

Between the Lines – Issue 1, March 2003

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The Equator Initiative's venue for community dialogue and exchange was a dynamic forum at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The name “kraal” comes from the traditional Southern African term for a village enclosure surrounding huts and livestock, in this case built by local workers from Soweto.

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Welcome to *Between the Lines*

With this first issue of the Equator Initiative's fully digital newsletter, *Between the Lines*, we look forward to keeping you posted on the work of our partnership as we strive to help build the capacity and raise the profile of the growing sustainable communities' movement in the tropical developing countries of the Equator Belt.

We will bring you news of grassroots, community-level development projects and small business ventures in the tropics that are linking economic improvement and job creation with protecting the environment—ranging from sustainable forestry and fishing to organic agriculture and ecotourism, with sustainably harvested plants being used to make a wide range of cosmetics, medicines, fabrics and other natural products.

Local communities in the tropics are claiming an ownership stake in biodiversity conservation as a practical measure to safeguard their livelihoods—a phenomenon sufficient in scale and impact to be called both a movement and a vital new driving force for sustainable development.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to become involved in the ongoing work of the Equator Initiative and to send us your comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Sean Southey

Equator Prize 2002

Community projects from Belize, Brazil, Costa Rica, Fiji, Kenya, Malaysia, and Tanzania won the Equator Prize 2002, presented at a ceremony at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg on 30 August 2002. The awards, accompanied by US\$ 30,000 each and presented by the Equator Initiative, recognize extraordinary local efforts in the tropics to reduce poverty while conserving and sustainably using biodiversity.

Selected from 27 finalists out of over 420 nominations from 77 countries, the winners of the Equator Prize 2002 represent outstanding examples of the types of community-led partnerships that are best able to tackle the planet's most pressing development challenges, including poverty and biodiversity loss.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said of the finalists, "The passion, dedication and courage with which these communities have adopted the cause of local sustainable development are a source of inspiration to the entire global community."

"Demonstrating that partnerships among individuals, communities, governments and civil society organizations bring great dividends for both local livelihoods and the environment, these communities are models of the kind of sustainable future UNDP believes is possible," said UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown.

In an unexpected announcement that crowned the award ceremony, Steve McCormick, President of The Nature Conservancy, announced that his organization would contribute US\$30,000 to each of the remaining 20 finalists for the Prize.

"These groups have dedicated themselves to improving their communities through the sustainable use of biological resources," said Mr. McCormick. "We want to recognize their innovations, and give them additional needed resources".

An eminent jury of eight world leaders, including Nobel Peace Prize laureates Dr. Oscar Arias Sanchez and Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Princess Basma bint Talal of Jordan, and Professor M.S. Swaminathan, selected the winners following extensive deliberations. They also presented Equator Prize 2002 award sculptures to representatives of the winning communities. The prizes, crafted from certified, sustainably harvested Amazonian hardwoods, represent the interdependency of humanity and the biological resources of the planet, a central theme of the World Summit.

With support from the Equator Initiative, representatives of the 27 finalist communities were able to participate in the WSSD and share their experiences in working towards local sustainability with other communities from around the world. Together, they identified best practices, built linkages among individuals, groups, and projects, and created the foundation for a global, locally-based network for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation.

Most critically, the lessons identified by the finalist communities will form the basis for the Equator Initiative's continuing work and lead to the development of a learning and exchange strategy that will expand efforts to reduce poverty and conserve biodiversity.

EQUATOR PRIZE 2002 WINNERS

Equator Prizes for outstanding community efforts to reduce poverty and conserve biodiversity were awarded to:

- Associação Vida Verde da Amazônia (AVIVE) of Brazil
- Fiji Locally-Managed Marine Area Network of Fiji
- Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) of Belize

- Uma Bawang Resident's Association of Malaysia
- Il Ngwesi Group Ranch of Kenya
- Suledo Forest Community of Tanzania
- Iniciativa Talamanca of Costa Rica was awarded the prize for an outstanding community initiative associated with a World Heritage Site.

Interview with Mark Malloch Brown

UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown talks about the background, impact and future of the Equator Initiative.

What is the motivation behind the Equator Initiative?

