



Community Action to conserve Biodiversity



Linking Biodiversity Conservation with Poverty Reduction

Case Studies from
Latin America and the Caribbean

SGP The GEF
Small Grants
Programme



Community Action to Conserve Biodiversity:

Linking Biodiversity Conservation with Poverty Reduction

GEF Small Grants Programme
Equator Initiative
United Nations Development Programme

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At the heart of this publication are the projects themselves. These experiences are the result of creativity, hard work, and expertise of SGP grant recipients and Equator Prize finalists. SGP national coordinators, programme assistants and community representatives have given generously of their time to respond to questions, provide photographs and review case studies prior to publication. Without their input, producing this publication would not have been possible.

GEF Small Grant Programme

Established in 1992, the year of the Rio Earth Summit, the GEF Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP) channels financial, technical and capacity-building support directly to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) for activities that conserve the environment while enhancing people's well-being and livelihoods. GEF SGP funds activities in support of the five GEF focal areas, notably: biodiversity conservation, abatement of climate change, protection of international waters, prevention of land degradation, and elimination of persistent organic pollutants.

As a corporate programme of the GEF, SGP is implemented by UNDP on behalf of the three implementing agencies of the GEF, namely UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank. As of March 2006, SGP currently operates in 95 developing and transition countries in all regions of the world. SGP grants are approved by a decentralized National Steering Committee (NSC) at the country level composed of a mixture of civil society organizations, academia, government, indigenous peoples representatives, and donor organizations. Since its inception, SGP has funded over 6,500 projects to reconcile global environmental priorities with local community needs - challenges that have been met in different ways across the globe depending on particular economic, cultural, political and environmental conditions of the countries concerned.

UNDP Equator Initiative

The Equator Initiative is a partnership that brings together UNDP with the government of Canada, Conservation International, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Fordham University, International Development Research Centre, IUCN—The World Conservation Union, The Nature Conservancy, Television Trust for the Environment and the United Nations Foundation to build the capacity and raise the profile of sustainable communities in developing countries within the equatorial belt.

The Equator Initiative champions and supports community-level projects that link the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity with economic development. To this end, the Equator Initiative works in four action areas: Equator Prize - a prestigious international award that recognizes outstanding local efforts to reduce poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity; Equator Dialogues - a programme of community and local-global dialogues, learning exchanges and meetings that celebrate local successes, share experiences and inform policy; Equator Knowledge - a research and learning initiative dedicated to synthesizing lessons from local conservation and poverty reduction practice; Equator Ventures, a programme focused on blended finance and capacity development for biodiversity enterprises in the most biodiversity-rich locations of the world.

I INTRODUCTION

In the parallel struggles for rural poverty reduction and the conservation of healthy ecosystems, increasing evidence over the past years suggests that poor, rural communities are seizing new opportunities to develop livelihoods based on sustainable environmental management and emerging niche-markets in agriculture, tourism, forestry, and other biodiversity-related sectors. Communities the world over are leveraging the economic value of historically non-economic assets such as local culture and previously undervalued natural resources. Harnessing the currents of globalization, these communities tap the creativity of entrepreneurs and initiate collaboration with whole-salers, retailers, investors, product certifiers, and ultimately customers in complex value chains dubbed by a recent article "Sustainable Local Enterprise Networks" (Wheeler et.al. 2005).

Development agencies are observing these trends with interest and calling for a focus on community and enterprise-based strategies in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (Rio Agenda 2001). Markets have been even quicker to engage: demand for local products, including village life as a commodity in itself, has been growing for years. As eco-tourists come to visit from afar, poor communities have an opportunity to build, consolidate and rejuvenate their assets: indigenous culture, wilderness (nature), educational experiences and remoteness are in increasingly high demand.

