



# **Strengthening WWF Partnership with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities**

*Summary*

2007

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## FOREWORD

A decade ago, in 1996, WWF became the first major conservation organization to formally recognize the rights of indigenous peoples. More specifically, we recognized their rights to their traditional “lands, territories and resources” and endorsed the key principle of “free, prior informed consent.”

We undertook this commitment because of WWF’s recognition that indigenous peoples are among the earth’s most important stewards. We undertook it also to help rectify what historically has been an erosion of the rights of indigenous peoples and because it had become clear by then that traditional conservation approaches were, in some cases, contributing to the erosion of these rights.

In recent years, as conservation approaches have shifted to work across larger scales, debate over the impact of conservation activities on indigenous communities has been rekindled. Consequently, we undertook a second commitment, in 2005, to assess our large-scale conservation activities as they relate to indigenous peoples and local communities and to evaluate the effectiveness of our policies in light of them.

Our initial step in pursuit of this commitment is this review of WWF policy and programme experience, involving a survey of WWF offices and interviews with members of indigenous organizations, outside experts and WWF staff. We appreciate the efforts of the authors in conducting this work and the contributions of all the external interviewees, the review’s external advisory group and WWF staff who participated.

From the review findings, we are pleased to see a high level of commitment, on the part of staff, to working constructively and in partnership with indigenous peoples and other local communities – a commitment that is reflected in support for a wide range of community-based conservation activities throughout the WWF Network. Similarly we are encouraged to see the strong interest of indigenous groups to engage in collaboration with WWF on conservation activities, and to hear that the WWF policy is viewed as a strong foundation for positive collaboration.

At the same time, we recognize that we need to do significantly more to ensure consistent application of WWF’s indigenous peoples’ policy across our conservation programme. We hear the concerns expressed by indigenous peoples and other social groups about negative impacts of some conservation projects, and about the need for greater responsiveness to the connections between conservation interests and those of indigenous peoples. Further, we take note of calls by our own staff for greater recognition, capacity and support for work on the social aspects of conservation. We also recognize the need to increase our ability to hear ongoing input and feedback from concerned parties, and resolve problems as they occur.

Several actions have already been taken, or are in the process of being taken, at the field level to address specific concerns raised directly to WWF offices or WWF-International. However, as emphasized by the review, broader action at the Network level is also required to ensure that our policies towards indigenous peoples are applied successfully and consistently across our areas of operation. The annex to this report outlines the main elements of WWF’s management response to the recommendations.

This review and the recommendations it contains represent the start of a process, not the end of it. The review is but an initial step; others must follow.

As we move forward, it will be particularly important not only to maintain but to expand the dialogue initiated during the course of this review with indigenous peoples' organizations. Continuing input will be an important part of an ongoing process to which WWF remains committed because of our conviction that conservation cannot succeed unless it addresses the rights and needs of people living in the places we seek to conserve.

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## **SUMMARY of the WWF report on *Strengthening WWF Partnership with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities*<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

Around the world, large areas of global significance for biodiversity conservation are owned and managed directly by indigenous peoples and local communities who depend upon forests, fisheries and wildlife resources for their ways of life. The need for conservation action to involve these communities, respect their rights and needs in relation to natural resources, and support conservation based on their local institutions and knowledge has been widely recognized by the global conservation community.

At the same time, however, conservation bears the burden of an historical heritage of approaches that have failed to fully recognize the rights and roles of indigenous peoples and local communities, particularly in government-managed protected areas overlapping traditional lands and territories. Despite changes in the direction of conservation approaches, indigenous peoples' organizations and others often remain critical of conservation, and strong critiques have raised the public profile of "conservation versus community" issues.

In the context of these debates, as well as shifts toward large-scale conservation approaches, WWF made three public commitments in 2005 (*World Watch*, January/February 2005) focused on strengthening partnerships with indigenous peoples and local communities:

- Openly re-evaluate WWF policy on indigenous peoples and strengthen its enforcement and monitoring mechanisms.
- Examine WWF's large-scale conservation programs as they relate to indigenous and local communities to expand support for effective partnership approaches as well as implement changes where necessary.
- Listen more closely to the voices of indigenous peoples and ensure that their concerns are addressed in design and implementation of WWF field projects.

