



# Analysis

## The growth of capacity in IUCN in Asia

**IUCN**  
The World Conservation Union

Anne Rademacher

*A case study prepared for the project 'Capacity, Change and Performance'*

**Discussion Paper No 57M**

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# Study of Capacity, Change and Performance

## Notes on the methodology

*The lack of capacity in low-income countries is one of the main constraints to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Even practitioners confess to having only a limited understanding of how capacity actually develops. In 2002, the chair of Govnet, the Network on Governance and Capacity Development of the OECD, asked the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) in Maastricht, the Netherlands to undertake a study of how organisations and systems, mainly in developing countries, have succeeded in building their capacity and improving performance. The resulting study focuses on the endogenous process of capacity development - the process of change from the perspective of those undergoing the change. The study examines the factors that encourage it, how it differs from one context to another, and why efforts to develop capacity have been more successful in some contexts than in others.*

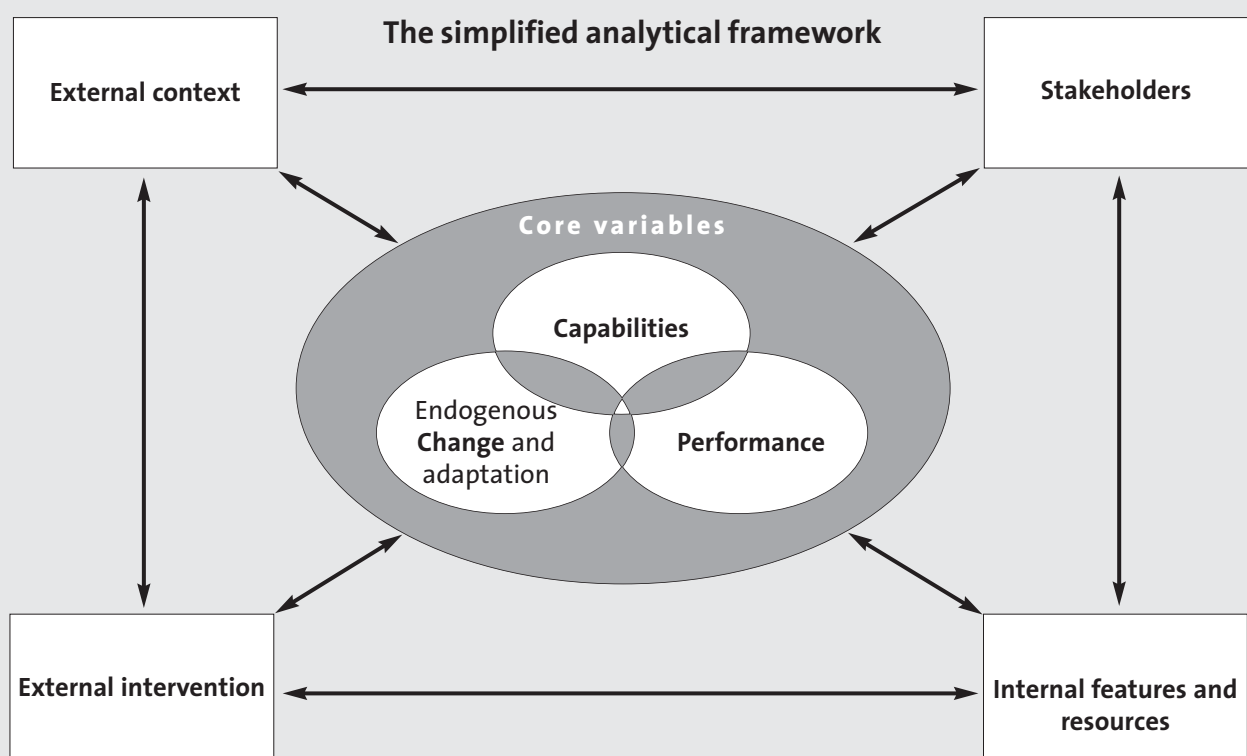
*The study consists of about 20 field cases carried out according to a methodological framework with seven components, as follows:*

- **Capabilities:** *How do the capabilities of a group, organisation or network feed into organisational capacity?*
- **Endogenous change and adaptation:** *How do processes of change take place within an organisation or system?*
- **Performance:** *What has the organisation or system accomplished or is it now able to deliver? The focus here is on assessing the effectiveness of the process of capacity development rather than on impact, which will be apparent only in the long term.*

- **External context:** *How has the external context - the historical, cultural, political and institutional environment, and the constraints and opportunities they create - influenced the capacity and performance of the organisation or system?*
- **Stakeholders:** *What has been the influence of stakeholders such as beneficiaries, suppliers and supporters, and their different interests, expectations, modes of behaviour, resources, interrelationships and intensity of involvement?*
- **External interventions:** *How have outsiders influenced the process of change?*
- **Internal features and key resources:** *What are the patterns of internal features such as formal and informal roles, structures, resources, culture, strategies and values, and what influence have they had at both the organisational and multi-organisational levels?*

*The outputs of the study will include about 20 case study reports, an annotated review of the literature, a set of assessment tools, and various thematic papers to stimulate new thinking and practices about capacity development. The synthesis report summarising the results of the case studies will be published in 2005.*

*The results of the study, interim reports and an elaborated methodology can be consulted at [www.capacity.org](http://www.capacity.org) or [www.ecdpm.org](http://www.ecdpm.org). For further information, please contact Ms Heather Baser ([hb@ecdpm.org](mailto:hb@ecdpm.org)).*



# **The growth of capacity in IUCN in Asia**

**Anne Rademacher and the IUCN in Asia Senior Management Team**



*A case study prepared for the project 'Capacity, Change and Performance'*

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# Acknowledgements

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## Terminology

Following Morgan (2005), this study understands '*capacity*' as the ability to perform, or to create or deliver value. As a concept, capacity refers to the potential to act, as opposed to '*performance*', which refers to the execution or implementation of some task. To assess capacity is, therefore, to consider the overall ability of a system to perform. '*Capability*', by comparison, refers to a collective ability to do a specific task, such as learning. Finally, '*competence*' refers to individual ability or mastery.

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## Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARD	Asia Regional Directorate
ARO	Asia Regional Office
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AWG	Asia Working Group
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DGIS	Directorate General for Development Cooperation, the Netherlands
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ELG	Ecosystem and Livelihood Group
GEF	Global Environment Facility
MRC	Mekong River Commission
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ICIMOD	International Center for Integrated Mountain Development
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature - the World Conservation Union
IUCN-P	International Union for the Conservation of Nature Pakistan
PEP	Pakistan Environment Programme
SAARC	South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation
SACEP	South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

## Summary

This study explores the growth of capacity in IUCN in Asia over the period from its inception in 1995 to early 2005, with the aim of broadly assessing how capacity was built, maintained and strengthened over that period. This regional component of IUCN—the World Conservation Union employs 445 staff members who work in partnership with 136 governmental and non-governmental members to focus on the conservation and rehabilitation of landscapes, ecosystems, habitats and species in Asia. In the process, IUCN in Asia aims to promote sustainable natural resource management and equitable, sustainable livelihoods within and among nations, communities and gender groups.

In the first several decades of its existence, the management of the global IUCN programme was highly centralised. The effort to create an Asia Regional Programme followed a global directive to decentralise and regionalise that was issued in the mid-1990s. A regionalised IUCN was expected to be more responsive to its membership, more financially sound and sustainable, and more likely to realise IUCN's overarching goals through regionally sensitive approaches.

The 23 countries of Asia present specific challenges and opportunities to an organisation like IUCN. The political, cultural and ecological complexity of the region creates a highly specific context in which managers worked to build an Asia Regional Programme within IUCN.

This report recounts, largely in their own words, senior managers' descriptions of the process of forming a regional manifestation of IUCN. It reviews the kinds of managerial thinking and approaches that went into creating the regional programme, and highlights a strategy for change that combined formal, documented plans with a parallel process of highly flexible daily management practice.

The study examines how informants characterised the role of leadership, collective strategic thinking, and an established base country programme as they reflected on the rapid growth of capacity in IUCN in Asia. It pays particular attention to the cultivation of regional coherence, describing the key principles and structures through which capacity and coherence were encouraged. These include the Asia Working

Group/Asia Regional Directorate, the practice of co-location, the establishment of unique positions, the use of information-sharing networks, and an ongoing process of reassessment and change that continues at this writing.

While certain aspects of the trajectory of capacity development in IUCN in Asia resemble that of many private transnational organisations, there is a uniqueness to IUCN in Asia's management culture and commitment that defies quick categorisation, and instead is best represented through the extended quotations presented in this report.





# 1. IUCN in Asia: the context and the challenge

## 1.1 IUCN: a global union

Since its inception in 1948, IUCN-the World Conservation Union has brought together scientists, environmental experts and policy makers in a global alliance to promote the conservation of nature. Worldwide, the IUCN network presently includes 76 member states, 111 government agencies, 720 NGOs, 35 affiliates and over 10,000 experts and scientists from 181 countries. IUCN is unique in that it combines both governmental and non-governmental organisations in its membership, an aspect of the organisation that is considered essential to the effective promotion of IUCN's vision of 'a just world that values and conserves nature'.

IUCN's conservation goals include the mitigation of species extinction, and the restoration and maintenance of ecosystem integrity. Its mission is 'to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature, and ensure that the use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable'.<sup>1</sup>

Although this mission is global, the scope of IUCN activities ranges from local and national to regional and global. The IUCN network is therefore organised to facilitate programmatic efforts at multiple scales. While a global headquarters and individual country programmes have existed for years, it is only relatively recently in the history of IUCN that a concerted effort has been made to build and empower institutional components at the *regional* level in Asia.