Markets for community-based enterprises and biodiversity-based local economies, while still relatively small, are growing. Success stories can be found in numerous sectors, including in sustainable forestry and fishing, organic agriculture, eco-tourism, and the production of cosmetics, medicines, latex leather, paper, fiber and other products derived from sustainably harvested herbs and plants. Globally, it is estimated that 22% of the forests found in developing countries are managed by local communities (Bray and Merino, 2004). Mexico alone has over 1000 communities managing forests on communal lands and leads the world with 500,000 hectares of FSC-certified forests, largely run by community-based enterprises. By the end of the 1990s, it has been estimated that the global organic foods market was worth 14.2 billion USD and was growing at a rate of 20-30% a year in the industrialized world. Eco-tourism accounts for only a small percentage of the global volume of package tours, but is growing at up to 20% annually (WTO Research Programme on Ecotourism Generating Markets, WTO 1999). Non-agricultural rural livelihoods are opportunities for much needed employment and diversification of community incomes. Even at current levels, these markets employ millions, create critical new social capital among poor rural populations, and present a unique opportunity to integrate the protection of global biodiversity and ecosystems with demands for improved human security and wellbeing of the poor.

If community-based biodiversity enterprises are an important solution in stemming the tide of adverse poverty and environmental degradation, some critical questions present themselves. What are the "best practices" of these communities and can they be replicated in service of a community-based biodiversity paradigm? How do poor rural communities access opportunities and foster entrepreneurship? Answers to such questions are difficult to come by, not least because of the vast diversity and remoteness of some of the communities in question. However, the science of community-based development is growing. Organizations that have committed resources to the community-based biodiversity and poverty agenda include UNDP's Energy and Environment Group (EEG) and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). In particular, the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) and the UNDP Equator Initiative (EI) have been financing, supporting and showcasing local best practices in community-based biodiversity enterprises.

In this report, the SGP and the Equator Initiative collaboratively present thirty case studies from their portfolio to document and draw preliminary lessons from the successes of community-based biodiversity enterprises. While these cases are selected from across Latin America and the Caribbean and initially emerged from an international workshop in Merida, Mexico, they offer valuable lessons for a global agenda. These lessons are for our purposes grouped along the following five main dimensions:

- **internal enabling conditions**, including community leadership, mobilization and organization;
- **external enabling conditions**, including access to financial, business and technical assistance services;
- **scaling out capacities**, including strategies to build constituencies and alliances with peer organizations and advocacy groups;
- **scaling up capacities**, including access to market and political leverage, sometimes through cross-sector alliances;
- **learning by doing** and capacity building, including self-learning, peer-to-peer learning, and learning from codified lessons.

As this review of case studies illustrates, there is clearly no “one-size-fits-all” in community-based enterprises. Distinct management, leadership and enterprise models are required for different circumstances. Distinct policy and financial interventions are needed depending on the country, socio-political climates, and the specifics of the project. Amidst isolated “islands of success”, these cases also offer transferable lessons and successful examples of scaling-up. Critically, the interchange of ideas, networks, and scalable strategies for the communication of best-practices must be further developed. Challenges that cannot be solved at the local level have the potential to be incorporated into an expanded international “challenge-set” and must inform international policy-making. In order to create a basis for concise, effective communication and problem-solving, market and business literacy is set to become part of the culture of public sector development and nature conservation.

1.1 Methodology

This document began as a contribution to a Regional Exchange Workshop on how to scale-up community-based initiatives held between May 25-27, 2005 in Mérida, Mexico. Documentation was conducted with the support of UNDP Energy and Environment Group, the GEF Small Grants Programme and the Equator Initiative. The UNDP Latin American Caribbean Regional Office (LAC SURF) also provided financial and technical support for the drafting of case studies and the present synthesis. Case studies were commissioned and completed by a group of consultants from the selected countries.

This introduction serves as a summary of, and introduction to, the detailed descriptions of thirty case studies from Latin American and the Caribbean.

The methodology employed in the selection and documentation of the thirty case studies presented was based on guidelines developed by the LAC SURF team. Cases were selected according to geographic and thematic distribution and for their relevance and replicability. Where applicable, SGP coordinators were consulted directly in the selection process. The measure of “success” of a given case study derives from field work conducted and is strongly based on the perceptions of community members consulted during the process of documentation. Twenty-two cases have been selected from SGP programmes in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. Eight cases were selected from among the Equator Prize finalists in Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala and Peru.

