

NTFP and REDD at the Fourth World Conservation Congress: What is In and What is Not

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Abstract

While the Fourth World Conservation Congress (WCC) was effective in bringing together different participants to discuss climate change, the discussion of potential mitigation mechanisms was dominated by the Reducing Emissions for Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) initiative, to the exclusion of other possibilities, including Non-timber Forest Products (NTFP)—there was a notable lack of venues for discussing the relevance of NTFP projects for biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and poverty alleviation. This paper contrasts the treatment of NTFP and REDD at the WCC and discusses how the exclusion of NTFP from these discussions will probably affect its inclusion in the conservation agenda and the future design and funding of conservation projects. The paper also shares some ideas on unexplored complementarities between NTFP and REDD for climate change mitigation, showing that an opportunity was lost at the Fourth WCC for promoting NTFP as an additional market-based approach to conservation.

Keywords: Non-timber Forest Products, Reducing Emissions for Deforestation and Degradation, climate change, World Conservation Congress, ICDP, IUCN, event ethnography

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INTRODUCTION

Market-based approaches to conservation were widely promoted at the Fourth World Conservation Congress (WCC) as a preferred policy solution to the problem of reconciling conservation and development needs (Brosius & Campbell this issue). Diversification, as used by economists, is a financial mechanism that seeks to invest in a variety of assets in a portfolio to lower risk so that more predictable gains can be obtained from the investments (The Economist 2010). Thus, playing it safe by profusely diversifying or being risky by 'putting all the eggs in one basket' can be seen as two extremes in this game of betting for more returns. Based on observations and findings during the Fourth WCC held in Barcelona in October 2008, it seems likely that upcoming Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs) and market-based initiatives will focus on mitigation of climate change as their primary objective. These initiatives, in all likelihood, will push for using only the mechanism of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) to achieve that goal. This may disrupt an otherwise diversified

portfolio of ICDPs and market-based initiatives for climate change mitigation and conservation objectives.

ICDPs have been promoted since the 1980s, as a means of reconciling conservation and development needs (Wells & Brandon 1992). In their initial form, they were often place based and context specific and they were often assumed as win-win solutions. While the scope and scale at which REDD is conceived is broader, it nonetheless shares similar objectives of the more traditional ICDPs, with the additional incentive to mitigate climate change, acknowledging trade-offs in conservation. In this paper, I explore the relationship between the more traditional ICDPs [specifically projects designed to extract and often Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP)] and REDD. I am interested in both the similarities and the differences in NTFP projects and REDD, how these different programmes were treated at the WCC, and what this implies for future conservation efforts. ICDPs in general have been the subject of criticism for a while now (Robinson & Redford 2004; Wells *et al.* 2004), and there is a danger that the REDD initiatives as promoted so far by NGOs will fail to learn from the experiences accumulated from the NTFP projects and

other market-based approaches to conservation. Therefore, it is important that academics and practitioners in charge of these initiatives consider contemporary literature related to failure of these schemes when implementing future REDD and NTFP-based projects or other market-based strategies for conservation (Blom *et al.* 2010). “What will happen when REDD becomes a reality? Huge amounts of money will become available but we haven’t even finished understanding the results of ICDPs”, was the expressive assertion of an IUCN official interviewed at the WCC.

Within the discussion of climate change, REDD is arguably one of the most comprehensive and integral mechanisms to achieve forest conservation for both carbon sequestration and development objectives. NTFP, however, has been a traditional activity of indigenous or local people, who use the forest for firewood for heat and cooking, for hunting bushmeat, and for collecting plants for food or medicine. Furthermore, numerous conservation projects have been promoting initiatives to add commercial value to NTFP (Bishop *et al.* 2008). From this perspective, NTFP projects can also be considered a market-based approach to conservation. As shown by Bishop *et al.* (2008), use of NTFP for both subsistence and commercial purposes is very important, since millions of people on the planet depend on these products.

