

THE 2016 WORLD CONSERVATION CONGRESS: EXPLORING A WIN-WIN AGENDA FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The World Conservation Congress (WCC), one of the world's largest environmental gatherings, is convened every four years under the auspices of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to find collaborative solutions to conserve global biodiversity and ecosystems, and harness the solutions nature offers to global development challenges. The WCC convenes in Honolulu, Hawai'i from 1–10 September 2016. The congress will include the IUCN's 1 300 member organisations from across 161 countries, all seeking to develop the conservation and governance responses necessary to tackle the drivers of biodiversity loss.

At the WCC, IUCN members representing government, the private sector and civil society¹ will vote on motions and resolutions that lay out the global conservation agenda for the next four years. The 100 proposed motions are aligned with the overarching objectives of valuing and conserving nature, ensuring the effective and equitable governance of its use, and deploying nature-based solutions to global challenges in climate, food and development.

REDEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PLANET AND PEOPLE

It is widely acknowledged that, despite the fundamental importance of nature, biodiversity continues to be degraded and lost at unprecedented levels.² While proactive and targeted conservation actions have prevented and reversed some biological losses, interventions vary in their degree of success and many international agreements have not been effectively implemented on a large-enough scale. Conservation efforts are hampered by inadequate systems for evaluating ecosystem services; weak governance arrangements that fail to

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** The IUCN, and its 2017–2020 Programme, must support the overarching objectives of the post-2015 UN development agenda and seek to establish an international framework for ecosystem-based climate action.
- 2** African stakeholders must call for clearly identified roles and responsibilities, and associated action plans, to enhance the ownership of resolutions and support their implementation.
- 3** African members must ensure consolidated voting positions, aligned with rigorous scientific data, which highlight the continent's most important and vulnerable ecosystems and biodiversity.

recognise a rights-based approach to conservation and do not clarify access and use rights for vulnerable people; and a lack of know-how and capacity to address these and other direct and indirect threats to the environment.

Convening under the theme ‘Planet at the Crossroads’, the 2016 WCC is a reflection on where humanity finds itself in terms of fast-approaching planetary boundaries. The concept of planetary boundaries challenges the belief that resources are limitless or infinitely substitutable. It questions the business-as-usual approach to economic growth, as well as global development trajectories based on high rates of ecosystem damage and fossil fuel consumption.³ The framework lays the groundwork for a shifting approach to the governance and management of natural resources.

Loss of biodiversity can be slowed by efforts to protect the integrity of living systems, enhance habitats and improve the connectivity between ecosystems. However, this requires a fundamental reorientation of our current economic system and the interrogation of deeply structural issues that are contentious and politically sensitive, such as the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, poverty and inequality, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, population dynamics and the management of the natural resource base for future social development.

Biodiversity considerations must be introduced in all development choices and all emerging policies related to poverty alleviation, food production, climate adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk management. If governed effectively, nature and its non-market services can generate significant benefits that provide cost-effective solutions to society’s most pressing development needs.

CONTINUING THE MOMENTUM FROM 2015

2015 was a defining year for international negotiations dealing with sustainable development, and environmental and planetary boundaries. The world witnessed a series of important global events and related pledges to conserve and restore the global commons, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030); the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (and its associated Sustainable Development Goals); and the UN Paris Agreement on Climate Change. All of these processes seek to achieve similar goals, namely, to reframe global development aspirations for the next 15 years and beyond; and to ensure that ecosystem integrity is upheld, that

equity and social justice are achieved and that planetary boundaries are taken into account.

The IUCN marks a commitment to advance the ambitions and targets of these global policy frameworks for the environment. To achieve these aims the IUCN and its members also highlight opportunities that concurrently promote ecological sustainability and socio-economic growth. Ecosystem-based climate change adaptation frameworks and emissions pathway strategies, for example, can provide countries with the opportunity to anchor their domestic needs and priorities within scaled-up climate actions delivering broader sustainable development that supports the environment.