This document summarizes findings and lessons from a review undertaken as a step toward meeting the above commitments. The review gathered perspectives from WWF staff and from indigenous organizations and advocacy groups on WWF's policy and program experience as it relates to indigenous peoples and local communities around the world. Methods included external interviews, a survey and/or interviews with WWF staff members and a limited review of relevant literature and project documents. The purpose of this work has been to provide a basis for initial recommendations to WWF senior management on ways to strengthen WWF policy and program implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> Springer, Jenny and Janis Alcorn 2007. *Strengthening WWF Partnership with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities*. Washington, DC: WWF.

## **Key Findings and Lessons**

1. ***WWF's Statement of Principles on Indigenous Peoples and Conservation is generally considered to be strong and progressive, but needs to be more tangibly integrated into program operations.***

WWF's Statement of Principles—and the related Policy on Protected Areas developed with IUCN—are generally well regarded externally and seen as offering good guiding principles for effective partnerships. The primary focus and interest of external interviewees is on effective implementation. The WWF staff see these policies as important expressions of institutional values, though active use of the policy documents is limited, and WWF does not have program support and monitoring systems in place to ensure that policy is linked consistently to program implementation.

Policy application is hampered by several key constraints. These include limited internal and external awareness; need to clarify commitment at country levels; challenges of translating broad principles into locally relevant action; need for Network resources and capacity to support implementation; and lack of training, advisory services, and up-to-date operational guidance. Key safeguard requirements need to be highlighted, while also promoting strategies for proactive collaboration as contained in the policy.

2. ***Civil society monitoring can be an effective means to improved policy implementation and needs to be strengthened.***

Outcomes and satisfaction with WWF's response to concerns has been mixed. Concerns raised by indigenous organizations directly to WWF offices have provided an important catalyst in some cases for improved mutual understanding, problem resolution and forging of shared agendas. However, in other cases, concerns have not been addressed in a timely or effective way. Representatives of indigenous and civil society organizations feel strongly that they have an important role to play in monitoring policy implementation, and recommend establishing designated internal focal points and communications channels (country and international) so channels for raising and addressing concerns is clear. Independent monitoring through an ombudsman or inspection panel was mentioned by some but seen by others not to have worked well in other cases. It was suggested that this might be considered as a recourse of last resort, while focusing primarily on collaborative efforts among concerned parties to resolve conflicts. WWF staff members also feel that responding to concerns is an area where greater support should be provided by the Network. Support is needed for "case work" to understand and resolve specific conflicts identified by monitoring.

3. ***Many staff members would welcome a policy addressing work with local communities, in addition to WWF's policy on indigenous peoples.***

Staff members note that they are working with many non-indigenous as well as indigenous communities in their field projects and that it also is necessary to ensure against negative impacts and support community conservation strategies with these groups. They felt a policy articulating WWF's approach to collaborative work with local communities would be helpful, in addition to the existing indigenous policy.

4. ***There is broad commitment among the WWF staff to work collaboratively with indigenous peoples and local communities, and substantial programs of work on the ground. Indigenous groups feel that WWF needs to do more to ensure that people are involved as rights holders and key decision makers, and are interested in collaborating with WWF on this basis.***

Involvement of indigenous peoples and local communities is broadly integrated across WWF program approaches, and staff members see this engagement as essential—both to ensure against negative impacts and because indigenous peoples and local communities are important partners for conservation. Staff members note that indigenous and local communities are owners and managers of priority areas for conservation, with increasing formal recognition, and that they need to demonstrate the social and economic relevance of their work for local constituencies. External interviewees reflect indigenous interests in partnership with WWF, but also express criticisms of the extent to which they are approached and engaged as rights holders and decision-makers. Criticisms reflect broader backlash against conservation approaches that conflict with indigenous rights and interests, including concern that this will result in lost opportunities for collaboration across many areas where interests are shared.