Different studies have revealed the importance of NTFP in maintaining sustainable traditional activities for subsistence purposes, implementing new commercial activities as a market-based strategy for sustainable use of biodiversity, and in making considerable contributions to national economies. For instance, a study in Senegal in 2006 suggests that an estimated USD 6.3 million per annum of value added from NTFP is not being accounted as part of the national income (Ba *et al.* 2006). Other than the well-known examples of nut gathering in Brazil, Peru and Bolivia, rubber tapping in Brazil, and extraction of rattan and bamboo in Asia, new examples of NTFP-focused commercial ventures with positive environmental output like flower sales from privately conserved land in Cape Floral Kingdom (the world’s most botanically rich habitat located in South Africa) have proven to be interesting commercial ventures that helped save the ecosystem and incorporate sustainability (Bishop *et al.* 2008). Nevertheless, it has been noted that many NTFP-based conservation projects might not have been as successful as once thought—a poorly skilled population, limited access to credit, uncertainty in the legal tenure of the forest, limited public incentives and failure to integrate NTFP into the market have been cited as probable causes for poor results in some cases (Shreckenberg *et al.* 2005; Fernandez 2009). Environmental concerns have also been raised. An example of this is the case of the commercial use of *Prunus africana* in Cameroon. Schroder (2000) showed that the traditional control system that avoided overexploitation of this species could not cope with the instability brought by a national economic downturn and other external social factors such as migration. Schroder (2000) notes that:

‘triggered by economic hardship, the possibility of gaining

cash income from the forests led to a careless exploitation of a valuable resource previously protected by local people ... Communities experiencing a daily struggle to meet their basic needs, cannot be expected to prioritize ecological concerns ... [This case] therefore suggests that pressure on tropical forests cannot always be eased by the commercialisation and sustainable use of NTFPs.’

All these findings and discussions should have become subject of more and deeper deliberation at venues such as the WCC.

In the case of REDD, an important member of the Commission on Environmental Law (CEL) of IUCN mentioned that it was still too early to determine how it was going to affect different stakeholders, mainly indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, the scheme’s complexity and its challenges and problems for future implementation are already being assessed and debated when analysing problematic issues such as temporary and geographical leakage, poor data for baselines, initial financing for REDD start-ups and additionality (Myers 2007; Angelsen & Atmadja 2008; Friends of the Earth 2008). This article will show that the WCC, as the world’s foremost conservation forum, has focused solely on one market-based conservation mechanism—REDD—to the detriment of others such as NTFP. This leads us down a dangerous path in the opposite direction from diversification as a principle for proper risk management by neglecting an opportunity to discuss and advance different market-based mechanisms for conservation. Instead of competing with REDD, these alternatives can and should be used together in complementary ways.

METHODOLOGY

I took part in an event ethnography of the WCC with 22 other researchers (Brosius & Campbell this issue). Data was gathered through first-hand observation during the entire Congress, by attending discussion sessions and other events of the Forum, conducting informal and formal interviews with key actors and other participants, and participating in the contact groups of some motions. Due to overlap between different events, priority was given to those focusing on indigenous issues. Interviews and informal meetings yielded valuable information from conservationists, indigenous advocates, environmental lawyers as well as IUCN officials. Following the Congress, complementary information was gathered from IUCN’s official website.

REDD and NTFP at the Fourth WCC

The Fourth WCC took place at a particularly important time for the definition of REDD’s future. It met two months before the Fourteenth Conference of the Parties (COP-14) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the conservation community had the opportunity to discuss different environmental issues in advance. Something that caught the attention of many participants was the orientation

of much of the Congress to market-based environmental strategies, mainly REDD.

During the Forum, at least 61 of the total 972 events held were to discuss actions on climate change.¹ Although there was no ‘climate change journey’, it was one of the three themes of the event and was addressed as a cross-cutting issue in different journeys. Particularly in the case of avoided deforestation and REDD, 13 events² focused on discussing problems and opportunities on its future implementation. Most of these events were well attended. In contrast, none of the WCC events featured NTFP as a specific topic for discussion.

The WCC organised its programme along ‘journeys’, thematic programmes designed to help attendees navigate the complex schedule (Brosius & Campbell this issue). Of the 65 events of the ‘forest journey’ and the 63 events of the ‘biocultural diversity and indigenous people journey’, one in which we might expect to find discussion of NTFP projects, only three³ sessions indirectly addressed NTFP projects. On the ground, it proved difficult for a participant interested in NTFP projects to find the topic discussed even marginally. Even at the central meeting space dedicated to dialogue among and with indigenous peoples, the subject was only occasionally raised.