The IUCN Programme 2017–2020,⁴ which is to be approved at the WCC in September 2016, is explicitly framed as a vehicle for delivering on the relevant dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to support the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Strategic Plan for Biodiversity (2011–2020) and its 20 associated Aichi biodiversity targets. The IUCN Programme also seeks to support countries in the implementation of their nationally determined climate change commitments.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE 2016 WCC

The 2016 IUCN WCC motions are indicative of current trends and priorities for global conservation, sustainability and the environment. The key motions identified for debate deal with protected areas, natural capital, biodiversity offsets, ocean governance, oil palm expansion and ecotourism. Motion 063, for example, attempts to develop the technical and analytical underpinnings of natural capital valuation, including the development of standardised metrics to measure biodiversity and ecosystems. Through these motions the congress is also expected to trigger action on wide-ranging issues such as environmentally damaging activities in protected areas, including extractives and mining (Motion 026),⁵ and the enhanced role of indigenous peoples and local communities in tackling the illegal wildlife trade crisis (Motion 022).⁶

One of the key strengths of the IUCN is that it is not an exclusively intergovernmental body. It bridges the perspectives of different sectors, private and public stakeholders to influence policy and practices related to biodiversity and sustainable development. The six commissions of the IUCN comprise some 16 000 experts who generate and disseminate technical, scientific, legal and policy advice.

BOX 1 IUCN COMMISSIONS

World Commission on Environmental Law:

Develops sound environmental laws and policies

Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy:

Links conservation to social and economic decision-making

Species Survival Commission:

Evaluates the status of a species and promotes its greater protection

Commission on Ecosystem Management:

Advises on the status of marine, coastal and terrestrial ecosystems

World Commission on Protected Areas:

Promotes expanded and improved management of protected areas and natural resources

Commission on Education and Communication:

Strengthens conservation through education, training and strategic communication

The IUCN leans on its broad geographical and multi-sectoral membership base and expertise to provide innovative, experience-based and adaptive approaches to sustainable use. For example, the Species Survival Commission is a science-based network of more than 10 000 specialists belonging to one or more of 140 specialist groups (SGs) focusing on a variety of taxonomic clusters or topical issues. These SGs produce well-known datasets that include the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Red List of Ecosystems and the World Database on Protected Areas. This data is used to inform biodiversity conservation policy and action in the private and public sector, as well as to support the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)⁷ and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. These tools are used to set global standards for the identification of 'biodiversity hotspots' (sites and species of biodiversity conservation significance). This knowledge supports the implementation and monitoring of global biodiversity policy targets.

The IUCN also implements a diverse portfolio of local conservation projects worldwide, mainly working to prevent biodiversity loss and restore habitats.

THE IUCN VOTING AND MOTIONS PROCESS

The motions process is a central part of the IUCN's governance system. Through motions, members can shape the agenda of the conservation community and seek international support for various conservation challenges. Since the IUCN's founding in 1948 the motions process

has generated 1 239 resolutions and recommendations that form the basis of the IUCN's general policy agenda. Past IUCN Congress motions and the resulting resolutions have been key to developing landmark treaties such as the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1968), the Ramsar Convention (1971), CITES (1975) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992).

Today the IUCN resolutions process is an important quasi-intergovernmental platform where non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can submit and vote on resolutions. These unique characteristics appear to serve a niche role in global environmental governance.⁸ Members can use the motions process as a non-threatening way to bring governments together on intractable or controversial decisions. In practice this system is frequently used as a platform by individual members to elevate their specific issues to an international level.

Despite the advantages of such a system the approaches to implementation are varied and many lack co-ordination and a sense of ownership. There are no formal mechanisms for ensuring compliance or for putting motions into practice. As such, opportunities to advance conservation through collaboration between constituents of the Union are frequently missed. Action plans or strategic approaches could be put in place to improve the implementation of motions, or to explain how policy positions should be put into practice.

THE RELEVANCE FOR AFRICA

It is important that Africa ensures its regional development priorities are sufficiently linked to this international process. This issue is specifically addressed through Motion 086⁹ – 'Supporting implementation of the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and the African Agenda 2063'. While the adoption of this motion will go some way to elevate Africa's conservation and development agenda, it will be up to African states to elaborate on this broad statement of purpose, mobilise support from states, the private sector and civil society, and ensure that commitments are monitored to ensure tangible outcomes.