## 1.2 Conservation in the Asia Region

Practising conservation at a regional scale presents particular challenges, and the Asia context shapes those challenges in specific ways. Asia is home to approximately 3.4 billion people - over half the world's population - and produces nearly one-third of the world's economic output. Its human population is expected to grow to 4.2 billion by 2025, with the bulk of that growth concentrated in India, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh - all countries in which IUCN has members and offices. Along with population growth, the region expects dramatic increases in the demand for goods and services, and changes in consumption and livelihood patterns that have the potential to have substantial impacts on natural resources and on the environment.

Asian ecosystems support more than half of the world's biodiversity, but they are far from being managed in a sustainable or equitable manner everywhere in the region. The integrity, productivity and diversity of many key ecosystems in Asia have eroded significantly, with profound effects that are at once social and environmental. The region's freshwater resources are under considerable stress from depletion and pollution, forest cover is being lost and degraded, and key ecosystems and their associated biodiversity are vanishing or being adversely affected by a wide range of factors.

The conservation challenges faced in Asia are embedded in growing socioeconomic disparities. Although the region has witnessed unprecedented economic growth in recent years, that growth is highly uneven. While Japan and Singapore have relatively high ratings on the Human Development Index and the Well-being of Nations index,<sup>2</sup> for instance, other Asian countries, such as Nepal, Cambodia and Bangladesh, are among the poorest and least developed in the world. Internal political unrest in countries like Nepal, or regional geopolitical tensions, such as between India and Pakistan, further complicate the social and environmental scenario in parts of Asia.

China and India have made, and will continue to make, a substantial ecological footprint in the region. Both are emerging as key global economic powers, and both depend on natural resources that are derived from ecosystems with processes and parameters that reach far beyond national boundaries. Addressing ecosystem and livelihood concerns in this

### Notes

- 1 See IUCN (2005) Statutes of 5 October 1948, revised 24 November 2004, and Regulations revised 16 November 2004.
- 2 The Human Development Index measures a country's achievements in three aspects of human development: longevity, knowledge and standard of living. Longevity is measured by life expectancy at birth; knowledge is measured by a combination of the adult literacy rate and the combined gross primary, secondary, and tertiary enrolment ratio; and standard of living is measured by GDP per capita. The measures of human development used in the 'Well-being of Nations' include indicators of wealth and education, as well as measures of freedom, governance, peace, order, education, communication infrastructure and basic services. These are intended to give a more accurate portrayal of human wellbeing.

context requires a regional approach that works across and among the many diverse and complex nation-states in Asia.

IUCN in Asia takes as fundamental the proposition that where economic growth is strong in the region, it cannot persist without the implementation of more sustainable management practices in both environmental and livelihood terms. Likewise, in places where economic growth is weak, it cannot be effectively encouraged without attention to issues of ecological and social sustainability.

The biodiversity of Asia is matched by rich cultural diversity, a vast array of traditions and histories that form an intricate tapestry of languages, religious practices and identities. These differences testify to the variety of human experience that is at once a source of regional pride and regional tensions.

Governance systems in Asia are often ill equipped to adequately address socioeconomic and ecological stresses, and a general lack of accountability or resolve has allowed many problems to escalate. Political tensions linked to long-standing rivalries, such as between India and Pakistan, and pressures from the international community, such as those applied to China, create a distinct dynamism, and at times instability, in the region.

In the unique ecological, cultural, and political context of Asia, IUCN in Asia seeks to conserve and rehabilitate ecosystems, habitats and species; to use and manage natural resources on an equitable and sustainable basis within and among nations, communities and gender groups; and to develop a dynamic, sustainable organisation that is effectively managed to pursue IUCN's mission. Implicit in the mission is the goal of strengthening IUCN membership in the region.

#### **IUCN goals for Asia**

- Landscapes, ecosystems, habitats and species are conserved and rehabilitated.
- Natural resources are used and managed on an equitable and sustainable basis within and among nations, communities and gender groups.
- IUCN in Asia operates as a dynamic, effective and sustainable organisation pursuing successfully the mission of IUCN in Asia.

This study concentrates on the goal of developing a dynamic, sustainable organisation that is poised to bridge the global and the local conservation aspirations of IUCN in Asia.

### **1.3 Constituency in the Asia Region: members and partners**

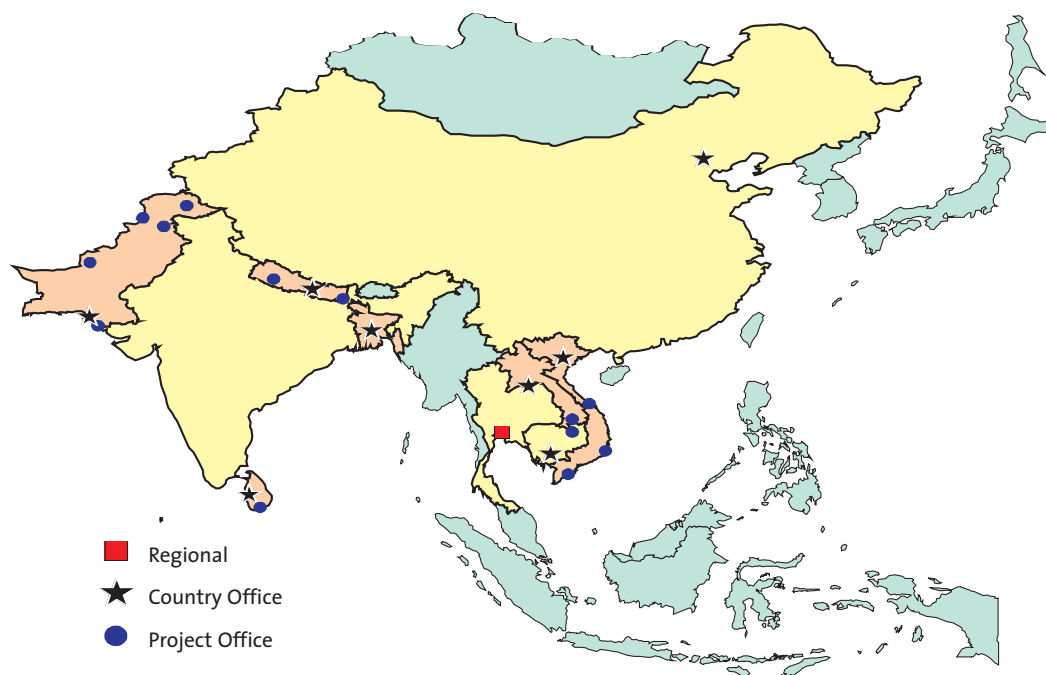
IUCN has 136 members in 17 of the 23 countries in the Asia Region (see Appendix). Members may be states (generally represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the ministry concerned with the environment), government agencies (those dealing with forests, wildlife, parks, or science and technology, for instance), NGOs (ranging from small grassroots level groups to larger national, regional and global players), educational and research institutions, and regional and global organisations.

IUCN partners at the global, regional, national and local levels provide financial support and assistance in project implementation. Funding arrangements are sometimes flexible, allowing IUCN in Asia to test new approaches, and maintain its innovation and creativity. The sources of funding available to IUCN in Asia are:

- general programme allocation from IUCN Headquarters in Gland, Switzerland. These funds are unrestricted and can be used for any purpose in the region;
- programme restricted funds, also made available from IUCN Headquarters, for use in specific programmes defined by Headquarters;
- project income; and
- programme and country framework agreements, which are restricted to country or thematic outputs.

**Figure 1. IUCN Secretariat: presence in Asia**

Country programmes: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.



#### 1.4 Activities of IUCN in Asia

IUCN in Asia is composed of seven technical programmes: biodiversity, environmental economics, environmental law, forests, marine and coastal, protected areas, and water and wetlands. Since January 2003, these programmes have been organised as regional Ecosystem and Livelihood Groups (ELGs). These groups are organised in two clusters, each with a pan-Asian mandate, and consisting of a combination of ecosystem-based, socio-economic, and cross-cutting components. One cluster is located in Colombo, Sri Lanka (biodiversity, environmental economics, marine and coastal), while the other is based in Bangkok, Thailand (environmental law, forests, protected areas, water and wetlands).

The aim of this approach to organising IUCN's regional technical programmes is to better reflect and deliver an ecosystem and livelihoods approach to nature conservation, one that is based on simultaneously improving socioeconomic and environmental status, with a focus on the poorest groups.

The Asia Regional Office, which houses the IUCN in Asia Secretariat, is located in Bangkok, Thailand. It includes the Regional Director's office, corporate services, and core central functions, and provides coordination, integration, and support for the region. It also coordinates membership and constituency-related matters in close collaboration with the membership unit at IUCN Headquarters in Gland.

##### Ecosystem and Livelihood Groups

*Group 1* (Bangkok, Thailand): Environmental Law, Forests, Water and Wetlands

*Group 2* (Colombo, Sri Lanka): Biodiversity, Environmental Economics, Marine and Coastal Protected Areas

**Examples of IUCN in Asia projects**

**Coastal and Marine Resource Management and Poverty Reduction in Asia**

Multi-country project: Sri Lanka, Maldives, India and Pakistan  
Value: USD 600,000

**Mountain Areas Conservancy Project**

Location: Pakistan  
Value: USD 10,350,000

**Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Project**

Multi-country: Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam  
Value: USD 14,000,000

**Sustainable Utilisation of Non-Timber Forest Products in Vietnam**

Location: Vietnam  
Value: EURO 1,581,000

**Integrating Gender, Poverty, and Social Equity in Natural Resources Management**

Location: Nepal  
Value: USD 70,000

**1.5 People and performance**

IUCN has 445 staff members in the Asia Region, representing 21 nationalities, of whom 82% are located in country programmes in the region, and 17% are allocated to the Regional Office or its ELG programmes. While the total number of staff in the Asia Region remained basically static, between 400-500, in the period 1995 to 2005, the number of country programmes has effectively doubled, and the portfolio of the region grew dramatically.