The Equator Initiative is an idea that came to life last Fall in my discussions with Timothy Wirth, President of the UN Foundation, on how best to approach the acute environmental and development challenges of the tropics. You might ask, why the tropics? Well, the reality is that this area is unique in many respects, not the least for its tremendous endowment of biodiversity and for the challenges it faces in addressing poverty issues.

This dual focus seems unique – why the focus on poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation in particular?

The fact is that the tropics are a treasure trove of the kind of biodiversity that local people and society worldwide depend upon: the genetic resources that support productive agriculture and effective medicines, and the ecosystems that provide clean water, maintain soil fertility and reduce vulnerability to natural hazards like flooding, landslides, and droughts. From the planting of indigenous rice varieties to improve food security in India to the reforestation of hillslopes with diverse native forests to reduce erosion and restore water quality in Cuba, biodiversity is central to an increasing number of local efforts to ensure that livelihoods are sustainable. The Equator Initiative focuses on the region between 23.5 degrees north and 23.5 degrees south of the Equator as this zone holds the world's greatest concentrations of both human poverty and biological wealth. So the biological significance of the high concentration of species and landscapes in the tropics has a critical human dimension.

Livelihoods in the tropics, as elsewhere, often depend directly on the sustainable use and management of biological resources. It is shortsighted to think that longterm economic progress can be achieved if biodiversity is sacrificed. The two issues really are inseparable and most people in the tropics are more than well aware of this.

The question, though, is whether we can make sure that the recognition of this linkage is reflected in policies and practices that allow for 'scaling up' of successful local level initiatives and the widespread dissemination of lessons from those communities that are successfully working to achieve sustainable economic advancement.

Given the challenges facing much of the tropical developing world, what gives you hope?

One of the first challenges taken up by the Equator Initiative was the identification of outstanding projects being undertaken at the local level to eradicate poverty and conserve biodiversity in the tropics. We knew anecdotally that communities are engaged in remarkable efforts to promote local sustainability, reduce poverty, and conserve the resources upon which their livelihoods depend. The Equator Prize 2002 process, though, really showed the extremely wide range and number of these local efforts. In just over two months, the Equator Initiative received more than 400 nominations from throughout the tropics. The caliber of these community initiatives was

outstanding and speaks to the dedication with which many local communities are tackling these issues.

The seven winners of the prize, and the 20 other finalists, are testaments to the power of community action as a tool for effectively addressing issues of poverty and ensuring that livelihoods do not come at the expense of biological diversity.

What was the impact of the Equator Initiative at the World Summit?

The finalist communities for the Equator Prize 2002 were a source of great inspiration at the World Summit. The community representatives that assembled in the “Community Kraal”—a dialogue space set up in the center of the summit venue – had a great impact on thousands of summit participants and visitors, including a number of heads of state that visited. The event provided these community representatives with a strategic opportunity to share ideas and experiences with each other and with critical decision makers affecting the world’s thinking on sustainable development. The capacity development and learning that took place during the three weeks that the groups shared together was extremely encouraging. We were also thrilled by The Nature Conservancy’s surprise donation of US\$30,000 to each of the 20 communities who were prize finalists and who would otherwise not have been awarded a monetary prize. For their generous and effective work in supporting a community presence at the World Summit, I would especially like to thank the Equator Initiative partners: BrasilConnects, Canada, IDRC, IUCN, The Nature Conservancy, TVE, and the UN Foundation.

What’s next for the Equator Initiative?

The global potential of the Equator Initiative as we move forward is to now build on the inspiring energy and insight that was displayed by local communities at the World Summit. In the next phase of the programme, we intend to “move to scale” on these types of successes through the sharing of good practices via a comprehensive “learning and exchange programme” among communities.

We also plan to develop a strong component on “research and analysis for policy impact’ so we can understand what makes these initiatives work. We have already learned from our work with local communities that they are greatly affected by the policy environment they find themselves in. We are setting out a plan to work with our counterparts in national governments around the tropics to help create an enabling environment for successful local initiatives. These are ambitious goals for such a young project but, if events at the World Summit are any indication, the Equator Initiative offers real promise for catalyzing a global movement for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation.