There are also many other motions that are relevant to Africa's conservation and development agenda. Motion 010 seeks to combat illegal poisoning (a growing challenge) with a focus on intentional poisoning of wildlife in Africa, the poisoning of migratory birds and the illegal use of poison baits in the EU. Motion 011 calls for the greater

protection of all pangolin species, urging all IUCN members to support transferring all eight pangolin species from Appendix II to Appendix I of CITES at the 17th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP17) to CITES. Pangolins are native to 15 African countries, including South Africa.

Like other members, South Africa will use this platform to elevate its environmental priorities to an international audience and to mobilise support for particular resolutions. South African members, especially from governmental agencies, need to carefully balance the interests of a divergent set of stakeholders. The 26 South African IUCN member organisations,¹⁰ including the national Department of Environmental Affairs, government agencies such as SANPARKS and Cape Nature, and international and national NGOs such as Birdlife SA, the Endangered Wildlife Trust, the Game Rangers Association of Africa and the World Wide Fund for Nature, all have particular objectives. Government entities seek support and collaboration to achieve their national objectives, while NGOs use the platform to advocate for stronger support of their individual conservation agendas. It is important that these entities support one another in their collective endeavours and that they remain consistent in their opinion and voting, especially across the UN and other decision-making forums. There are some contentious issues to be discussed at the WCC that have become highly polarised. These include IUCN Motion 009 that calls for terminating the hunting of captive-bred lions and captive breeding for commercial, non-conservation purposes; and Motion 007 on the closure of domestic markets for ivory trade.

CONCLUSION

The WCC provides a pivotal opportunity to highlight biodiversity and nature in the development equation and apply a nature-based solution approach to sustainable development. Through its focus on diverse partnerships and building capacity across key areas of work, the IUCN can help to extend international co-operation and assess opportunities for common global development and climate agendas. This is particularly the case as it is an intergovernmental space that allows state and non-state actors equal levels of participation.

The WCC is timely as we look to convert the unprecedented commitments of 2015 into transformative and meaningful action going forward. The IUCN and its members must seek to maintain momentum and inspire the international community to take action for nature by demonstrating nature's critical role as our life support system, and by

showcasing inspiring examples where conservation and environmental stewardship have delivered tangible benefits for people, nature and sustainable development. This presents an opportunity to ensure that biodiversity, climate change, sustainable development and financing priorities are aligned, mutually reinforcing and tailored to achieve similar transformational goals, and that our economic pathways develop nature-based solutions for enhanced productivity, sustainability and livelihoods.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Created in 1948, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, harnessing the knowledge and resources of its 1 300 member organisations and approximately 16 000 experts. The majority of its members are international and national non-governmental organisations, which now constitute 1 066 members. The IUCN has 217 members from state and government agencies worldwide.
- 2 WRI (World Resources Institute), *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment: Living Beyond Our Means*, 2005, <http://www.wri.org/publication/millennium-ecosystem-assessment-living-beyond-our-means>, accessed 30 August 2016.
- 3 UN, *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A future worth choosing*, UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, 2012, accessed 30 January 2012; scientists assert that once human activity has passed certain thresholds or tipping points, defined as 'planetary boundaries', there is a risk of 'irreversible and abrupt' environmental change. Among these boundaries are climate change limitations and biodiversity loss.
- 4 IUCN, *Programme 2017–2020, Draft 2 May 2016*, Congress document WCC2.1/1-Annex1, 1 June 2016.
- 5 See IUCN, 'Motions', <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/assembly/motions>, accessed 30 August 2016.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 The Species Survival Commission specialist groups have advised the CITES Animals, Plants and Standing Committees, supporting CITES Monitoring Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) and the CITES and Livelihoods Working Group.
- 8 Griffin J, Helsing H & A Moiseev, *What Do IUCN Resolutions Achieve? A Study to Develop Monitoring for Results of IUCN Resolutions and Recommendations*, IUCN, February 2014, https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/2012congress_evaluation_study_of_resolutions_for_results_monitoring_2014_final.pdf, accessed 30 August 2016.
- 9 IUCN, 'Motions', *op. cit.*
- 10 IUCN, 'Who are our members', <https://www.iucn.org/secretariat/membership/about/union/members/who-are-our-members>, accessed 30 August 2016.

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