5. ***Landscape-scale approaches offer opportunities as well as challenges for WWF to better achieve conservation goals by collaborating with indigenous peoples and local communities.***

Indigenous and local community lands make up a significant expanse of high-biodiversity areas. WWF staff members feel that community partnerships are increasingly necessary to achieve the goals of landscape-scale conservation, and they report increased collaboration with indigenous and local communities in conservation of their lands and resources as WWF programs have sought to work across the broader landscape. Indigenous organizations also want increased support for their conservation initiatives. At the same time, power imbalances among actors across larger landscapes mean that special attention and sustained support are required to ensure recognition of indigenous and community rights and ongoing representation in decision-making at a landscape scale.

6. ***WWF support for establishment of government protected areas continues to be a focal area for conflicts, while increasing support for co-management and indigenous and community conserved areas offers new opportunities for collaboration.***

Two main trends in WWF's protected areas work are support for broader networks of protected areas and support to new governance types including co-managed and community conserved areas. Government protected areas remain a key area of conflict because historical and continuing impacts on lands, livelihoods and cultures. Many indigenous groups emphasize that—while established by government—protected areas are actively supported by international conservation organizations and that therefore WWF and others share responsibility for ensuring that rights are respected in their establishment and management. Attentiveness to the governance contexts within which protected areas are promoted is particularly important in relation to larger-scale networks, to guard against imposition of restrictions on resource access by the people who have traditionally used and claimed those areas. WWF support for indigenous and community conserved areas is growing and generally appreciated, and co-management approaches offer opportunities for collaboration, though many indigenous groups see recognition of territorial rights as a necessary foundation for co-management. Restitution of lands currently in protected areas remains an unresolved issue.

7. ***Experience is emerging on strategies to “scale up” community conservation from site-based work; however, addressing broader policy and institutional contexts remains a key challenge.***

Emerging WWF program strategies for scaling up community conservation include facilitating lateral linkages across communities, building capacity of support institutions and drawing on field experience to leverage broader policy change. Efforts to scale up livelihoods

benefits to communities through market-based approaches have been a particular emphasis within WWF. At the same time, much WWF-supported community conservation remains limited in scale. Externally, WWF is seen to have created innovative models for community-based conservation at particular sites, but without promoting significant policy change in recognition of rights that would enable scaling up. Staff members expressed interest in capacity-building activities to enable them to engage more effectively in issues related to land tenure and resource rights, governance and scaling up sustainable livelihoods. They also expressed a need for crosscutting analysis and lesson-sharing to build knowledge and support over time.

**8. *Participatory approaches are mainstreamed in WWF programs, but may differ from indigenous expectations for collaboration based on shared decision making.***

Indigenous peoples' organizations distinguish between "participation" in conservation schemes designed by conservation organizations, government, and others and true collaboration grounded in shared decision-making. They are concerned to improve two-way communication flow and negotiation, have earlier involvement in WWF project and program planning for work in indigenous areas and establish formal agreements or bodies to manage partnerships. Clear decision-making roles and support for participation in landscape governance are emerging needs in relation to large-scale conservation. These issues are linked to indigenous peoples' rights of participation, self-determination and self-governance.

**9. *Territorial, land, and resource rights remain a core issue for WWF to address as a basis for collaboration with indigenous peoples and local communities.***

It is widely accepted that territory is essential for indigenous peoples to maintain their cultural integrity and identities, and secure tenure is a critical foundation for long-term stewardship of land and resources. Yet many countries do not officially recognize territorial or land rights of indigenous people or the land and resource rights of local communities. In some areas, WWF and indigenous and community groups have established collaborations around efforts to secure tenure and resource rights including through community mapping, land titling, land-use planning and policy-level change. However, land rights were also frequently identified as an area of conflict, especially in relation to protected areas. Indigenous groups are concerned about negative impacts of conservation interventions on land rights, and also want to see WWF doing more proactively to support land rights as a foundation for their collaboration in conservation.