IUCN in Asia emerged at a time when environmental funding in general was shrinking. Yet the organi-

sation saw a steady growth in its budget; in 2004 its total turnover was approximately USD 15 million, which had grown from about USD 2 million in 1995. The programme has also become considerably more complex. This would seem to indicate that through the recrafting of structures, and the re-profiling of staff competencies, the organisation has increased its capacity.

One means for assessing the growth of capacity in the Asia Region is to note that it has recently been awarded several global projects, including a European Union project on Timber and Governance, a Protected Areas project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and global programmes in economics.

**1.6 IUCN in Asia as a case study**

This study focuses on capacity building in IUCN in Asia over the period from 1995 to early 2005, with the aim of assessing how capacity was built, maintained and strengthened over that period.

The study was commissioned as part of a larger project on organisational capacity, change and performance, coordinated by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM). The IUCN in Asia regional programme was selected as one of 17 case studies analysed in this project. Cases were chosen according to several criteria, among them the assumption that some success at developing capacity had been achieved.

The guiding questions for the ECDPM study address both the practices through which organisational capacity is developed, and the ideas that guide those practices. The researchers are particularly interested in the endogenous process of capacity development - that is, the processes of change from the perspective of those undergoing the change. This includes factors that encourage capacity devel-

IUCN in Asia budget data (USD million)			
	2005	2003	2001
Signed projects	68,91	46,32	34,46
Projects in negotiation	26,47	40,22	52,73
Projects in planning stages	127,87	123,15	62,38
<b>Total</b>	<b>223,36</b>	<b>209,70</b>	<b>149,58</b>

opment, and the question of why efforts to develop capacity succeed in some contexts better than in others.<sup>3</sup>

A total of 28 consultations were conducted with key informants from IUCN in Asia, IUCN Headquarters, and among development professionals outside IUCN but familiar with the regional programme. Eighteen of these were semi-structured interviews conducted in person, while 10 were administered in the form of a written questionnaire. Extensive archival work was undertaken to supplement the interview findings, and a preliminary report on the case study was presented to IUCN in Asia regional staff members in a workshop in March 2005.

Since the ECDPM study takes a particular interest in processes of change from the perspective of those undergoing it, this report draws heavily on the content of individual interviews and written comments provided by several senior managers. This approach is used to understand, through the direct words and insights of those who formed and nurtured the organisation, the experiences, thought processes, and challenges through which it developed its capacity. In particular, this case study focuses on building a *regional* organisation - one that sought to bring together largely autonomous country programmes as part of a unified, coherent regional organisational entity.

It is important to note that while this study emphasises the growth of capacity at IUCN in Asia, respondents often framed their discussions of success in terms of capacity development that has yet to be realised. While this report should be read as a review of successes, then, one should also bear in mind that no staff member expressed the opinion that capacity development in IUCN in Asia has been fully achieved; rather, it was viewed as an ongoing process, and a challenge always unfolding - one that remains at the forefront of IUCN in Asia's organisational consciousness.

The research for this case study commenced, by coincidence, in the immediate aftermath of the Asian tsunami of 26 December 2004. In-person interviews with senior managers were undertaken in the Karachi sub-regional office of IUCN in Asia, which is housed in the main office of the IUCN Pakistan country programme. The Asia Regional Director, the Head of organisational development,

and the Head of regional emerging programmes were in residence at the Karachi office at that time. While it was not always explicit, coordination efforts for a long-term response to the tsunami by IUCN in Asia formed a constant backdrop for all meetings and discussions that took place during the interview research. As will be discussed later in the report, the challenges presented by the tsunami evidenced both capacity development within IUCN in Asia, and areas where capacity development was needed. This study, then, was undertaken in a historical moment that illustrated both the dynamism and unpredictability of the region, and the constant, process-oriented nature of capacity development at IUCN in Asia.

Following a series of in-person interviews, structured questionnaires were sent to senior managers in IUCN in Asia, IUCN Headquarters, and to selected development professionals familiar with the work and capacity development of the organisation. The informant pool from which data for this study are drawn, therefore, was intentionally selected according to their involvement in, and knowledge of, the growth of capacity in IUCN in Asia. Furthermore, the study was designed and conducted internally, as a collaborative effort among several senior managers, assisted by one external consultant. This self-reflective approach to exploring capacity development is consistent with the goal of ECDPM's Study on Capacity, Change and Performance, which, as noted above, is particularly interested in processes of change from the perspective of those undergoing it.

Through the words and insights of senior managers at IUCN in Asia, this report focuses on a specific capacity development process, rather than strictly on capacity itself. While there is a brief discussion of how various senior managers think about the meaning of capacity in the section to follow, the overall discussion is less concerned with solidifying a singular definition of capacity than with *profiling a capacity development path* for a specific organisation.

### 1.7 Assessing IUCN in Asia's capacity today

As noted above, the interview research for this case study was undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the Asian tsunami. It was in this completely unforeseen, multinational moment of profound

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#### Notes

<sup>3</sup> See Morgan *et al.* (2005) *The Study on Capacity, Change, and Performance: Interim Report*.

natural and socioeconomic change that the contemporary capacity of IUCN in Asia became immediately apparent.

In order to formulate a quick and thorough response - by a global organisation to a regional crisis - IUCN in Asia required functional and efficient information-sharing networks, and the flexibility of individual staff members to compile and synthesise the massive inputs of information flowing across those networks. IUCN in Asia's rapid reaction to the tsunami evidenced capacity, while at the same time it stretched and challenged it.

In the interviews in the weeks following the tsunami, informants were asked first to reflect on the question of how they would describe the level of capacity of IUCN in Asia today. Respondents repeatedly referred to the unfolding tsunami tragedy and offered that a few years ago such a situation might have paralysed the regional programme. Instead, the programme was functioning, albeit challenged, to try to discern and formulate a clear, long-term plan of action, and to coordinate

### **IUCN responds to the Asian tsunami**

IUCN's Director General Achim Steiner established a task force to ensure that IUCN's efforts to assist with the relief and rehabilitation work following the Asian tsunami are effective. It aims to assist national and international efforts to cope with the disaster in both the short and the longer term. In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, IUCN supported emergency relief efforts, particularly in Sri Lanka, through members, staff and projects, by providing human resources, transport and advice to the affected governments.

After the emergency relief efforts provided the basic needs of drinking water, shelter, and food, as well as the reconstruction of basic infrastructure, attention began to shift to the longer-term need to rebuild shattered communities and restore the ecosystems upon which so many coastal livelihoods depend. It is in the arena of linking livelihoods and ecosystems that IUCN has the most to offer. Activities have included humanitarian efforts, an IUCN appeal for the affected regions, and technical advice for the rehabilitation effort.

that plan across multiple affected country programmes.

Although respondents could point to the tsunami response for evidence of capacity, each seemed to have a slightly different definition of precisely what capacity means. One interview respondent described capacity as:

'To me, capacity is fundamentally to do with both having the quality and quantity of staff and collective organisational ability to address IUCN's core and existing areas and demands, and to adapt and expand to deal with new areas and demands. The meaning of capacity thus goes beyond solely looking at current knowledge, staff and abilities; it also involves some degree of potential to incorporate new knowledge, staff and abilities. The latter depends on the former.'

Another said,

'In the simplest sense capacity is the ability to perform. This is derived from a definition of purpose, legitimacy or mandate to pursue that purpose, the skills required to do them, the [physical] resources needed to mobilise the skills available or developed, and the systems [rules, procedures, accountability, rewards and the like] that enable or disable carrying out the mandate.'

Still a third perspective defined capacity as

'... a complex, forever changing approach which determines the *potential* of an individual, or in our case, an institution, to address problems, meet challenges, and overcome hurdles in moving towards a vision and [pursue] strategies. It is constantly changing, and may often take a downturn, in which case its potential to revive itself demonstrates its resilience.'

Although perceptions of the meaning of capacity itself, and metrics for measuring it, differed among respondents, most agreed that, over the course of its development, IUCN in Asia had witnessed a rapid and effective development of capacity. This suggestion, as mentioned previously, was usually accompanied by a reflective discussion of enduring gaps in capacity, and the need for continued capacity growth to address those gaps.

When asked how she would characterise the capacity of IUCN in Asia today, one senior manager replied,

'Unrecognisable compared to what it used to be! It is now a recognised regional organisation. When our membership thinks of IUCN now, it recognises that there is a region. They feel part of a global organisation, yes, but they also identify with the secretariat on a regional basis.'

Others emphasised both the progress realised thus far, and a sense that capacity building is continuous:

'The IUCN in Asia region as a whole, if I think of what it was in 1999 or 2000, with individual "one-man show" thematic programmes, and then I think of what it is now, with the Ecosystems and Livelihood Groups working on the real issues of integrating livelihoods and ecosystems, on having a balance of technical and managerial capacity, on continuing to work toward a regional identity as well as developing the capacity of country programmes. IUCN in Asia is now in a position to make an impact - but you cannot impact if you remain small. That is the main reason we have grown, and that we wish to continue to grow.'

