodiversity and the Ramsar Convention, Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention to Combat Desertification, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), and the World Heritage Convention (WHC). Many additional conventions and regional agreements are relevant and should be explored as well.

Meetings under the Ecosystem Program for Biodiversity that bring together parties from the various conventions to discuss a specific ecosystem would go a long way towards fostering positive synergies. In addition, such collaboration could help avoid negative outcomes. For example, market-based mechanisms designed to reduce carbon emissions in the most cost-efficient manner could actually lead to biodiversity loss. Coordination would enable individual projects to promote multiple environmental goals. Similarly, institutional linkages could avoid redundancy and capture economies of scale.

Conclusion

An ecosystem approach to preserving biodiversity may seem obvious. Ecosystems are increasingly recognized as the key biodiversity unit. A proliferation of organizations now focuses on one type of ecosystem or another. And yet, the Convention on Biodiversity remains at a standstill. A call from NGOs for ecosystem-based protocols could prompt UNEP to develop a much needed Ecosystem Program for Biodiversity. Like the Regional Seas Program, an ecosystem program would allow individual protocols to be negotiated independently. Together, however, the protocols would protect biodiversity across the globe. Protocols could be made more quickly than conventions, and could provide greater specificity.

The ecosystem approach would encourage the involvement of the most relevant stakeholders and stimulate the exploration of linkages that could create value in the process. It would also facilitate coordination with related conventions. The synergies and specificity that result would be essential to developing incentives that appeal to both the North and the South.

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