During the second part of the WCC, the Members’ Assembly gathered to discuss motions proposed by members. One of the main goals of these instruments is to guide the work of the governing bodies of IUCN, especially that of the Director General, during the coming years. These resolutions, and the legitimacy given by the vote and by members’ participation in the drafting process, can be used as a good measure of the level of involvement of the conservation community in each issue.

The contact groups for motions held meetings some days before the Assembly. These contact groups had the task of making the last revisions to motions’ texts. Despite the atmosphere of discussion within these sessions, there was the widespread sense that IUCN motions are passed easily without much debate. In the plenary, the nature of the voting process revealed that discussions were not supposed to happen during the plenary but behind closed doors at the contact sessions or even earlier. As an example of this, during a contact session on a motion regarding conservation and indigenous peoples, a representative from a Nordic European country stated, right from the start and without prior discussion of the text, that her country would not be supporting the motion. Although there was some active participation during contact group sessions, participants tended to see the procedure as merely bureaucratic.

Of the 106 resolutions and 30 recommendations approved, three directly addressed REDD as an economic incentive for mitigation of climate change (among other objectives) and called for intensive follow-up of its implementation. Resolutions 4.068—Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation—and 4.075—Climate Change Mitigation Targets and Actions for Biodiversity Conservation—focused specifically on the importance of REDD, describing its characteristics and urging IUCN and its members to support the mechanism. Resolution 4.085—Establishing the 1% Earth Profits Fund and sustaining government conservation

finance—while promoting a new voluntary funding mechanism for conservation, also pointed to REDD as an important market-based instrument. Also, it is worth mentioning a fourth resolution that did not cite REDD directly but called attention to the problems of deforestation and degradation in relation to desertification and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). In comparison, no resolution or recommendation addressed the benefits or discussed the problems surrounding implementation of NTFP-related conservation strategies. Only two resolutions marginally mentioned NTFP and its importance for conservation and development in specific cases.⁴

Some IUCN officials made presentations and speeches, several of whom commented on the importance of climate change in our times and the role of IUCN.⁵ A mention should be made of the speech by Jeff McNeely, IUCN’s chief scientist, during the final day of the Assembly. His was one of the few official speeches to mention REDD specifically; he urged support for REDD, noting its potential for benefiting local communities.

During the entire Congress, Terraviva⁶ served as the official newspaper. It managed to present different stories, from small articles to news on daily events. It is worth pointing out that some of these focused strongly on climate change although none referred to REDD specifically.⁷

Are We Seeing Everything in REDD?

At this point, it is significant to comment on the formal and informal processes at the WCC for promoting different issues. Interviews with two high-level IUCN officials seemed to indicate that although the Congress may seem like a complex venue and is at times chaotic, it manages to involve many people with many diverging points of view; in that sense it appears democratic. A major claim of the first volume of *The final report on the evaluation of the Barcelona World Conservation Congress* is that although there were many opportunities for sharing, the number of events, the complexity of the programming structure and the lack of information caused difficulty to participants (Universalia Management Group 2009). However, as one of the interviewees stated, this could be seen to result from the diversity of the WCC and the fact that IUCN refrains from becoming too involved in every theme or guiding the whole scenario. Interviewees pointed out that political skills are essential at the WCC if one is to gain more than just attendance. Participants or members should be aware of this need when they seek to advance certain issues on the conservation agenda. Of course, it is all premised on the assumption that the issue has already been placed for discussion somewhere within the Congress. This was not the case with NTFP projects, and, as shown earlier, with the exception of incidental cases, the topic was completely left out of the official discourse as well.

Even though the process for approving resolutions and discussing motions in contact group sessions made it possible for most motions to pass easily, one informant criticised the

procedure, mentioning that the resolutions were too many, repetitive, and used a common language; in sum, he pointed at many being 'all over the place'. Yet, it could be argued that simply having issues summarised in motions is also a good indicator that the subject is relevant at some level. Thus, the conservation community seemed to have a lesser interest in NTFP since no motion sought to advance its promotion.