One respondent linked capacity growth to adaptability itself, the organisational characteristic perhaps most critical in a dynamic cultural, ecological and political context like Asia:

'I would say that IUCN's capacity has grown manifestly over recent years, particularly in the more dynamic aspect of capacity. The organisation's (and its staff's) skills sets have expanded. But perhaps more important, their ability to respond to change, and to incorporate new areas and skills into their portfolio and staff base as required, has increased. In terms of core capacities, it is clear that IUCN in Asia still has notable gaps. But there is the capacity to recognise these gaps, and to at least start to work to fill them.'

The Regional Director emphasised that capacity building is ongoing, and that it can catalyse further capacity development:

'We have the capacity today to take on the tasks and challenges that face us. By and large our

capacity is keeping up with the requirements of the programme. But every time we meet the goal, it is my job to raise the bar. And I do that for myself as much as I do it for the staff. ... As the programme grows, and we raise the bar, so too does capacity build even more. And it's across the board, from secretaries to country heads.'

While the tsunami response might be taken as the most immediate evidence of, as well as challenge to, IUCN in Asia's capacity development, informants also pointed to another recent event that had made the level of capacity development apparent both inside the organisation, and to outsiders interacting with it. In November 2004, a month before the research for this case study commenced, IUCN hosted the Third IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Bangkok.<sup>4</sup>

Elaborating on how the WCC had showcased IUCN in Asia's capacity both to its constituents and to its own staff, one senior manager reflected,

'I think the Congress showed us two things. First, we worked with each other, we created small teams without really realising what a huge effort it was, and it fell into place. We worked in a very integrated, almost seamless fashion - of course we had internal hiccups, ups and downs, but that meant that the teaming process, which we had started with the reorganisation, really worked. We were able to do it not only internally within the region, but also with the global team. So it proved to us that the people are working, the systems are working, and our spirit is working.'

The performance of IUCN in Asia during the WCC was not just a mirror on the organisation's own capacity, however; it was also a catalyst through which its members and partners developed new expectations. She continued:

'I think [the Congress posed] a larger challenge to us than ever before; we have met expectations, and ... we now have to work even better with our constituency, our membership, and our commission members. ... After this Congress, after a long process of negotiation, IUCN has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Asian Development Bank. Now we will have a national presence in India,<sup>5</sup> and a lot of inter-

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#### Notes

- 4 Over 3500 conservationists, policy makers, funders and community representatives gathered at the 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Bangkok in November 2004 to share ideas and find common ground toward advancing conservation efforts worldwide. Held every four years, the WCC is the venue for IUCN members to set a course of action, and to discuss global approaches to conservation. This Congress was one of the world's largest gatherings of conservationists ever.
- 5 The IUCN-India country programme is in its nascent stages. An MoU between IUCN and the government of India was signed at the 3rd WCC in Bangkok.

esting work that we have started in China,<sup>6</sup> and our ability to hold ministerial roundtables - all these things have just thrown us into a different category, a different league altogether.'

This manager also emphasised that the performance of IUCN in Asia had reinforced in practice the idea of a regional organisation, and even placed it in a position in which others were asking how IUCN in Asia had developed its capacity. She noted that the more the organisation performed, the greater were the expectations that others placed upon it:

'I think the World Conservation Congress also proved to several of our staff that there is a regional identity, and that people are now looking to us for advice - they are asking, how did you do this, how did you set up an office in Bangkok, how do you work across countries, how are you able to transfer resources and skills and capacities from one part of the organisation to the other?'

If capacity has indeed developed at a notable pace, and to a notable degree, in IUCN in Asia, then it is important to understand precisely how this took place. This report now explores the regional programme, and the processes through which it was created and continues to develop.

## 2 Creating a regional programme

### 2.1 Decentralisation and regionalisation

IUCN in Asia is a relatively new organisational component of IUCN. Until the early 1990s, the management of most country programmes was highly centralised, administered from the headquarters in Gland, Switzerland. Like all IUCN country offices, those that were operating in Asia<sup>7</sup> depended on the Gland office to raise funds, sign contracts and administer finances. In a few cases, independent country representatives and support staff managed some country programmes, but the general norm was a concentrated, headquarters-centred approach to managing the global network.

During the early 1990s, however, the international development community began to question the

efficacy of centralised management, and as an alternative promoted decentralisation. The membership of IUCN saw many potential advantages to decentralisation, and formally called for the implementation of an organisational structure that would group individual country programmes into regional clusters. A regionalised IUCN was expected to be more responsive to its membership, more financially sound and sustainable, and more likely to realise IUCN's overarching goals through regionally sensitive approaches.<sup>8</sup>

As the broad organisational directive in IUCN was shifting toward decentralisation and regionalisation, there was recognition by Headquarters, and a simultaneous, growing internal sense among various IUCN country programmes in Asia, of the need to form a regional organisation. Country programmes were witnessing rapid growth and expansion, but at that point there was no regional organisational entity through which that expansion could be broadly coordinated.

In reflecting on the external and internal circumstances that catalysed the formation of IUCN in Asia, one senior manager explained the internal sense of a need for a regional organisation as follows:

'There were regional organisations involved with environmental conservation in Asia, but it was difficult to see their impact. ... There was obviously room for another, and there seemed to be the need. But that may have been more of an intuitive sense; it wasn't determined by doing surveys or anything else. And the opportunity that was given by the regionalisation of IUCN provided an impetus to start looking at how this new con-

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#### Notes

- 6 China became a State member of IUCN in 1996 and a national committee for members was established in 2003. The IUCN Beijing office was established in January 2003. During 2002 and 2003, a number of project development missions were carried out by IUCN, and several areas for collaboration were explored. Programmatically, IUCN is aiming to help its members and partners in China in specific areas of ecosystem management and livelihood support: forest landscape restoration and management; integrated water resources management; and integrated coastal zone management. Support in policy discussions will relate to multilateral environmental agreements, protected area management and World Heritage, and environmental impacts of economic development. IUCN will offer assistance in providing information, strengthening capacity and helping to test approaches on the ground. A strategic situation analysis carried out by IUCN in 2001 identified nine priority provinces, mainly in the west and south of the country, which will be the focus of IUCN assistance during the first years.
- 7 At that time these were Bangladesh, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.
- 8 IUCN General Assemblies 1991, 1994.



struct, within IUCN, could become recognised not just as a conglomeration of country offices or an administrative arrangement within IUCN itself, but as a truly regional manifestation of the institution.'

The journey to realising the internal aspiration to become a 'truly regional manifestation of the institution' began with the formation of a self-administering entity called the Asia Working Group. This group, convened in 1995, began the task of visioning, designing and implementing an Asia Regional Programme. The Asia Working Group, in turn, established the Asia Regional Directorate, which, between 1997 and 2000, oversaw the establishment of an Asia Regional Office in Bangkok, and witnessed the appointment of a regional director.<sup>9</sup> A regional staff was recruited, new regional thematic programmes were developed, and efforts were made to set up new country programmes. The areas of responsibility and authority that were delegated from IUCN Headquarters to the region steadily expanded.

IUCN in Asia developed gradually, then, through a series of entities charged with the formation of the regional programme. But even as it was forming, IUCN's programmatic coverage in Asia, as well as the number of Asian countries in which it was working, continued to grow at an unprecedented rate. By the end of 2001, in the context of this rapid expansion, a need was felt to reassess and reorganise IUCN in Asia. In order to help guide a new phase in the development of IUCN in Asia, two consultants were hired and asked to propose a range of options for reorganising the regional organisation and managing continued change.

During roughly the same period, the Asia Regional Directorate met in Dhaka<sup>10</sup> for one of its regular meetings, which are convened three times per year. During this session, participants undertook an extensive organisational self-assessment, reviewing the regional programme's cultural, structural and systemic strengths and weaknesses. This exercise provided a collective opportunity to discuss IUCN in Asia's capacity development to date, and the direc-

tions in which the organisation could move in order to address key weaknesses.

Among the important strengths identified in this meeting were the organisation's relevance to Asia, and the reach and dynamism of its programmes. The participants expressed their collective desire to maintain flexibility, while at the same time making a wider and deeper impact on development in Asia. They agreed that in order to do that, they would have to carefully manage the rapid expansion, and consequent stresses, that growth was producing for IUCN in Asia's structures, systems and relationships.<sup>11</sup>

The reorganisation process initiated in 2002 still continues,<sup>12</sup> and IUCN in Asia remains on a conscious and self-reflective path toward further capacity development.

## 2.2 Positioning IUCN in Asia

The thinking and action that went into creating the Asia Regional Programme can be traced back to the global IUCN. During the 1990s, IUCN was increasing its involvement in international policy dialogue, and was gradually assuming a role of convener for discussions between members with divergent views on environmental issues.<sup>13</sup>

As international recognition of the strength and role of IUCN grew, it became clear that an Asia Regional Programme that merely coordinated a collection of country programmes would fall far short of the opportunities present in Asia. Thus emerged the key question of what kind of identity IUCN wished to establish with its member governments, network of scientists, and non-governmental members and partners in Asia.

The way that Asian IUCN country programmes developed until 1995 was essentially as national institutions. They were aspects of the global IUCN, but with a Pakistani or Bangladeshi or Vietnamese grounding. While their systems, procedures, programmatic mandates and management reflected those of the global secretariat, country programmes were set up to embody the best of what an environmental organisation in that particular country was capable of producing. The governments of host countries in Asia had a strong sense of ownership and stake in national programmes in a way that the offices of most other multilateral organisations do not. Headed by

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### Notes

9 This was originally a part-time appointment; the Asia Regional Director split her time between her position as Country Representative of IUCN in Pakistan and the Director position in Bangkok.

