

Globalization and Conservation
Brown University Pax Americana Conference/April 4, 2003.
(As prepared for delivery)

Introduction: Of Mosquitoes and Mental Fences

One night some years ago, an American living in the US-run Panama Canal Zone fell ill after being bitten by a mosquito, went to the doctor and was diagnosed with malaria. “That’s impossible,” the disbelieving patient told the doctor. “Malaria exists in Panama, but this is the Canal Zone. I’ve never set foot in Panama!”

Having always thought of the Canal Zone as part of the United States, the patient at first refused to see the obvious: To a mosquito, the chain link fence separating the zone from the rest of Panama had not been a barrier. It’s tempting to dismiss such a narrow worldview as naïve. But in one way or another, many of us—even conservationists—have been laboring under a similar illusion for years.

Living in a world with boundaries drawn by politics and culture, we tend to view things within the context of the geography lessons we learned early in school. Looking at the world from within our own mental fences, it’s easy to forget what even a tiny mosquito instinctively takes for granted: Biology knows no borders.

I like to think this helps put the current—and at times emotional and heavily politicized—debate over globalization into a bit of perspective. Long before NAFTA, long before trade, long before human beings themselves came onto the scene, nature was already globalized. Humanity is only playing catch-up.

Globalization means different things to different people, of course. Some see it as a kind of wonder drug for what ails us; a panacea for poverty; a way of bringing us together through the creation of a commonality of economic and social interests to bind the countries and cultures of the world into one true Global Village.

Others see it in much more threatening terms; as the root of all evil; as the means by which large and largely amoral corporations extend their influence around the globe, exploiting ever expanding pools of human and natural resources for their own selfish profit.

I tend to see globalization as something that, like most things, is neither intrinsically good nor bad, but which has the potential for both depending upon on

how we use it. And how we do so is going to be critically important--not just for our economies, but also for the environment that provides the natural resources upon which our economies—and, indeed, our very existence--ultimately rely.

Going, Going Gone: What's At Stake

Tonight, I want to talk to you about the impact of globalization on the environment, the challenges those impacts pose for conservation and what conservationists are doing to respond to them. But first, I want to give you some idea of what's at stake; of what we stand to lose and the rates at which we're already losing it.

Before I start with the statistics, I'm going to ask you all to do something for me: Blink your eyes. Now consider this: In the time it took you to do that, nearly an acre of forest disappeared.

The world's forests reached their maximum extent six to eight thousand years ago, after the retreat of the continental glaciers and before the dawn of agriculture. Today, half of that forest cover is gone and the rest is being cut at an accelerating rate. Indeed, globally, deforestation is occurring at the rate of nearly an acre per second.

Half of the great tropical forests have already been cleared, along with more than 60 percent of the temperate hardwood and mixed forests. Nearly a third of our coniferous forests are gone and, of what remains, half has been degraded, much of it severely.

Our biologists tell us that deforestation is the primary driver of biodiversity loss, which is occurring today at a rate that is at least 100 times faster than it was before the dawn of human civilization. And this extinction crisis—for that is what the biologists are calling it—is different from earlier mass die-offs in that it is entirely caused by humans.

Of course, you may be asking yourselves if it really matters to you whether or not we save the Amazon. I hope my opening remarks hinted at the answer: Nature invented globalization and what happens in one place can have very serious consequences in another. Vapor generated by the rainforests influences global weather patterns. Lose them and rainfall will be affected half a world away. Take away the Amazon, and the world's capacity to store the CO₂ fossil fuel emissions that cause global warming drops by 20 percent.

Freshwater systems are even more imperiled than our forests. Our rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands enjoy a biological importance out of proportion to their size. They contain but one tenth of one percent of the world's water, yet they harbor an incredible abundance of species. Freshwater fish alone comprise a quarter of all scientifically described vertebrate species. Yet, because their habitats are so vulnerable, freshwater species face an extinction rate five times greater than that for terrestrial animals. And of course I don't need to remind you that a looming shortage of fresh water for human consumption is fast becoming a critical problem around the world.

Our oceans, too, are on the verge of collapse. Some 70 percent of our fisheries are over-fished, while some 60 percent of our coral reefs—the critical breeding grounds for our fisheries—are severely damaged.

The Eurocrat & the Antelope: Globalization's Impact on the Environment

Globalization is not the sole, nor even primary, driver of all this biodiversity and habitat loss. But it does clearly serve as both a conduit and accelerator for many of the forces that are.

Let me give you a couple of examples, from a conservationist's perspective, of globalization at work.

