The Power of Local Action

Lessons from 10 Years of the Equator Prize
Background

*Biodiversity for Local Livelihoods* – a collaboration between the Equator Initiative, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UNDP-implemented GEF-Small Grants Programme

...led to the Equator Initiative case studies project
The Power of Local Action

- Summarizes trends identified across case studies
- Seeks to offer insight into the dynamics of community-based action for environment and development
- Not all of these lessons are necessarily new, but Equator Prize winners may offer unique perspectives
- Due to be launched during the CBD COP 11 (October, Hyderabad)
Who wins the Equator Prize?

- Community-based organizations (CBOs)
  - Indigenous groups (60%)
  - Women’s groups (12%)
  - Community enterprises (50%)

- Meta-associations (producer groups, umbrella organizations, federations)

- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intermediary support organisations for CBOs

- State-sponsored programmes in which local communities are the main actors
Lesson 1: Local collective action provides a unique lens on sustainable development

- Environmental threats, primarily from large-scale extractive industries
- Service gaps or institutional failures
- A lack of legal entitlements or empowerment, including tenure insecurity
- The desire to take advantage of new opportunities in enterprise
CoopeTárcoles, Costa Rica

Artisanal fishing community’s livelihoods faced twin threats of commercial shrimp trawling and tourism development
Lesson 2: The social strand must come first

- Conflict resolution and peace-building
- Community and personal empowerment, fostering group independence, self-reliance and agency
- Political and legal empowerment
- Accumulated social capital to draw from in tackling other collective problems
Support Group for Conservation and Sustainable Development Initiatives (CACID), Cameroon

Conflict resolution between pastoralists, farmers, and fishing communities over use of land and resources in the Waza Logone floodplain
Lesson 3: Action for the environment will often produce development gains

- Building local ‘green economies’
- Redefining ecosystem productivity
- Bringing improved market access
- Developing new skills and providing access to new technologies
- Stimulating investments in local infrastructure
- Positioning communities for new opportunities, such as payment for ecosystem services schemes
Phu My Lepironia, Viet Nam

Secondary processing of *Lepironia* grass has redefined productivity of grassland in Mekong Delta
Lesson 4: Community empowerment enhances conservation efforts

- Management and monitoring of key wildlife species
- Invasive species eradication
- Management of protected areas (co-management and ICCAs)
- Preservation of genetic diversity, often as a facet of preserving cultural heritage
- Ecosystem restoration
Sepik Wetlands Management Initiative, Papua New Guinea

Sustainable crocodile harvesting and invasive species eradication in middle and upper Sepik
Lesson 5: Community-based action delivers the MDGs

• Investments in education and health infrastructure

• Mainstreaming messages on health, gender equality etc. in environmental communication

• Service delivery to fill gaps in state provision

• Empowerment of marginalized social groups
Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha, Bangladesh

Uses floating schools, health clinics, and agricultural training centres to bring services to riverbank communities in floodplain areas.
Association Songtaab-Yalgré, Burkina Faso

Grew from a women’s literacy group to a shea nut butter cooperative
Lesson 6: There is strength in the fusion of the modern and traditional

- Reintroduction of traditional resource management systems, backed by modern enforcement
- Value-added processing and marketing using traditional resources and modern processing techniques
- Seed banks that preserve genetic diversity
- New markets for medicinal plants which utilize local knowledge to meet modern demand for natural health products
Guassa-Menz, Ethiopia

Reintroduction of the traditional *Qero* system for grassland management
Lesson 7: Communication is a powerful agent of behavior change

- Peer-to-peer exchange and knowledge networks
- Project sites as ‘centers of excellence’
- Extension services, “train the trainers” approaches
- Culturally appropriate communication strategies
- Innovative uses of media and technology
- Participatory needs assessments
- Youth and child engagement
Smallholders Foundation, Nigeria

Reaching 250,000 smallholder farmers with agricultural information through farm radio
Lesson 8: Land tenure security and property rights are essential

- Partnering with local government in recognition of local resource management efforts
- National policies and legislation that provide for formal legal recognition of collective property rights and claims to customary lands
- Advocacy for improved tenure security
Centre for Empowerment and Resource Development, Philippines

Works with barangay officials to secure locally-managed fish sanctuaries for fisherfolk and women’s organisations.
Lesson 9: Local good governance exists

- Reliance on strong individual leadership
- Establishment of mechanisms for leadership transition
- Inclusion of marginalized or under-represented sectors of society in membership
- Inclusion of traditional authorities in governance structures
Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary, Ghana

Combines local Wala and Birifor tribal hierarchies with a democratic governance system for 17 villages
Lesson 10: Scaling of success is possible and can bring landscape-level change

- Quantitative scaling
- Functional scaling
- Organizational scaling
- Political scaling

Figure 2. Growth of the Fiji Locally-Managed Marine Area Network (Fiji, Indonesia, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and the Solomon Islands), 2000-2010
Village of Andavadoaka, Madagascar

Successful experiment in no-take zones for octopus harvesting expanded from Andavadoaka to 25 villages along south-west coast
Lesson 11: Partnerships matter

- Multiple and diverse partnerships are better
- Partnerships do not necessarily diminish autonomy
- Partners can increase access to markets, technology and specialized skills
- Research and monitoring
- Small and well-targeted investments can bring big results
- Private sector
- Governments (local and national)
Pred Nai, Thailand

Partnered with government agencies to launch a coastal network of community-based training centres for mangrove conservation
Lesson 12: Local innovation breeds adaptation and resilience

- The result of social, economic, and environmental processes
- Innovation and adaptation
- Solving local problems with local resources, providing new perspectives on chronic problems
- Ability to endure through failures and setbacks on the road to success
- Embedded resilience rooted in local capacity
Trowel Development Foundation, Philippines

Tie-crab method increases productivity and mitigates effects of flooding
Thank you!

oliver.hughes@undp.org
www.equatorinitiative.org