10 IUCN Asia 2002. ARD Meeting #12 Minutes. Dhaka: 11-13 February 2002.

11 For a list of the strengths and weaknesses identified at the conference, see Jafri and Sattar (2002a).

12 See Jafri (2005a, 2005b).

13 Including issues related to indigenous peoples, genetically modified organisms, and large dams.

national representatives as a matter of policy, the country programmes maximised their effectiveness through the strength of this national identity and national grounding.

The Regional Director of IUCN in Asia described the balance between the global and the national in the Asian country programmes as follows:

'When IUCN begins to work in a new region or country, the office is the diplomatic representational face of the Union. If you see the UNDP office, you know it is representative of UNDP. In IUCN, we go a step further; we also see ourselves as an institution *within* a country and region - as a partner in the environment-development agenda as long as the country needs us. Since members are part of that governance, we see ourselves as institutions helping with the overall development agenda of a given country. Now the UN system would stop there. But IUCN goes further and becomes part of the social fabric of the country, and behaves, when needed, like a civil society organisation. It not only provides a platform to its Asian members, but it also becomes an environment-development voice for Asia. The creative tension is in the need to maintain the balance between the national, regional and global.'

Building the regional organisation of IUCN in Asia from a pre-existing group of well established, locally grounded country programmes, then, presented both challenges and opportunities. Two choices faced those charged with developing the regional programme in Asia: either to take a conventional approach that would maintain a coordinated group of country programmes in the region, but with the functions of the IUCN Headquarters simply transferred to the regional office, or a less conventional approach that would create a truly regional organisation.

Since environmental issues and problems rarely correspond exclusively with national boundaries, the less conventional approach was understood as essential to fulfilling IUCN's mandate in the region. A truly regional institution would allow IUCN to address issues that were transboundary in nature. These include issues related to the large, sub-continental ecosystems that extend across vast swathes of the Asian continent, including the Hindukush-Himalaya, the Mekong, the South China Sea, or the Ganges-Brahmaputra system. IUCN in Asia saw a regional organisation as the only effective option for working

in such ecosystems, and for serving its goals and members in Asia.

But when it came to finding models for the kind of regional institution that IUCN in Asia aspired to be, none were immediately apparent. IUCN in Asia would have to invent its own model. The Regional Director explained,

'... we looked around to see what everyone was doing in Asia - what other organisations could we learn from? What we found, interestingly, was an empty space. We found ASEAN, SAARC, APEC, SACEP; we found thematic sub-regional organisations like MRC and ICIMOD, and we found the UN system: UNDP (with country offices in all UN countries) and some donors who worked at the regional level from their headquarters. The regional bureaus, even for the UN, were based in New York, not in the region itself. None brought the world of civil society and government together in the way that IUCN did. Having found this empty niche, we worked with the idea that IUCN in Asia needed to position itself as a pan-Asian organisation, and in order to do that, we needed to develop an organisational structure that would build on what existed. We needed regional thematic programmes and country programmes as our resource base. We saw that we would have to move people, money and resources - whatever existed - within the parameters of what we were permitted to do. We had to shift from the current practices of individual pockets - country and regional units - to integration and higher levels of thinking. So, what drove us was the goal of positioning IUCN as a working pan-Asian organisation, one that could work across political boundaries and throughout regional ecosystems. Immediately, the canvas moved from being within the then-current comfort zone of IUCN to this great challenge of the vast region.'

Thus IUCN in Asia programmes on biodiversity, forests, water and other issues were established with a pan-Asia brief, and an eye toward the regional picture. The central challenge became the need to balance a decentralised programme of countries and dispersed centres of responsibility, with the integration and capacity to hold it all together at the regional level. As part of this challenge, it was necessary to ensure the interlinkages between the regional office and IUCN Headquarters.

### 2.3 Building a regional institution in a dynamic context

Given the extraordinary challenge of building a truly regional institution, how did capacity develop in IUCN in Asia? Was it a product of the external pressure produced by the directive to decentralise from the IUCN Headquarters in Gland, or was it crafted through internal strategic guidance? Senior managers answered this question by describing a combination of both. Elaborating on the interplay between the two, the Regional Director recounted a vision of the organisation as analogous to an individual species in an ecosystem, the parameters of which are subject to constant change:

'In IUCN in Asia, we live within an ecosystem, the Asia Region. And then within that ecosystem, there are sub-ecosystems, such as countries and other regional programmes. We might think of ourselves, for example, as a frog living in a pond - a large frog, comfortable with its environment, knowledge of the parameters of the pond, the water temperature, and the threats from predators. The frog is comfortable, until one day there's a massive rain, and a flood, and suddenly the frog finds itself living in a lake. The frog is faced with a choice: either to leave that lake and go find another pond, or to consider the lake its new ecosystem, thinking, OK, I'm now a small frog in a big lake, but there is now room to grow. There are new threats, but also new opportunities. The frog needs to adapt if it decides to stay. There is a third option, which I would say is the worst: to stay in the lake but continue to pretend that it's a pond. And those are the options. That second option is where I think most of us in IUCN in Asia were. Yes, our capabilities emerged in response to external pressures. But internal processes of strategic management had to direct the process. We're looking, in a sense, at a pond that's changed to a lake. But our internal strategic management was guided by the sense that we *must* grow and we *must* change.'

Another senior manager elaborated on the sense of an internal need for change, and the overall dynamism of the Asian context within which the regional organisation developed:

'Capacity building cannot take place in an environment that is stress-free. And I am using the word stress deliberately, instead of challenges. The stress has to come with recognition of the

need for change - institutional change, systemic change, or individual change. And that recognition cannot be externally imposed, but external circumstances can raise the need to a level where something has to be done. IUCN in Asia had to change because of external forces - the constant unpredictability, and the fact that we operate in a system which is not enabling. In our countries, environment and development, and the links between ecosystems and people, are not issues that are built into government systems. Added to that, Asia has a very high population, a high percentage of people living below the poverty line, and social indicators that are extremely low. We developed our capacities in response to these external challenges and to a sense of an internal need for change.'

Along with external challenges, external support was also critical. Through their essential financial assistance, advice and an enduring interest in what IUCN was doing in Asia, donors formed an important external catalyst for the creation and development of IUCN in Asia.

The list of donors that have funded IUCN through various field projects, framework agreements, and smaller initiatives is long. All were in some way instrumental to strengthening IUCN in Asia's capacity, highlighting gaps, assisting with processes and models for capacity building, or stimulating debates on what constitutes capacity. IUCN in Asia managers highlighted the contributions of the following specific donor organisations:

*The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)* provided the initial impetus, through its support for the National Conservation Strategy (NCS) in Pakistan, and through its follow-up project, the Pakistan Environment Programme (PEP). The NCS itself was a capacity development effort that brought multiple stakeholders in a very top-down, authoritarian society together to work out a sustainable development agenda for Pakistan. The PEP also forged partnerships between government and non-government institutions. These initiatives provided IUCN with a platform to think through the various connotations of capacity development, to focus on institutional capacity building, and to devise and use methods that ranged from strategic planning to more conventional training programmes. CIDA's sup-

port also enabled IUCN to hire staff with a variety of skills and backgrounds, and they formed the start-up team of what is now IUCN in Asia.

*The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)* provided support to the capacity building process as one that was inclusive, multi-faceted and closely associated with human development systems. The SDC served as development partners to IUCN in Asia, and had a major impact through their programme support, technical advice, debate sessions, concepts of use of knowledge and secondment mechanisms.

*The Norwegian government* provided IUCN with flexibility to use funds on internships, exchange programmes, and secondments, in collaboration with CIDA and the SDC. The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) was key in enabling IUCN to invest in new or emerging areas, to test new partnerships and to respond to unpredictable changes in the external context in which IUCN in Asia was developing.

Through the Royal Netherlands Embassy, *the Dutch and Swedish governments* (DGIS and Swedish International Development Agency, Sida) contributed to capacity building by supporting the exchange of personnel, in the form of interns or junior officers, as they moved from their respective countries into short-term placements in the various offices of IUCN in Asia. This enabled a better understanding of the Asian context within these agencies, and provided IUCN with a group of energetic and bright young people when needed.

While donors form an important external group, it is mainly the members and partners who are served by IUCN in Asia, and who jointly implement its work programme. Members and partners exert major influence through the demands and expectations they hold of IUCN services. Senior managers consulted for this study cited these external expectations as an ongoing source of motivation to improve capacity.

## 2.4 A strategic mindset for change

If IUCN in Asia's capacity developed as a product of external pressures and internal strategic management, then it is critical to understand both the approach to internal management taken by the management team, and the specific strategy they used to build organisational capacity.

In describing how the formation and development of IUCN in Asia was managed, senior managers rarely pointed to the formal documents that outline the growth of the organisation. While these documents, such as the Asia Intersessional,<sup>14</sup> constitute an important set of guidelines and formal plans for the regional organisation, when reflecting on the everyday realities of management, senior managers seemed to rely less on these documents as templates for action, and more on incremental processes characterised first and foremost by flexibility. This does not imply that formal documents were unimportant, but rather highlights a parallel, everyday process of strategic management that could both refer back to formal plans *and* remain highly adaptive. The Regional Director described her strategy as deliberately dynamic:

'I do not have a road map; what I do have is a goal. But having said that, it can change. When we first started building a regional programme, I had a vision that this would be like an ASEAN or a SAARC, but for IUCN in Asia, and it would be a bit like UNDP or the ADB in terms of a regional institution. OK, that's a place to start, but of course IUCN in Asia is not any of these, because it's not governmental, it's not a bank, and it's not a development agency. So that ability to see what the goal actually becomes - how it changes - is also important. And that depends on so many things. ... The whole strength of this programme has been adaptation, continuous adaptation. Yes, we want to be the premier regional institution in Asia when people talk about the environment and development. But we don't want to be the only one, not necessarily even the most important one, depending on the crisis or the nature of the change. What we do want to do is take our place as an equal partner with the others.'

