Protected Areas for a Sustainable Future

Address to the World Parks Congress
by
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Statement delivered by Ian Johnson, World Bank Vice-President, Sustainable Development

Mr./Madam Chair, members of this distinguished panel, ladies and gentlemen:

It is an honor for the World Bank to be with you at this very important Congress on parks and protected areas. I send thanks to the South African Government and South African National Parks for hosting this meeting, and extend my deepest respects to former President Nelson Mandela and Her Majesty Queen Noor.

I also wish to congratulate IUCN, the World Conservation Union, and especially IUCN President Yolanda Kakabadse, for effectively championing "a just world that values and conserves nature."

Your vision and our dream - "a world without poverty" - are one and the same. Accelerating progress on the Millennium Development Goals means, among other things, new momentum on the global public goods agenda. It means basic services designed with poor people in mind and infrastructure done right. It means leadership and delivery.

Many commitments have been made, including last year in Johannesburg where world leaders set three targets for the goal of environmental sustainability:

1. We said we would push ahead on the global partnership to integrate the principles of sustainable development into policies and programs and reverse the losses of environmental resources - reducing biodiversity loss by 2010 and restoring fisheries stock by 2015.

2. We aimed to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without safe drinking water.

3. We said we would achieve by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.
The establishment, expansion, evolution, and effective management of protected areas will play a key role in all of these objectives. Since the last Parks Congress in 1992, the number of protected areas has gone from about 7,000 globally to more than 63,000, and from just under 5 percent of the global land surface to more than 11 percent.

These protected areas provide society with many benefits—habitats to help conserve biodiversity, including for agriculture; natural laboratories for scientific research and knowledge generation; landscapes and seascapes that support local livelihoods and national development through tourism and fisheries; intact watershed areas that yield high-quality water supplies to support human agriculture and residential and industrial development; and opportunities for rest and recreation in more peaceful and pristine environments similar to those in which our ancestors evolved.

As the largest single international funding source for biodiversity projects, and one of the Global Environment Facility's implementing agencies, the World Bank has played a part. We have invested in over 200 projects which wholly or partially support protected areas, including investments in institutional strengthening, innovative governance arrangements, and sustainable financing mechanisms. These efforts contribute in tangible ways to realizing the Millennium Development Goals.

Now we must continue to build on these considerable achievements through local and national initiatives, and international efforts such as the WWF Gift for the Earth Program, the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund, and the World Bank-WWF Alliance for Forest Conservation and Use. We know that, together, we can do more, do better, and do a better job of delivering, measuring, and scaling up results.

Some key challenges include:

Filling gaps in protected areas representation to better conserve the planet's biodiversity—historically many protected areas have been established on the basis of least opportunity cost rather than biological significance;

Ensuring that the protected areas systems we are establishing have the ecological and social adaptability needed to maintain biodiversity and other key values in a period of increasing environmental, economic, and social change—without supportive external land use and resource use contexts, even the largest of today's protected areas will unlikely be able to adapt to the changes in life zones that we can expect from accelerating climate change and the growth in human resource needs;

Finding the human and financial resources to sustainably conserve and manage established protected areas and the values they provide—World Bank experience in many of our client countries suggest that, on average, effective protected area management requires about $1 per hectare for establishment and $1 per hectare per year to manage. With the tight fiscal and social realities in many countries, there is a clear gap between conservation and management needs and available resources;
Ensuring that both the costs and benefits that arise from the creation of protected areas are equitably shared and that the systems we create do not further exacerbate the lot of the poor and powerless - unless protected areas are managed with the full support and involvement of the people who live in and near them, their sustainability will be questionable, at best.

I am pleased to note that the Parks Congress will take up many of these issues.

Protected areas are the cornerstone of effective biodiversity conservation and management strategies and an essential requirement for sustainable development. The World Bank remains committed to making parks and protected areas an ever more promising reality - and a major contributor to our Millennium Development Goals.

Thank you very much.