

## **The Ethical, Cultural, and Spiritual Dimensions of Conserving Biodiversity**

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WRI, IUCN, and UNEP are launching a two-year program of research and consultations for the purpose of developing a global *Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Decade Action Plan*. Based on our work on ethics for *Caring for the World: A*

*Strategy for Sustainability* (the successor to the *World Conservation Strategy*, which was published in 1980), the IUCN Ethics, Culture, and Conservation Working Group has been asked to write a proposal for how to develop the ethical, and spiritual dimensions of this program and to participate in its implementation.

"Culture" is being used here in the broad sense, inclusive of all human value-bearing activities, social, economic, and political, as well as the arts, sciences, humanities, and religion.

Three phases of work are anticipated.

### **PHASE I: PROPOSAL, AUGUST 1990—JANUARY 1991**

The first task is drafting a proposal for *how* we believe this area of the biodiversity program should be developed over the next two years and *what* directions of research and action in the area of ethics and culture will prove most effective.

To facilitate this process, I was invited to make a presentation on behalf of the Working Group at Workshop 3, "Designing and Implementing the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy," at the IUCN General Assembly meeting November 30 in Perth, Australia, and to submit a first draft of our proposal to the International Coordinating Group by January 30, 1991.

In order to draft this proposal, I have suggested that we look for answers to the following three questions:

1. What is the best procedure for making ethics and culture effective components of the biodiversity strategy and action plan over the next two years?

2. In what ways (if any) does the current concept of the biodiversity

strategy program need to be modified in order to effectively incorporate ethics and culture?

3. What directions for research and action in ethics and culture will most effectively help conserve biodiversity? What are examples of specific projects in these areas?

My own thoughts on these matters run along two lines. First, a serious approach to the ethical and cultural dimensions of biodiversity conservation raises important questions about the nature of the program as a whole: how broadly is "biodiversity" being *defined* (does it include cultural diversity as part of life's diversity and therefore internal to the issue?), what *constituencies and interests* are involved (who is writing the program? for whom? to what end?), what *ecological model* is guiding the strategy, what *theory of social and political change* (or "development") is operative, how may we conceive of *economic activity* as inherently moral rather than amoral, etc. To think along this line means that persons in the humanities will need to be engaged in a dialogue with persons working on other aspects of the program and there will need to be opportunities to hold this dialogue.

At the same time, there are many specific research and action projects that need not await the conclusion of this larger dialogue, and which could substantially contribute to achieving the goals of the strategy. I am thinking, for example, of collecting case studies that show how deliberate attention to ethics, culture, and religion positively impacts biodiversity; the issues involved in the privatization of the biotic commons and the professional and commercial uses of traditional knowledge; the development of a philosophy of democracy and

human rights that includes the values of biodiversity.

## PHASE II: TASK FORCE

If the Phase I Proposal is well received, I anticipate the formation of a Task Force on the Ethics of Biodiversity to work with WRI, IUCN, and UNEP in the regional consultations and other activities that will lead to the writing of the *Biodiversity Strategy and Decade Action Plan*.

We also know that it will be important for the Task Force to be represented at the major international fora that will review the biodiversity strategy, e.g., the IV World Congress on Protected Areas (Venezuela, 1992), and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Brazil, 1992).

## PHASE III: IMPLEMENTATION

It is hoped that support for funding of the specific research and action proposals in ethics and culture will be developed in the course of Phases I and II of our work.

## RESOURCES

In addition to such basic works as *Biodiversity*, E.O. Wilson and Frances M. Peter, eds. (Washington: National Academy Press, 1988), and *The Preservation of Species: The Value of Biological Diversity*, Bryan Norton, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), there are several new publications by WRI and IUCN staff that are important resources for this topic.

I especially recommend Jeffrey A. McNeely, Kenton R. Miller, W.V. Reid, R.A. Mittermeier, and T.B. Werner, *Conserving the World's Biological Diversity* (1990), available for US\$18 ppd. from either: IUCN Publi-

cations Services, Avenue du Mont-Blanc, 1196 Gland, Switzerland; WRI Publications, P.O. Box 4852, Hampden Station, Baltimore, MD 21211; or World Bank Publications, P.O. Box 7247-8619, Philadelphia, PA 19170-8619. This readable book provides the basic conceptual framework and rationale for the biodiversity program. You will also find that each chapter can be fruitfully expanded once the cultural and ethical dimensions of biodiversity are taken into consideration.

Also very valuable is Walter V. Reid and Kenton R. Miller, *Keeping Options Alive: The Scientific Basis for Conserving Biodiversity*, WRI 1989.

Another basic document is the June 1990 draft of *Caring for the World: A Strategy for Sustainability*, the new title for the successor to the *World Conservation Strategy* of 1980. This new draft is available from IUCN Publications. The *Biodiversity Conservation Strategy* is conceived of as a companion to this document. Chapter 2 of *caring for the World*, which follows, spells out the ethical presuppositions of the new world conservation strategy and draws heavily upon materials generated by our working group.

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