Another senior manager de-emphasised structured long-term plans, and highlighted instead the importance of a strong leader, a flexible staff, the formation of teams and networks, and what she called an

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### Notes

- <sup>14</sup> See Imbach (2004) *IUCN Asia Intersessional Programme 2005-2008*. The IUCN Intersessional Programme is the overall framework and planning tool of the IUCN Commissions and Secretariat.

overall *mindset* that managers sought to disseminate throughout the regional organisation:

'I don't think it [capacity development] happened because we had a five-year strategic plan. Which is what, whenever I go through most management literature, they talk about: ten-year visioning and five-year strategic planning, and three-year planning, and so on. We didn't have any sort of strategic plan whatsoever. What we did have is a very strong leader who had to make a difference when she moved from a country level (IUCN-Pakistan) to the regional level (Asia Regional Director). What she had was a small group of individuals she could talk to and share ideas with, individuals who were able to shift gears very quickly. We in Asia have to be able to work according to priorities that change almost daily, weekly, monthly. So [several] times a day we would hear: person A, this is what needs to happen, can you please quickly put together something; person B, this is what I have heard, can we start doing something along these lines? The ability to just talk informally to ourselves, and quickly put together small working teams that would discuss, contact on email, talk to each other, and come up with some ideas and then take them forward. ... And then what we also had was a good network, and good friends in our global network, with our donors, with our partners and members. So first, we had to have a *mindset*.'

Thus the strategy for change combined formal, documented plans with a parallel process of daily strategic management that required more dynamism than fixed plans, strictly adhered to, can allow. Formal plans could be used as reference points, or for explanations of the institutional vision, but in the daily workings of management they did not always determine practices. Interestingly, among those interviewed for this case study, only one mentioned the Asia Intersessional; all other respondents described the managerial strategy and 'mindset' without referring to formal fixed plans. Thus while one can discern a formal documented structure for building IUCN in Asia, senior managers stressed an additional process - highly adaptive and sensitive to change - that drove capacity development.

## 2.5 The role of leadership

Building IUCN in Asia as a truly regional institution required particular leadership qualities and approaches. Informants for this study emphasised how the Asia Regional Director created an enabling environment for the creative formation of IUCN in Asia, and how she continuously encouraged its rethinking and re-fashioning. While some informants suggested that it was strong leadership that mattered most for capacity development, others emphasised the ways that leadership capacity itself developed in concert with the growth of overall capacity in IUCN in Asia.

When asked to characterise the relative importance of strong leadership in the development of IUCN in Asia's capacity, a management consultant with a long history of working with IUCN in Pakistan and IUCN in Asia replied,

'I think that, minus [strong leadership], the Asia Region would still be a collection of country programmes without an organisation at the regional level. Of course [the Regional Director] brought some people on board who were highly capable, but the leadership was the most important factor driving the expansion. One thing I have learned is that if you don't have a leader in a programme that is in its infancy, people can always retard its growth. It's within human nature [to] become complacent.'

But another senior manager cautioned against assigning too much of the responsibility for capacity development to the leader alone:

'I would hesitate to put either the entire success or the entire failure of the institution onto [the Regional Director]. Over the past five years, she has changed her own capacity for dealing with issues and people, probably for reasons similar to those [with regard to the larger organisation]: external issues and challenges, the need for change, [and her own] internal sense of the need for change. Leaders can bring about change, but the [opposite] is also true. It is the followers who also force change. And if that had not also happened in IUCN in Asia, then we would be having a very different conversation.'

Another senior manager agreed, pointing to the leadership within the 'followership' of senior managers:

'... often [the leadership] is not the most apparent aspect of the group when we meet collectively. It's not the Regional Director who, nine out of ten cases, makes the final decisions. It is the group of people who work with her - they primarily decide what needs to be done. So it's not so much [that we are] followers. She is almost an arbitrator. When the question is between option A or option B, that's when she comes in, and often she gives us the justification for one or the other. So it's not so much about being followers. We don't see ourselves as followers; we see ourselves as colleagues.'

When asked to identify the kinds of leadership qualities that were associated with the growth of capacity at IUCN in Asia, an informant long affiliated with the organisation identified a mix of authority, respectful human relations skills, and genuine support for staff. A senior manager in IUCN described the Regional Director's leadership style by saying,

'I think her leadership is very much based on her agility of mind. She can pick up what is troubling groups of people. She does quick mental inventories, both among staff and on public occasions. She also picks out key strategic points and puts them into context, so people are able to lift themselves out of their immediate problems and worries, so they can see into the future - to the next stage. She often talks about 'getting to the next level' as if the levels themselves are already laid out somehow in her mind. Her long-term vision is very acute. ... One of her weaknesses as a leader, however, is that she assumes that because she finds something easy or possible, it's [due to] a lack of effort if others cannot do it.'

When asked to characterise her own management style, the Regional Director described a conceptual approach that seeks to simultaneously engage issues at both the micro-level, and in their broader context:

'My management style ... is a bit of two things which are in some ways contradictory, in some ways not. I always think that a really good manager has the ability to simultaneously hold in their head the big picture, and focus on the detail, so that while you can see the big picture you can still pick at the detailed understanding. Now a lot of them feel this is micromanagement, and some-

times it is. But to me it's also an opportunity to tweak the system. The poet William Blake said it best: "to see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower".'

She also emphasised a deep belief in the possibility of change:

'The other thing that underlies my work is that I will not accept that something cannot be done if I think it needs to be done. To me there is always a way. So it's very difficult to take no for an answer if something is intrinsically, in my mind, justified. To me there *must* be a way. We need to think outside the box; there must be some way of linking up, doing things ... and once you put that into place, you find that other people's minds start thinking that way too. And we put this conviction into the system, the kind of structure of thinking, and this is where capacity is important. If you restrict people's capacity by saying, "you will work within this framework and no other", then you are not encouraging their minds to think otherwise. However, if you tell people, "no, always think that there must be a way", then the outcome is quite different. Of course we have rules and guidelines, but then using these as our base, we can always ask, "how do we achieve what we want to achieve?"'

Finally, in reflecting on her leadership style, the Regional Director described an ongoing, conscious effort to develop a team of leaders around her. She explained,

'I believe that constant interplays of responsibility and teamwork are in turn absorbed and internalised, and people then start doing things themselves. Capacity becomes an issue of demonstration. If you want to build someone's capacity, you have to start with you. I try to do this in several ways. I used to have a scheme when I was in the Pakistan office called "Tracking the CR [Country Representative]". Whenever I went to Islamabad or Peshawar, or some other place outside the Karachi office, I either picked someone, or asked a staff member to volunteer, to come with me. Their job was just to observe what went on. That's it: observe, ask questions. To some extent I still do this.'

While it may be tempting to understand capacity development in IUCN in Asia largely in terms of the senior leadership, some informants cautioned

against this, emphasising the unevenness of capacity development across the various countries in the region:

'It is important to understand that the leadership of IUCN in Asia cannot be seen as one homogeneous entity; there are clear differences in leadership and followership styles and techniques, underpinned to some extent by cultural contexts, across countries in the region. The different kinds of leadership capacities have also had a bearing on the philosophy and practice of leadership in the region. While in some instances intellectual and programmatic leadership has been strong, weaknesses in management or leadership in others have given rise to varied followerships. This has had its effects on overall capacity development in the region.'

## 2.6 The role of collaboration: collective strategic thinking

If leadership and 'followership' were interactive in IUCN in Asia, this was facilitated, in part, by processes that promoted and utilised collective strategic thinking. One respondent pointed to these processes as a crucial feature of capacity development in IUCN in Asia:

'Collective strategic thinking and decision making are a key part of how IUCN in Asia functions. It should also be emphasised that these processes do not just contribute to decision making, they also play an important part in building the capacity of managers to address and deal with issues, and to have buy-in to the decisions that are made. The geographical dispersion that is an essential element of IUCN's structure in Asia makes collective thinking and action more of a challenge than it is in other more centralised organisations. The Asia Regional Directorate (ARD) has been an important mechanism from its formation, and as IUCN in Asia has evolved and adapted, so has ARD as a focus and process for collective thinking and decision making. Another important and useful tool has been the formation of task teams, working groups, and taskforces to deal with specific issues, themes, or processes [such as reorganisation]. These, again, feed into collective thinking and decision making.'

One respondent emphasised the importance of staff attitudes - resonant with the point about a mindset made previously - for making collective strategic thinking effective:

'I think that IUCN in Asia has a permanent collective strategic thinking mechanism in place. I have seen the system working collectively to address issues such as the planning process that led to the IUCN Asia Quadrennial Programme 2005-2008,<sup>15</sup> or the setting of the Mountains Programme,<sup>16</sup> or the development of the Ecosystem and Livelihoods Group idea into an operational reality. ... There are some formal systems in place, ... but just as or even more important is the attitude of the key senior staff. And this staff is not there by chance; it is there through a careful process of selection, nursing, and evaluation that keeps bringing and maintaining good people in key positions in the programme.'