Case Study Format

BACKGROUND, describes the initial situation, project/process location, general social and environmental conditions of the area and the main problems addressed by the initiative.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION, refers to

- Implementation
- Technology
- Environmental Benefits (global and local)
- Local Livelihood Benefits (Poverty reduction, Employment, Income generation, Social inclusion)
- Regional and National Benefits (Demonstration effects, Capacity building, Policy development)
- Beneficiaries
- Partners

LESSONS LEARNED with regard to

- Environmental Management
- Barrier Removal (Financial, Institutional, Information and Knowledge)
- Scaling Up

Thematically, the distribution of case studies include eight eco-agriculture cases, including one in animal husbandry, six experiences linked to ecotourism, five experiences related to community forestry, with the rest distributed among marine resources, beekeeping and renewable energy. In terms of the main actors of the project, over half (16) the cases were community-based organizations (CBOs), seven were non-governmental organizations (NGOs), six were indigenous organizations, and one was a national umbrella coalition.

It is important to stress that this collection of case studies by no means constitutes an exhaustive review of community-based rural enterprises in Latin America. Limited resources and available space restricted the range and breadth of the case studies. It becomes clear, however, that important lessons can be drawn from this sample group: the complex

interaction between local community-based organizations, small-and-medium-sized enterprises, wider markets, value chains, and the combined impacts on sustainable livelihoods and nature conservation deserves further research and greater attention.

2 WHAT IS A COMMUNITY-BASED BIODIVERSITY ENTERPRISE?

The entrepreneurial initiatives documented in this report have produced a range of biodiversity products and institutional networks that allow us to identify and categorize them as community-based biodiversity enterprises. Below are some of the characteristics used for this identification and categorization.

2.1 Biodiversity Products

Communities and local enterprises which sustainably harness biodiversity as a means of income generation most frequently produce within the following categories: forest products (timber, palm fronds, pulp/paper products); non-timber forest products (NTFPs, such as rubber, resins, fruits, seeds, nuts); agricultural products (landrace/native crops, indigenous seeds, major and minor crops, roots, shoots and tubers, fruits, honey, beeswax); horticultural and botanical products (ornamental flowers, medicinal plants); agroforestry products (coffee, cocoa, cacao and other fruits); handicrafts and textiles (baskets, silk and cotton fabrics, embroidered clothing); personal care and health items (makeup, soaps, essential oils, medicinal plants and supplements); aquatic products (edible and ornamental fish, oysters, pearls, sea urchins, seaweed, sea moss); livestock products (ostrich, green beef); and insect products (butterflies).

For certification and marketing purposes, biodiversity-based products may also be categorized by social group (women's products, indigenous/traditional products, small farmers/fishers products), region (cerrado/desert/rainforest products), productive scale (community products), and applicable model (organic, fair trade, climate-friendly). Table 1 presents a simple matrix of product categories based on social, environmental, and economic standards.

Table 1: Biodiversity-Based Products with Environmental, Social and Economic Benefits across the GEF SGP portfolio

Category	Example Products
Women's Products	Crafts, Medicinal Plants, Textiles
Indigenous/Traditional Products	Medicinal Plants, Seeds
Small Farmers/Fishers Products	Coffee, Minor Crops, Shrimp
Community Products	Timber, Fruits, Extracts, Nuts
Youth Products	Crafts
Regional/Ecosystem Products	Rainforest, Desert, Cerrado, Amazon
Organic Products/Sustainable Agriculture Products	Major and Minor Crops, Fruits, Dairy Products, Beef Products
Fairly Traded Products	Crafts, Coffee, Sugar, Fruits, Chocolate, Timber
Climate-Friendly Products	Solar Dehydrated Medicinal Plants and Agricultural Products, Agroforestry and Non-timber Forest Products
Forest-Friendly Products	Agroforestry and NTFPs
Ocean-Friendly Products	Pearls, Shrimp, Seaweed

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