In contrast, many sessions as well as formal and informal interviews managed to engage participants in meaningful and interesting conversations regarding REDD. Both the amount of attention given to REDD and the nature of the discussions that ensued stood in sharp contrast to the treatment of NTFP projects. For example, in a session on rights-based approaches to conservation, one of the speakers stated that many new conservation projects use Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) strategies and that some countries where these projects are being implemented may see them as a matter of state control. He argued that REDD, as an expression of this kind of market-based approach, will directly affect the rights of communities (and governance) since authorities do not have incentives to decentralise control. This speaker viewed the process for achieving emissions reduction as a pyramid, where only the top and final item is actual emission reduction, while the middle comprises financial mechanisms and monitoring, and the base—the widest and most important part of the pyramid—is basic governance. "So far we've been only talking about the upper part of the pyramid," he concluded.

Governments also had the chance to introduce their strategies for forest conservation using REDD. During a presentation at the Poble, a representative from Ecuador introduced 'Socio Bosque', Ecuador's national programme for REDD. He stressed the need for this programme to be part of an integral system that would achieve conservation together with different measures by: legalising lands, implementing forestry control and monitoring, using sustainable forestry and reforestation. He also mentioned that the main criteria by which the Ecuadorian programme would select sites and beneficiaries for this programme will not be based solely on risk of deforestation, but also on the poverty level and the level of representation of forests in the national protected areas system. Also, a representative of Guyana argued against the exclusion of developing countries with historically low emissions from REDD schemes; nevertheless, he soundly stated that 'they will not sacrifice their sovereignty' in either case. At the same session, a senior advisor from Papua New Guinea stressed the importance of involving indigenous peoples in the decision-making processes for REDD; he mentioned that his country would implement a 'development fund' and the indigenous people could decide for themselves how to use the money. Finally, the director general of the Brazilian forestry service mentioned that the problem was that too much time was spent trying to create projects, therefore the importance of Brazil's national approach with the 'Amazon Fund'.⁸

While there was minimal formal discussion on NTFP projects in the sessions of the forum and in resolutions presented to the Members' Assembly, informal meetings and formal interviews

with participants elicited enthusiasm for these projects. For instance, a member from one of the Convention on Biological Diversity support bodies mentioned that there is still an ongoing debate among NGOs and civil society about whether they are for or against market-based solutions, but that there was a consensus that some new conservation and development strategies were successfully promoting biodiversity-based businesses for local and indigenous communities around NTFP. However, he argued that while NTFP projects ensure that local and indigenous communities participate in conservation, they raise questions around an inherent environmental carbon footprint problem. The environmental benefits from the promotion of NTFPs can be questioned in a climate change scenario if applied to an international scale, where goods are shipped all across the globe for better north-south gain margins in specialised 'green' or fair trade markets.

Another participant, an academician, thought that the 'new' conservation trends presented and discussed at the WCC centred on debates about direct payment incentives and 'carbon money'. She argued that, in the past, incentives for conservation by local or indigenous communities were indirect, such as in the case of NTFP projects, in opposition to the new direct payments mechanisms for conservation like REDD. Even though the two were market-based incentives, the first focused on continuing and improving traditional activities while simultaneously saving the forest, while the second simply compensated parties for not implementing certain land-use changes or extractive activities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although NTFP and REDD are both market-based approaches for conservation and development, it is evident that not all the dimensions, scales and objectives are comparable. Both focus on achieving forest conservation and development, although NTFP projects focus on a more local scale, while REDD centres its objective within a much broader scenario for climate change mitigation. While NTFP projects can support conservation of biodiversity as well as other ecosystem services, REDD, as originally designed, seeks to address problems with the forest's carbon sequestration capability caused by deforestation, thus focusing on one ecosystem service as its primary objective. These conceptual differences should not disregard the similarities in the outcome of their implementation. By involving the market in the equation, NTFP promotion, where suitable, should be able to attain the goal of managed forests with little intervention or deforestation. This obviously serves climate change mitigation efforts and carbon stabilisation goals as well.