At the same time, however, some managers expressed a sense that developing structures that encourage and mobilise collective strategic thinking is a challenge that IUCN in Asia has yet to fully meet; instead, it is an ongoing process. Stratified application limits the effectiveness of these structures in the present:

'What is perhaps less strong, or less clear, is the extent to which other levels of staff and programmes are brought into these collective decision-making processes, or are informed of them. Not all of the management styles and approaches that are used or promoted at "the top" filter downwards. Perhaps some of the advances and models that have been applied to bring senior management into the collective thinking loop need to be promoted - even forced! - within the component programmes of IUCN in Asia.'

## 2.7 Scaling up from country to region: IUCN in Pakistan and IUCN in Asia

Particularly in the early years of its formation, IUCN in Asia depended on the IUCN in Pakistan (IUCN-P) programme, which at that time was the strongest IUCN country programme in the region, employing about 250 staff.<sup>17</sup> IUCN-P was also the home office of Aban Kabraji, who would later become the Asia Regional Director. In several ways, IUCN-P provided models for systems that could be scaled up and adapted into the workings of the regional programme.

### Notes

<sup>15</sup> See Imbach (2004) *IUCN Asia Intersessional Programme 2005-2008*.

<sup>16</sup> See Mountains Intersessional Strategy Document: Annex 16 of *IUCN Asia Intersessional Programme 2005-2008*.

<sup>17</sup> The development of the National Conservation Strategy for Pakistan was a landmark and trend-setting contribution of the IUCN-P programme. Developed through consultations with some 3000 people over three years, it brought together the greatest number of experts ever in Pakistan to focus on the way their sectors affect, and in turn are affected by, the environment.

The anchoring role of IUCN-P had several facets. Most visibly, it was Kabraji, then the country representative from IUCN in Pakistan, who eventually, after spending approximately five years in both roles,<sup>18</sup> became the Asia Regional Director. But there were other critical ways that the IUCN-P programme served as a nurturing institution for the nascent IUCN in Asia. These included providing models for systems that worked well, and financial stability for an organisation still developing its own sources of funding. Early in the development of IUCN in Asia, IUCN-P provided substantial financial support - as much as USD 150,000 per year.

One senior manager characterised the IUCN-P programme as a model that had developed structures and processes over time, lending the benefits of its own learning process to IUCN in Asia:

'The Pakistan office functioned as a microcosm in several ways. It had multiple offices - a country office [in Karachi] and other programme offices [in Islamabad and Peshawar], and so in some ways, this mirrors the situation in the region. The systems that worked for Pakistan to maintain its integrity as a whole were looked at as a base from which to launch the regional systems. That was not done blindly - these structures had been well thought-through and chewed over in Pakistan. The Pakistan human resources management became the base for Asia Regional human resources policies and procedures. These, in turn, were sent off to Headquarters. In many ways, they routinised these as a useful tool for developing global systems and procedures. In that way, you have growth from country office to region to global.'

The Regional Director elaborated on the supportive role that IUCN in Pakistan played as IUCN in Asia was developing, and the critical importance of IUCN-P's relative strength for simultaneously sustaining itself and nurturing the regional programme.

'I was basically drawing on all the resources, models and learning done to date within the Pakistan programme. So when I was given the responsibility for managing this collection of country offices and individuals [as a regional organisation], if I wanted to do certain things ... the only way I could do them was by bringing my own resources from the Pakistan programme, and my own people from the Pakistan programme, to effect the changes. That overlap period was when I used all the capacities that had been built in IUCN-P to

lay the foundation for the Asia region. And that is an important thing: if we want to see progression and links between capacity, [then it is clear that] if IUCN in Pakistan had not been as robust an organisation, and a capacity-empowered organisation, they would not have had the ability to [both nurture IUCN in Asia and maintain the country programme itself].'

As noted above, IUCN-P also provided financial resources for the start-up and support of IUCN in Asia, which were critical for the creativity and adaptability characteristic of the regional programme. Specific budget lines that enabled IUCN-P to help the regional programme were built into framework agreements and project agreements, which were in turn accepted by donors. IUCN in Asia also drew on the human resources available in the Pakistan programme.

If initially the relationship between the two facets of the organisation was one of dependence, it has gradually become more reciprocal. The current country representative for IUCN-P commented that 'These days, the balance has shifted to where there is more expertise residing in the Asia Region now, and we are trying to benefit from that and get resources from the region. This is helping create integration between the country and the regional programmes.'

### 3 Crafting coherence

In building a truly regional institution, the IUCN in Asia management team faced a key challenge: to balance the autonomy and independence of the country programmes with the need for broader, transboundary coordination through the regional entity. As IUCN in Asia positioned itself, the issue of coherence between countries on the one hand, and an integrated programme on the other, became paramount. One senior manager explained, 'If we are to be capable of serving our members and partners in all of Asia, then we have to have an integrated functioning secretariat. We cannot say to someone, "we work on the big picture", and then say, "Nepal and Pakistan won't work with each other!" It was this integration of individual country programmes that the regional entity would have to catalyse and coordinate.'

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#### Notes

<sup>18</sup> During this 'overlap period', from 1996 to 2000, the present Regional Director was chair of the Asia Working Group but retained her position as the country representative for IUCN in Pakistan.



### 3.1 Defining regional coherence in a multinational context

But just what was it that the regional entity was trying to cultivate? The Regional Director described her ultimate vision of regional coherence as something that created a continuity of identity among all staff across an extremely diverse and complex region. She explained,

'I tell people that the only thing IUCN is totally intolerant about is intolerance itself. You leave your personal beliefs at the door of the office, and when you come in, you're an IUCN person. You're not a Muslim, you're not a Hindu, you're not a Buddhist, Christian or Parsi. You leave your prejudices out. ... Anyone among the staff should be able to walk into an IUCN office anywhere in the region, sit down, and feel they are part of the office.'

She elaborated further:

'While diversity, both cultural and geographic, is encouraged in the staff profiles and culture of the offices, there is, as part of the integration challenge, the tendency of groups, national and ethnic, to want to stay with their own. This is relatively benign when such groups are located outside their own countries and cultures, but can become quite damaging, if in countries, offices become the domain of one ethnic or national group. Regional coherence then becomes threatened by national cohesion which manifests itself in a desire to keep out "the foreigner", undermining the very nature of the diverse membership IUCN is meant to represent and secure. The human resources units are continuously monitoring for signs of this happening, and insist on a mix of ethnic groups whenever a programme becomes too [homogeneous].'

Cultivating and maintaining a shared collective identity is an ongoing process, and ideas of a unified regional identity were constantly subject to the tensions produced in national, as well as international, politics. For example, in conversations about forging a regional identity, the Regional Director discussed the potential challenges that the regional organisation faced in the days after September 11, 2001. She described her sense of the possible volatility, and divisiveness, that might follow this event in the IUCN in Asia sub-regional office in Karachi, where she was at the time:

'I remember after 9/11, Pakistan was ready for all kinds of explosions and implosions. And I sat in a staff meeting here and I gave an instruction, ... that under no circumstances will there be any staff meetings or official discussions on the issue of 9/11. It was of course OK to do it informally, but formally there could be no staff meetings, and no discussion. Because at that moment we were citizens of the world, working in a *regional* and an *international* organisation, and we could not ... enter the political debates. I felt that the situation was so incendiary that if discussions began, there would be huge arguments, and it would blow the organisation apart. So I said no discussions whatsoever in an official context, and we survived without a problem through that entire period.'

Cultivating regional coherence and identity also entailed instituting a shared sense of organisational ethics that would weave together the cultural backgrounds of managers from countries across the Asia Region, as well outside it.

But informants were careful to point out that the shared identity associated with regional coherence was not to be mistaken for regional uniformity. Whereas coherence was seen to preserve, and even encourage, some measure of diversity, uniformity was regarded as undesirable. Since each of the country programmes had developed in different ways, in terms of their programmes and human resources, there were vast differences at the country level that the regional organisation would have to balance. 'While we valued that difference,' one senior manager explained, 'we also saw that if we were to build a regional institution, they couldn't keep going in totally different directions. Otherwise they would just remain distinct country offices.' So the regional programme was built with the objective of coherence, in which commonalities were identified and built upon, but certain levels of diversity among country programmes were considered both desirable and strengthening.

While organisational development for the Asia Region devised certain tools for establishing coherence, such as a single manual, and a set of basic conditions adapted by every country programme in the region,<sup>19</sup> a level of flexibility was also maintained so that these tools did not simply cultivate uniformity.

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#### Notes

<sup>19</sup> See the appendix for a more comprehensive accounting of these tools.

### 3.3 Building coherence through principles and structures

A senior manager summarised IUCN in Asia's operational principles as follows:

- *Decentralisation*: each national and Ecosystem and Livelihoods Group component handles its own programme, budget, staff, etc.
- *Coordination*: as a way to balance decentralisation and keep a reasonably coherent and consistent organisation.
- *Transparency*: broad communications across the system through multiple, parallel and simultaneous channels.
- *Entrepreneurship*: everyone has a role to play to keep the organisation moving forward in its different areas (technical, financial, human resources, policy influencing, administration, etc.) and programmes (national, regional, etc.).
- *Shared responsibility*.

Adhering to these operational principles, and achieving the right balance between the country, regional and global programmes, depended on a set of processes and structures that would cultivate a regional identity and regional coherence, but that would also complement the country and global levels. When asked to identify and describe the most important organisational structures for cultivating this identity and coherence, informants discussed the Asia Working Group and Asia Regional Directorate, the practice of co-location, unique positions, information-sharing networks, and the ongoing reorganisation process. Each of these is briefly elaborated below.