**10. *WWF is often seen as working primarily with government and other "elites," with less attention to alliance building with indigenous peoples' organizations (IPOs) and related civil society interest groups.***

Indigenous peoples' organizations (IPOs) and their civil society allies are concerned about the broader policy environment affecting their long-term political struggle for human rights, land rights and self-determination. WWF tends to emphasize local projects—many of which are very valuable—but indigenous organizations are looking for political alliances for policy change in relation to their issues of core concern. WWF partnerships with indigenous peoples and local communities have been primarily at a local level; at national levels WWF is often seen as more closely allied with government and other elites, though partnerships with higher-level organizations of indigenous peoples and related civil society interest groups are developing in some areas. While recognizing that agendas will not entirely coincide, there is a need for increased dialogue and engagement to increase understanding of positions, identify areas of mutual concern and avoid or resolve differences in policy positions. The WWF Statement of Principles can serve as a guide for assessing the appropriate role for WWF to play in these cases, including ways WWF can use its influence with government. Alliances

also offer opportunities to increase WWF's effectiveness in landscape-level conservation and advocacy on negative environmental impacts.

**11. *Staff members working with indigenous peoples and local communities and with their organizations at various levels feel a need for greater institutional incentives and support for their efforts from WWF.***

Many staff members would like to see broader definitions of conservation, integrating related indigenous and community concerns, better reflected in institutional incentives, support and communications. They feel that increased integration of people-oriented objectives in goals, milestones and measures is needed to enhance incentives and recognition for program investment in collaborative approaches. Staff members also request support for crosscutting analysis of the conservation and socioeconomic results of community conservation work, increased investment in technical support and partnerships and increased funding support for community conservation initiatives and to ensure adequate implementation and monitoring of WWF policy principles. Staff members generally expressed interest to remain involved in policy, capacity and learning activities following from the review. The richness and diversity of practice and experience across WWF also highlights the value of cross-program exchanges and peer learning.

**12. Communication between WWF and indigenous organizations is often weak.**

A key crosscutting concern is communication and relationships—at many levels. Communication was seen as a significant ongoing weakness that hampers the development of positive relationships. Collaboration involves keeping communication paths open to understand different perspectives and to adapt to changing situations as collaboration proceeds. Supportive elements that were identified as needing to be strengthened include hiring of indigenous staff, establishment of regular protocols for sharing information, work with indigenous experts and recommended consultants and designated focal points in WWF for raising issues or opportunities for collaboration.

## **Recommendations**

This is a critical moment for WWF to take advantage of the opportunities for developing conservation alliances with indigenous and other civil society organizations at multiple levels. Action is needed to bridge differences and pursue opportunities to achieve conservation goals through collaborative efforts. The five recommendations together offer an integrated road map for improving WWF policy and program implementation as they relate to indigenous peoples. Many are also relevant to work with local communities. The recommendations focus especially on actions and capacities at a Network level, while also pointing to needs or follow-up at regional and country levels.

***Commitment: “Openly re-evaluate WWF policy on indigenous peoples and strengthen its enforcement and monitoring mechanisms”***

**1. *Commit resources for WWF capacity, awareness-raising, and consistent implementation and monitoring of WWF indigenous peoples’ policy.***

- **Central Network:** Clarify commitment and accountability for policy implementation at a Network level; establish focal point and working group to ensure capacity for policy updating, awareness-raising, implementation support to programs and policy monitoring.

- **Country level:** Make firm country-level commitments to the policy, establish indigenous peoples' focal points in key program/national offices, increase internal awareness and work with indigenous peoples' organizations on how to implement the policy in local contexts.
- **Policy updating:** Review and update policy periodically in relation to new developments; engage in dialogue and increase WWF understanding of emerging issues such as restitution, as a basis for further developing positions and guidance.
- **Monitoring and response:** Establish communication channels for complaints and feedback; and develop a complaints resolution mechanism, working through focal points at different levels to investigate and resolve concerns.

2. *Develop WWF policy to address key elements of socially responsible conservation as they relate to local communities.*

- **Policy on local communities:** Identify and develop additional policy or statements needed to articulate WWF's approach to work with local communities more broadly, covering positive and negative social impacts of conservation for communities.