For instance, one interesting feature that was left unexplored by the Congress in relation to NTFP projects and REDD is the relation both have with forest tenure. It is essential for REDD to analyse how rights allocations in forests are made in developing countries to correctly identify beneficiaries of the direct incentives, especially in a sub-national or nested-approach scenario (Myers 2007; Parker *et al.* 2008).⁹ Thus,

we should be able to detect differences among countries on this issue; for example, in most parts of South America that follow a civil law tradition; natural resources such as forests are property of the government or administered by it, allowing private exploitation only by concessions or permits (White & Martin 2002). This is an important consideration, since much of the forest legal tenure is related to natural resources, meaning that a person, company or community might have effective control over an area of forest only if they continue to use the forest for the purpose for which it was granted to them by the State. A Brazilian nut gatherer in Peru whose legal forest title is a concession, for example, can keep 'his' forest as long as he continues gathering nuts.

This simple explanation has complex consequences when trying to name who is entitled to negotiate and ultimately benefit from REDD, an issue that has been raising concerns (Peskett *et al.* 2008; Capella & Sandoval 2010). Also, it must be acknowledged that in many parts of the world, NTFP projects, timber activities or other uses of the forest will necessarily accompany REDD-related initiatives. Thus, REDD must be customised to address the realities in each place.

The indicators explored in this paper show that the fourth WCC focused considerable attention on exploring only one market-based strategy for conservation. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this effort might become relative. By having climate change as its centrepiece and REDD as its only champion, the WCC was unable to illuminate and develop discussions on other mechanisms for conservation such as NTFP projects and the important complementarities between them. While some participants did consider NTFP projects, the overall assessment leads us to think that the conservation agenda—and therefore future resources for conservation—is not paying enough attention to the potential of this mechanism. In the context of climate change, it is obvious that REDD or other initiatives for reforestation, afforestation or assisted natural regeneration have a much broader goal and a bigger task than NTFP projects alone or other market-based mechanisms for conservation. As such, REDD deserves proper analysis and research, but not in a way that its 'shine' dazzles and blinds conservationists, governments and financing institutions to all adopt it as the new 'silver-bullet' trend. This strengthens the perception that we may be putting all our eggs into one basket and therefore risking more than we should in this race to find the best strategies for climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation. As foreseen by an IUCN official cited earlier, it is evident that lots of carbon money has become available, but we still have a pending task of analysing the results and the opportunities of ICDPs or market-based mechanisms for conservation, such as NTFP, which were used in the past and still continue to be used to achieve conservation. We should keep asking ourselves: 'Are we seeing everything too REDD?'

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Notes

1. The figure includes all the events that mentioned climate change-associated objectives. The number of climate change-related events may be higher considering its cross-cutting attribute.
2. There were several others that addressed REDD and climate change in an indirect way, but, for the purposes of this research, we have only counted those which in their main objectives sought to raise awareness on REDD mechanisms.
3. Sessions 733: 'Biodiversity conservation in temperate forest of Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, India—Role of awareness, education and community participation', 603: 'Recognizing and supporting indigenous and community conserved areas—Part 1', and 568: 'Value for the valuable: Innovations in financing conservation' could be counted as examples of this.
4. Resolution 4.059 noted that community-based use of NTFP has been recognised as a legal tenure right for people living in the arid and semi-arid regions of southern Africa. Resolution 4.042 centred its attention on the importance of establishing a Transboundary Peace Park between Honduras and Nicaragua and noted that the natural American pine range provides NTFP for urban, rural and indigenous populations.
5. Reference to climate change can be found in Julia Marton-Lefebvre's, Ashok Khosla's and Valli Moosa's speeches and presentations.
6. More information on Terraviva: http://www.iucn.org/congress_08/live/daily/?1942/Terraviva-News.
7. Nevertheless, it is interesting to mention an NTFP-related story about Brazilian nut gatherers in Bolivia that highlighted the potential that commerce of goods from the Amazon rainforest has for accomplishing its protection. It appeared on Terraviva N°5 with the title: 'Buy the Amazon to preserve it'.
9. For an opposite interpretation of this problem, see Skutsh *et al.* 2007.

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