A few years ago, WWF field staff noticed a sharp increase in the hunting of a threatened species of antelope in Gabon. Investigating, we found the hunting was being conducted by Gabonese fishermen whose traditional livelihood had been threatened by a precipitous drop in their coastal catch. The drop in turn was traced to European fishing fleets that were netting all the fish as they returned to sea after spawning in bays along the Gabonese coast. And the presence of those European distant-water fleets was the result of European subsidies, without which the fleets would never have sailed as far away as Gabon. While hard to see at first, we were able to trace a circuitous but nevertheless real link between decisions made by a fisheries bureaucrat in Brussels and the life expectancy of an antelope half a world away.

By encouraging trade, globalization stimulates consumption, which accelerates natural resource depletion. And as the global demand for these resources grows, the process of extracting them has become increasingly internationalized.

Tesso Nilo is a lowland forest on the island of Sumatra that has been identified by WWF scientists as having the richest concentration of vascular plants of any forest in the world. It is also home to endangered tigers, orangutans and elephants. But it is a forest that is disappearing so quickly that our field team reported hearing the sound of felled trees crashing down around them even as they raced to record the forest's amazing plant biodiversity.

Once cut, a Tesso tree begins a long journey. An Indonesian company, APRIL, logs and pulps it. A Finnish company, UPM, turns it into paper in China. An American company, International Paper, sells it to Hewlett Packard, which in turn markets it to consumers across the US for home and office printing. Along the way, the governments of Germany, Japan, Austria and the US facilitate this journey by providing export credits to the machine manufacturers that supply the equipment used in the various mills through which the Tesso tree passes.

So these days protecting a forest like Tesso Nilo involves much more than a few anti-poaching patrols and a training seminar for park managers. It involves identifying a global chain of investors, creditors, financial advisors, processors, merchants and customers and engaging in one-on-one dialogues that hopefully will persuade them to use their influence to help protect the forest by managing its resources more sustainably.

The time is long since passed when we could be satisfied with staking out a pristine place somewhere, throwing up a fence and calling it protected. These days, the forces driving biodiversity loss are large, complex and usually international in scope. Conservation has had to respond in kind.

Our Response

At World Wildlife Fund, this response has taken us in several new directions. On the science side, and for some time now, it has involved conservation planning on a much larger scale than before. We now look beyond projects and plan on scales that encompass whole ecoregions—some of them involving more than one country. Our guidebook for this is the Global 200—a list of the most biologically representative places on earth whose preservation is essential if we are to conserve the fullest possible array of present-day biodiversity.

And working on these scales has required us to globalize; to form and manage complex, multi-stakeholder partnerships with governments, corporations, international institutions and local communities. Multi-disciplinary approaches

increasingly are involved. It used to be that the best training for a career in conservation was a degree in biology. But to be successful these days, a conservationist often needs to be part biologist, part economist, part diplomat, part social scientist and part international finance expert.

A multi-disciplinary approach has certainly been the key to what is perhaps the most ambitious of our current projects: The protection of nearly 125 million acres of Amazonian rainforest over the next 10 years through a \$400 million partnership with the government of Brazil, the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility.

Known as the Amazon Region Protected Areas Program—ARPA for short—this initiative will eventually cover an area the size of California, thanks to Brazil's commitment to set aside 10 percent of the Amazon for conservation. And the trust fund that will help make it possible is another example of how the face of conservation has changed to meet the challenge of globalization.

Along with the debt-for-nature swap—which, incidentally, WWF invented—conservation trusts offer a way to finance large-scale projects that require long-term funding. Another example is the now \$56 million trust established a few years ago for conservation in Mexico, in partnership with the Mexican government, USAID, the GEF and the Packard, Summit, Ford and MacArthur Foundations.

And just last month, we signed an agreement with the government of Ecuador to implement, in partnership with Toyota, BP Solar and other leading companies, a series of projects to help the Galapagos Islands meet all of their energy requirements through the use of alternative and renewable fuels.

Partnerships like these, which bring an international and multi-sectoral approach to bear on problems with solutions once considered out of reach, are perhaps examples of the best way in which globalization can work. Globalization itself is a tool; a process; a means to an end. It is up to us to decide how best to use that tool, and toward what that end.

The Need for US Leadership

If we choose to be good stewards of the planet, so that our children may inherit a world as rich in biodiversity and as wealthy in resources as the one we were born into, then we do have our work cut out for us. There is much that remains to be done and doing it will be difficult without American leadership that, it pains me to

say, has been sorely lacking on the environmental front.

To be fair, let me first say that the US record here has not been all bad. We are very grateful, for instance, for the strong and positive role the US has played in seeking to eliminate, within the framework of the World Trade Organization, wasteful subsidies that encourage over-fishing.

World-wide fleet capacity is currently estimated to be up to two-and-a-half times greater than the maximum yield our oceans are capable of sustainably providing. There are, simply put, too many boats out there chasing too few fish—an imbalance that is encouraged by the estimated \$15 billion that fishing nations spend annually to subsidize their fleets. Thanks in part to US support at the Doha round of trade talks two years ago, fishing subsidies are finally on the WTO agenda.

