



FRANCE-IUCN  
PARTNERSHIP  
NATURE AND  
DEVELOPMENT



IUCN/WCS/UNDP/Government of France  
Side Event during the High-Level Political Forum 2017  
**“Investing in Ecosystems to Benefit the World’s Poorest”**  
Thursday, 13 July 2017, 8:15-9:30 a.m., Conference Room 7, UNHQ

This side event, entitled *“Investing in Ecosystems to Benefit the World’s Poorest,”* was organized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of France as part of the 2017 IUCN/WCS Knowledge Dialogue Series. These Knowledge Dialogues are designed to stimulate discussion among UN officials and other stakeholders around key sustainable development challenges on the international agenda.

Conserving and protecting intact and healthy ecosystems is a monumental challenge in the face of pressures from economic growth, spread of industrial agriculture, mining and human population increase. The multiple services provided by intact ecosystems are rarely monetized and significantly undervalued relative to resource extraction and other activities which result in severe degradation. As a result, despite their economic, ecological, and cultural significance, ecosystem services are being degraded and lost at unprecedented rates around the world, leading to food and water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and increasing pressures on the world’s most marginalized and poorest people, which the 2030 Agenda recognizes. However, the decisions and actions which lead to severe ecosystem degradation are often beyond the control of these poor and marginalized communities and they lack the means to invest in conserving and restoring these ecosystems that are vital to their well-being. This side event aimed to highlight the values of ecosystem services and explore innovative approaches to mobilizing and allocating financial capital for conservation investment.

The Permanent Representative of France, H.E. François Delattre, provided the welcome address for the event, stressing that the protection of ecosystems makes a lot of economic sense. He mentioned that France’s President believes we need a global environmental pact enshrining main principles underpinning global environmental protection. John Robinson, the Executive Vice President of Conservation and Science for WCS and Vice President & Councillor of North America and the Caribbean for IUCN, provided opening remarks, showing the benefits of ecosystem services and the consequences of the human footprint in ecosystem degradation and unsustainable resource use. He also highlighted several market mechanisms for sustaining ecosystem services, such as Ibis Rice, which is sold at a premium to reward Cambodian farmers for protecting wetlands, and REDD. Panelist Elizabeth Bennett, Vice President of Species Conservation for WCS, echoed the value that ecosystems provide to the world’s population, including as a critical source of food for the rural poor, and addressed the negative impacts that logging roads cause on local wildlife and the food security of poor communities. Uchita de Zoysa, Sustainable Development Advisor for the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife of the Government of Sri Lanka, spoke of Sri Lanka’s commitment to transforming its national policy framework and overcoming institutional fragmentation in order to achieve the sustainable development goals.

Moderator, Frank Hawkins, Director of the IUCN North America office, then opened the panel discussion on how public and private finance can be creatively combined towards nature conservation efforts and how financial products can be structured in a way which attracts institutional and other private investors to activities which yield a combination of conservation, social benefits, and financial returns. Nik Sekhran, Director of Sustainable Development of the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support of UNDP, highlighted UNDP’s Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) and stressed the need to think critically on how conservation investments are made as biodiversity is a semi-public good whose full value is not being internalized in decision making. He also expressed the immediate need for an insurance mechanism for these ecosystems, meaning protected areas, while global development continues to change to a sustainable model. John Tobin-de la Puente, Professor of Practice at Cornell University, then spoke on the ongoing work of the Coalition for Private Investment in Conservation (CPIC), whose founding members include IUCN, Credit Suisse, Cornell University and the Nature Conservancy and which aims to bring together financial institutions and NGOs to devise appropriate and innovative pathways for conservation

investment. CPIC was launched at the 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress to resolve the main obstacles to conservation investment: high perception of risk and the small scale of current investment opportunities. Concluding remarks were given by David O'Connor, the Permanent Observer of IUCN to the United Nations, who pointed out that while conservation investment needs to be substantially scaled up the estimated investment needs are a tiny fraction of the total available pool of institutional investors' assets under management. He stressed the importance of the public sector in directing and leveraging private investment for conservation and sustainable development.