**Commitment:** "Examine WWF's large-scale conservation programs as they relate to indigenous and local communities to expand support for effective partnership approaches as well as implement changes where necessary"

3. *Integrate community-based and socially responsible approaches more fully into the WWF conservation program.*

- **Case work:** Take a deeper look at selected cases to address concerns and opportunities particular to those areas; build capacity and partnerships between relevant indigenous organizations and WWF offices through these cases, and learn lessons jointly.
- **Program planning/management:** Increase analysis of social issues, including social impact, in field program planning, especially for protected areas; build flexibility into program planning/management processes in order to respond to local interests and concerns.
- **Future program opportunities:** Identify and develop opportunities for collaborative work with indigenous peoples in priority large-scale programs, and integrate these into program strategies and results.
- **WWF positions:** Clarify and be prepared to voice stronger positions on issues of importance to indigenous partners; increase collaboration with indigenous organizations in international policy work and partnership activities.
- **Goals and monitoring:** Increase integration of rights and livelihoods-related objectives into institutional goals such as Network targets/milestones; identify and incorporate relevant indicators in results monitoring.

4. *Expand institutional support for partnership approaches with indigenous peoples and local communities, including through increased technical capacity, knowledge sharing, and communications and fund-raising.*

- **WWF capacity:** Strengthen in-house capacity to deal with social aspects and consequences of conservation including by hiring and better coordinating expertise in relevant social issues. Cultivate more extensive partnerships with organizations with complementary expertise, such as in human rights.

- **Program support:** Increase program support through learning activities, guidance, training, toolkits and advisory services. Key areas include collaborative approaches, land tenure and resource rights, governance (including landscape governance), scaling up livelihoods benefits and scaling up through field-policy links.
- **Community conservation impacts:** Increase cross-analysis and learning on community conservation impacts; document and disseminate results to governments, international agencies and others to promote linkages among livelihoods, empowerment and conservation goals.
- **Funding:** Ensure that projects include sufficient funding to incorporate implementation of policy principles and good practice standards of collaborative work.

***Commitment: “Listen more closely to the voices of indigenous peoples and ensure their concerns are addressed in design and implementation of WWF field projects”***

***5. Increase communication and strengthen partnerships with indigenous peoples’ organizations and related civil society groups at country, regional, and international levels.***

Increased communication and relationship with indigenous peoples’ organizations are a crosscutting recommendation identified as a priority coming out of this review. While requiring different approaches, increased engagement with civil society groups is also needed. Increased communication is a starting point for addressing several identified needs, including to increase awareness of WWF’s policy on indigenous peoples; translate policy principles into locally relevant action; prevent problems and misunderstandings “upstream”; identify areas of mutual interest and opportunities for field program collaboration; share views on policy issues; and identify how positions can be mutually supportive.

- **Improved communication:** Increase flow of communication between WWF and indigenous organizations through designated country focal points, regional and thematic working group members and international focal point; organize meetings of WWF staff members and indigenous peoples’ organizations, especially at country and regional levels, to discuss locally specific issues and strategies; seek ongoing feedback on WWF partnership practice.
- **Staffing:** Hire indigenous staff and others—such as indigenous experts and recommended consultants—who know the indigenous world and can facilitate collaboration. Include liaising with indigenous organization counterparts in job descriptions of relevant staff members, and invest time in building alliances.
- **Improved collaboration:** Explore and develop mechanisms for WWF to link with indigenous organizations and experts on an ongoing basis.
- **Country-level monitoring:** Track indigenous perspectives regarding WWF programs and activities semiannually to enable proactive, adaptive management in response to opportunities and concerns.

## **WWF MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: Moving Forward Together**

The review contains five main recommendations that the senior leadership of WWF believes will strengthen our collaboration with indigenous peoples and local communities and enable us to ensure adherence to high standards for that collaboration throughout the WWF conservation programme.

Having carefully reviewed these recommendations WWF endorses and accepts them and commits to the following priority actions to ensure their implementation:

***Recommendation # 1: Commit resources needed to increase WWF's capacity to raise awareness and to consistently implement and monitor its indigenous peoples policy across the WWF Network.***

The ***WWF Statement of Principles on Indigenous Peoples and Conservation*** is a policy for the whole WWF Network. We are updating the Statement of Principles to reflect recent international policy developments and will reissue it in 2007.