But in other areas where leadership is critical, the US has been less forthcoming. It is no secret that the environmental community—and, indeed, much of the developed and developing world—has been profoundly disappointed by the US failure to ratify the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. Its inflexibility on many issues related to trade and the environment also contributed to the polarization and ultimate disappointment of the Johannesburg summit on sustainable development.

It is understandable that our government is preoccupied at the moment with the war against terrorism. These days, security is upper-most in all our minds. But it would be a shame if our justifiable focus on security is allowed to completely blind us to other issues that, left unaddressed, may be equally threatening in the long run.

The world remains dangerously divided over issues like climate change and energy, trade and subsidies, globalization and sustainable development. US leadership will be essential to bridging these differences. In the end, sustainable development and economic globalization will succeed only if they work for, and not against, one another.

So how do we hitch these two headstrong horses to the same wagon? One place to start might be with the realization that the problem is not with trade itself, but with the lack of adequate policy and regulatory frameworks within which trade and commerce take place.

Maintaining a healthy relationship between globalization and the environment depends in part on the crafting of policy frameworks that can guide commercial

activity towards environmentally positive, or at least acceptable, results. Too often, however, rules meant to promote trade either ignore, or even openly conflict, with environmental concerns. One thinks here of the attack on US dolphin protection laws in the GATT “Tuna-Dolphin” case. Or, more recently, of the way “investment protection” language under the North American Free Trade Agreement has been used to attack environmental regulations in all three NAFTA countries.

Such conflicts arise from the fact that trade too often tends to be viewed as an *end* unto itself, rather than as a *means* to the end of improving social welfare around the world. Institutions like the WTO and the IMF still tend to treat the environment as a peripheral concern, one to be discarded when it conflicts with what they see as their more important priorities.

Too often, environmental policymakers are excluded from discussions where economic policies that have fundamental consequences for the environment are made. A growing imbalance exists between the generally powerful institutions that govern trade and the generally weaker ones concerned with environmental stewardship.

This imbalance is why trade always seems to trump environmental protection, as was evident even in Johannesburg, where the environment played poor cousin to the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development, and where a much needed discussion of the need to strengthen environmental institutions never even made it to the table.

This, for starters, is an area where strong US leadership could make a difference.

Role of the Private Sector

The private sector also has a critical role to play in ensuring that environmental concerns are better integrated into investment decisions.

Private capital markets are now the biggest source of funds flowing into developing countries and American financial institutions are the biggest players in this arena. Banks can help by writing environmental standards into more of their loans to ensure that the flows of capital and investment they oversee help to enhance, rather than degrade, the environments of the countries receiving those investments.

Companies, particularly those engaged in the extraction of natural resources or the sale of products made from them, must realize that they too have a stake in promoting sustainability. Many, I am happy to report, already do. WWF has partnered with Unilever, for instance, to create the Marine Stewardship Council, which has developed standards for sustainable fishing. And we also work closely with companies like Home Depot to support the Forest Stewardship Council, which has developed similar standards for forest management. To date, more than 80 million acres have been FSC-certified around the world.

In another encouraging sign, American industry is also beginning to realize that a “What, Me Worry?” approach to climate change is no longer tenable in the face of the clear and present threat it poses. Companies like IBM, Johnson & Johnson and Nike are all working to significantly reduce their CO₂ emissions as part of WWF’s Climate Savers Campaign.

These are but our own examples of the ways in which companies are now beginning to step up to the plate and form innovative partnerships with NGOs and governments to safeguard the environment. But strengthening the policies and the institutional frameworks within which these partnerships can flourish is going to require strong US leadership.

The few advances that have already been made in this respect—the inclusion of environmental provisions in NAFTA, for instance, and the current effort to reform fishing subsidies within the WTO—could not have happened without such leadership. But much more needs to be done.

Thoreau once said of the universe that it is “wider than our views of it.” The same may perhaps be said about globalization. Certainly, it is a bigger thing than either the chants of the street protestors, or the rhetoric of the free trade zealots, would suggest. For it is not only our trade, commerce and culture that have become globalized, but even the consequences of some of our most mundane actions. A man sneezes in an elevator on the ninth floor of a Hong Kong hotel and, days later, victims in Virginia fall ill to a new and life-threatening form of the flu. That too is globalization.

Today, the clothes we buy are made in China, while the paper on which we write, or the tables at which we sit, may have originated in a far-off, threatened rainforest. Increasingly, even the everyday choices we make as consumers can have far-reaching, rippling effects in a globalized world.

We cannot escape this predicament, for it is already upon us. But we can manage it—successfully and for the betterment of the world—if we have the vision to look beyond the ideological fences that artificially separate the economic, social and environmental sides of the globalization debate. Only by doing so—only by integrating environmental and social principles into our trade policies, and by realizing that they are inseparable—will the development we seek be truly sustainable.

Thank you.