The Way Forward

Equator Initiative December Meeting Charts Second Phase Direction

As it embarks on the next phase of its programme, the Equator Initiative partnership is working to deepen worldwide recognition of the role of local communities in reducing poverty and conserving biodiversity. As the program moves into its second year, the Equator Initiative intends to “move to scale”—that is, to support a shift in the practice of development towards greater recognition of the centrality of communities and towards stronger focus on creating successful enabling environments for their work.

To help plan activities over the next five years, the Equator Initiative brought together over 50 individuals from 30 key partner organizations on December 12/13, 2002. During this two-day meeting, participants identified the core issues that will define the future direction of the Equator Initiative and created a plan for the growth and expansion of the movement. At the meeting it was widely recognized that the standards set for achievements in the second year of the Equator Initiative are high—a strong first year demands an even better second year.

After two days of productive discussion, the group ultimately proposed a four-pronged strategy for creating a truly worldwide movement for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation.

Community Capacity Building To sustain both local livelihoods and biological diversity, the Equator Initiative will support capacity building through learning exchanges, community networking, local partnership building, and enterprise training.

Policy and Advocacy To support local efforts to reduce poverty and conserve biodiversity, the Equator Initiative must enable communities to gain access to decision makers, help communities bring successful local practices and programmes to those who make policy, and facilitate the participation of communities in national, regional, and global fora.

Research and Learning To increase its ability to support community initiatives, influence policy, and effectively conserve biodiversity, the Equator Initiative will identify and document the factors that contribute to success at all levels and engage in a programme of research and analysis that provides a deeper understanding of the nexus between community livelihoods and biodiversity.

Public Awareness

To fully realize the goal of creating a global movement for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation, the Equator Initiative will promote public awareness in equatorial countries of poverty and biodiversity issues and highlight the critical linkages between the two through an issue-based awareness campaign.

The energy and dynamism of the over 420 nominees for the Equator Prize 2002 provide a solid indication that poverty reduction and the conservation of biodiversity are mutually supportive goals. As well, there are countless examples seen by the Equator Initiative of the work communities are undertaking to ensure that economic advancement does not come at the expense of environmental sustainability. These indicate that local interest in forging a more sustainable future for the tropics is strong.

These successes are the source of the Equator Initiative's motivation to continue building a worldwide movement for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation that ensures local achievements have a global impact.

Global Celebrations

Ceremonies Around the World Mark the 2002 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and the Handover of Equator Prize 2002 Award Cheques

Since first meeting in Johannesburg during the World Summit in August, the finalist communities for the Equator Prize 2002 worked together with the Equator Initiative to present a wide range of events to mark the 2002 commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Taking place during the week of 17 October, these events were celebrations of local successes in reducing poverty and conserving biodiversity.

While positive stories in the struggle against poverty often seem hard to find, the Equator Initiative has worked with the outstanding finalists for the Equator Prize 2002 to help focus international attention on successful local solutions to the challenges of acute poverty and biodiversity loss.

In 1993, the General Assembly of the United Nations established 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. To mark this Day and to advance the search for solutions to the challenge of acute poverty, the Equator Initiative has supported special events in many of the 27 communities in 19 countries that are home to an Equator Prize 2002 finalist. A focus of the local commemorations, and of national events in New York, Delhi, and Rio de Janeiro, was the

presentation of US\$30,000 Equator Prize award cheques to the finalists. Even more importantly, though, the events served as show-cases for the innovative and successful work being undertaken by communities throughout the tropics to generate income in ways that help sustain biological diversity.

The human realities of global poverty are harsh—2.8 billion people continue to live on less than 2\$ a day, while 1.2 billion get by on less than 1\$ a day. However, in developing countries, there is also reason to believe that the types of locally-driven work being undertaken by communities themselves may be an effective means of addressing poverty issues. In countries as diverse as Thailand and Cameroon, the Equator Prize finalists have shown that economic advancement and environmental sustainability are not mutually exclusive but, rather, often go hand in hand. And encouragingly, the finalists for the Equator Prize represent only a small portion of the over 400 outstanding initiatives from over 77 countries that were nominated for the Prize.