To ensure more effective policy implementation, WWF is taking steps to increase policy oversight and support capacity at field office and Network levels. We have designated an indigenous policy focal point within WWF with responsibility for policy development and updating, coordination of support for monitoring and implementation and broader capacity-building. At a field level, some WWF offices now have focal points or working groups on indigenous issues, and we are establishing these in other relevant offices. Oversight accountability is also being made clear at national levels and within WWF-International.

Through these increased capacities, WWF has begun and will continue to address constraints to policy implementation noted in the review including communication, training, dialogue, adaptation to local contexts and monitoring systems. We have also established a small grants fund to support field office focal points to implement such activities. One priority is to establish a clearer internal system for responding to and resolving any concerns that may be raised to WWF.

To secure the necessary financial resources to implement these actions, we will work with WWF offices to promote investment in WWF core capacities for ongoing social policy development, implementation and monitoring as a priority component of our work. We will also increase mainstreaming of financial needs for policy implementation into proposals for field projects.

***Recommendation # 2: Develop WWF policy to address key elements of socially-responsible conservation as they relate to local communities.***

Starting in 2007, WWF is initiating work to develop a broader social policy, drawing on our field experience and addressing positive and negative impacts of conservation on local communities.

***Recommendation # 3. Integrate community-based and socially-responsible approaches more fully into the WWF conservation programme.***

WWF will ensure that best practices regarding socially-oriented approaches to conservation are integrated in our standards for programme and project management. As a first step, we have produced guidelines for fully integrating and implementing the WWF Statement of Principles on Indigenous Peoples and Conservation in our programme management standards. We will also

develop and field test guidelines for social impact assessment and monitoring, as a basis for integration in programme management standards.

To support direct implementation, WWF is also ensuring, beginning this year, that specific resources and capacity are in place to support enhanced social safeguards and community partnerships in the Network's highest priority field programmes, and to share lessons from these experiences for the benefit of other programmes.

WWF is currently developing a new strategy for our global conservation programme, emphasizing links to broader international agendas including poverty reduction. The review provides a timely and important contribution to this effort, in highlighting synergies among conservation, human rights and indigenous issues and how they can be integrated in programme strategies.

***Recommendation #4: Expand institutional support for partnership approaches with indigenous peoples and local communities, including through increased technical capacity, knowledge-sharing, communication and fundraising.***

Increased integration of socially-oriented approaches in the WWF conservation programme will depend critically on stronger internal capacity and institutional support. Therefore, WWF will strengthen our capacity to address social aspects of conservation by assessing, better coordinating and increasing our in-house expertise.

***Recommendation #5: Increase communication and strengthen partnerships with indigenous peoples' organizations and related civil society groups at country, regional and international levels.***

WWF views this recommendation as a priority. In the past, such dialogue has been critically important to WWF, helping to inform both WWF's Statement of Principles and our contributions to international policy frameworks such as the World Parks Congress Durban Accord. We expect that establishment of focal points will increase the flow of communication between WWF and indigenous organizations and related civil society groups, helping us to increase mutual understanding, identify shared agendas for field programme and policy partnerships and ensure that any conflicts that may arise are resolved in a timely manner. In addition, we are increasing proactive efforts to cultivate partnerships with organizations, particularly local organizations, with complementary technical expertise on social and indigenous issues. We will also examine capacity needs for partnership development, with particular attention to hiring of indigenous staff.

Because many issues are local or regional in nature, we see country and regional-level meetings as an important means for identifying ways that WWF and indigenous organizations can work together on shared concerns with conservation and indigenous rights. We are supporting and seek to continue to support country and regional-level dialogues on the intersection of indigenous and conservation issues and how WWF, governments and other actors can support collaborative efforts. At an international level, WWF has increased its work on the Convention on Biological Diversity and will continue to support the implementation of Convention's provisions on indigenous peoples, their knowledge, innovations and practices and on the equitable sharing of benefits arising from such knowledge, innovations and practices.