A diverse range of events were organized by the finalist communities and local UNDP offices to mark the Day and celebrate the handover of award cheques. They included gatherings with the President of Comoros, celebrations with UN officials at the Central Market in Kuala Lumpur, and a massive ceremony with over 800 people attending, including senior government officials and indigenous people, in Orissa, India.

Dynamic celebrations in Mexico, Fiji, and Madagascar, among other countries, helped to raise the national profile of innovative local strategies for combating poverty.

At an Equator Initiative supported press conference held at UN Headquarters on 17 October, Benson Venegas Robinson, of the Talamanca Initiative, said “It is sad that there are more than one billion people who are still poor. But we represent the good news. We are showing that it is possible to protect the environment with full minds and full stomachs.”

The Talamanca Initiative’s spirit of optimism is not unique. Other finalists for the Equator Prize have also had remarkable success in reducing poverty while conserving and sustainably using biodiversity. From efforts to promote sustainable beekeeping in Kenya, foster ecotourism in Peru, and conserve medicinal plant species in India, the Equator Prize finalists are a powerful symbol of the power of local action to effectively address the dual challenges of poverty and biodiversity loss.

One of the most exciting ventures undertaken by the Equator Initiative since it was launched in January was the founding of the Community Kraal at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

The “Community Kraal”, a venue for community dialogue and exchange at the Summit, took its name from the traditional Southern African “kraal”—a village enclosure surrounding huts and livestock. Built by local workers from Soweto, the Community Kraal developed into a remarkable variation on a traditional theme that served as a dynamic forum for community voices at the Summit and was awarded the WSSD’s award for most outstanding venue at the Summit’s Ubuntu site.

As an integral part of the Summit’s Ubuntu Village venue, the Community Kraal was designed to serve as a celebration of local community action for sustainable development and act as a “home” for community members from around the world.

At the Kraal, community members met to promote local sustainable development, share experiences, influence Summit outcomes, and generally effect change. Most importantly, the Kraal served as a showcase for the victories of grassroots communities from around the world who, in the face of great obstacles, have achieved tremendous successes in building a more sustainable future for us all.

Among the many participants in the Kraal were the representatives of the 27 finalist communities for the Equator Prize 2002. Like the Equator Initiative, the Kraal was dedicated to creating opportunities for spotlighting stories from the grassroots around the world—sustainable development victories won by community level action—and to encouraging dialogue about the future challenges facing communities. By promoting and facilitating community-to-community discussions, events, and presentations, the Kraal served as a showcase for the largely unsung work of communities to bring about real solutions to the global development challenges being addressed at the WSSD. The community representatives participating in the Kraal received considerable attention from the media and visiting dignitaries, including many world leaders who visited the site. It was widely felt that the communities showcased at the Community Kraal were inspiring evidence that the ultimate goal of the Summit, global sustainable development, is achievable.

The Equator Initiative congratulates the 20 runner-up finalists for the 2002 Equator Prize:

- Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén—Guatemala
- Association of Manambolo Natives—Madagascar
- Bolsa Amazonia—Brazil
- Café de la Selva—Mexico
- Cananéia Oyster Producers Cooperative—Brazil
- CBIRD Center, Sub Tai—Thailand
- Couro Vegetal da Amazônia Project—Brazil
- Empresa Forestal Integral de Bayamo—Cuba
- Ese'ejá Native Community of Infierno—Peru
- HASHI Soil Conservation Project—Tanzania
- Honey Care Africa Ltd.—Kenya
- Inter-institutional Consortium for Sustainable Agriculture on Hillsides / River Cabuyal Water-shed Users Association—Colombia
- Kerala Kani Samudaya Kshema Trust—India
- Medicinal Plants Conservation Centre—India
- Mohéli Marine Park—Comores
- Mosquitia Pawisa Agency for the Development of the Honduran Mosquitia— Honduras
- Organización Manejo Y Conservación—Guatemala
- Programa de Campesino a Campesino, Siuna—Nicaragua
- Support Group for Conservation and Sustainable Development Initiatives— Cameroon
- Tribal Communities of the Jeypore Tract of Orissa—India

Equator Initiative Partners:

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IUCN - The World Conservation Union
The Nature Conservancy
Television Trust for the Environment
United Nations Foundation
United Nations Development Programme

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