#### The Asia Working Group and the Asia Regional Directorate

A development professional long associated with, but positioned outside of IUCN, said, 'IUCN in Asia has struck an ingenious balance between the need to give individual countries priority-setting autonomy, and the need to weave a coherent regional programme. In that respect, ARD appears to have been the central mechanism for striking the balance.'

The Asia Working Group (AWG) was formed in the mid-1990s, as the extent of IUCN's work in the Asia region grew, and as the list of countries expanded. Its purpose was to guide the development of the regional organisation. Eventually, it grew into the Asia Regional Directorate (ARD).

The AWG, and later the ARD, consisted of country programme heads that were appointed on the basis of their position. They had a clear set of responsibilities and terms of reference, and their regular meetings were held in different locations, as an additional technique for building exposure to, and familiarity with, the region as a coherent entity. The ARD continues this practice, meeting three times per year in different locations in order to set the policies, review the programme and set the budget for the region.

Reflecting on the accomplishments of the AWG and the ARD, one informant related these groups directly to the formation and promotion of shared values.

'Shared values were extremely important. This is where ... AWG and then ARD played such an important role. Transparency was, from the start of AWG, a key notion. Everything - budgets, contracts, deficits, opening and closing of offices and programmes, new projects, you name it - was on the table and open for discussion. All senior [2nd level] regional staff were members along with one coordinator from Headquarters representing the Director General. Decisions were articulated by the chair and consigned in writing ... meetings were held every three months. Over a period of two years, shared values and identity were developed within the Secretariat.'

Informants suggested that the AWG/ARD had a discernable effect on people's sense of the regional organisation; one remembered that,

'... in the early days one kept hearing, "oh, but it's this way for Sri Lanka", "oh, but it's this way for Pakistan". Now one more often hears, "but what about the region?" Of course they consider their own countries and programmes first, but they can link them to the regional programme and think in terms of larger interests.'

The Asia Regional Director pointed out that there is no structural equivalent to the AWG/ARD anywhere else in IUCN. She emphasised in particular the value of meeting in different locations on a regular basis. 'You sense the environment of the country, and get a feel for the issues there, while at the same time you get a sense that, yes, I'm part of a regional programme, and this is part of my normal work.' She called the Asia Regional Directorate 'the key to the region', by virtue of the fact that it is regular, and it has a consistent membership that is focused on running the region.

### Multiple centres: co-location

Through co-location and the existence of a regional (Bangkok) and sub-regional (Karachi) office and two regional programme groups (ELGs) in Bangkok and Colombo, IUCN in Asia maintains a physical presence at multiple sites. This is rooted in a deeply held conviction that, as the Regional Director put it, 'location is absolutely the core of what you are as an organisation. Location, and your connection to ground realities, is *everything*: it determines how you function and who the pool of your staff is. If the management team is not in constant contact with the region, how can they own it? How can they work there?'

The practice of co-location allows the IUCN in Asia staff to work from offices throughout the region. This technique emerged in the earliest days of IUCN in Asia, in part as a way to allow regional staff to remain in the country offices with which they were already affiliated.<sup>20</sup> The system then had to be integrated with each country office, with co-located staff expected to follow the rules and norms of the office that hosted them. So, for example, today the regional staff working in Ecosystem and Livelihood Group 2 is co-located with the Sri Lanka country office in Colombo.

The system helps the regional programme avoid duplicating overhead costs and support services, making it both practically and financially efficient. It also allows regional staff members to be 'closer to the ground,' avoiding the sense that the programme is run exclusively by the Asia Regional Office in Bangkok.

Senior staff members also stressed that the presence of non-nationals in country programme offices helps to maintain a desirable culture of openness. The Regional Director explained, 'whenever a country office becomes entirely national, you have a very dangerous situation, because you look inwards. And there's nothing to bring in fresh blood and new thinking, nothing to link an office with the fact that it's part of an international and global organisation'. This echoes comments recounted above on the topic of regional coherence.

Like all of the processes employed by IUCN in Asia to build capacity, co-location is neither perfect nor unproblematic; many country programmes find it challenging, and sometimes undesirable. One senior manager explained that 'expats are more expensive,

and they often come into jobs which country people feel they can do perfectly well. ... And of course (among nationals) you speak the same language and share the same culture. But what can develop is a sort of fortress mentality'. Such a mentality, referred to earlier, is understood within IUCN in Asia to be inconsistent with the aspiration for a regional identity and regional coherence.

Maintaining multiple centres through multiple locations is thus a central feature of the regional programme. One senior manager summarised its importance by saying that, 'the fact that we have what we call distributed centres of power ... has contributed to the sharing of the wider region, to a feeling within people that they are part of the core, part of the centre. They are not just out-posted officers. So this ability to have a centre, not only a physical centre, but also a conceptual centre, a virtual centre, is important for coherence. At least that's the way I like to see it; I see myself a part of a virtual centre'.

### Unique positions

From the outset, two high-level posts unique to IUCN in Asia were created: a director of constituency development and an adviser on organisational development. These positions served two aspects of creating a truly regional institution: the director of constituency development was to establish closer links with the IUCN membership, councillors and commission members. It also acted as the programme's 'antennae,' sensitive to the external setting, the activities of other regional institutions, and opportunities for building strategic partnerships. The director of organisational development, meanwhile, was to identify commonalities among, and differentials between, the organisational components of IUCN in Asia, and use these to foster integration. In addition, this position supported the ongoing development of regional structures and systems by encouraging the sharing of lessons learned between country programmes. When asked why the Asia Region found it important to invest in these positions when most other organisations do not, the Regional Director responded, 'because we saw it as the underpinning of success, reorganisation and management change. We need people who are mentoring, training and monitoring the system'.

### Information-sharing networks

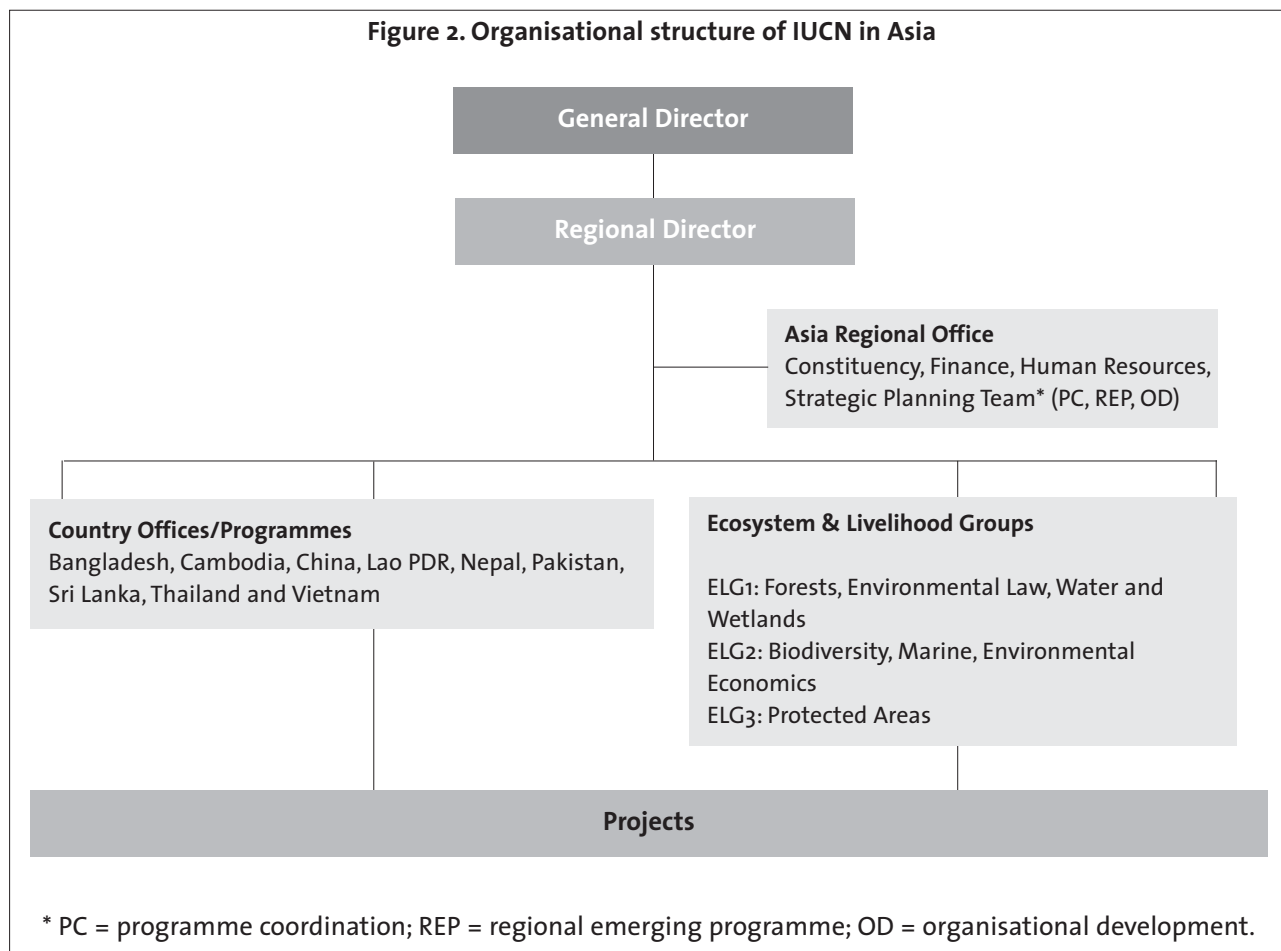
Senior managers repeatedly identified information-sharing networks as critical to building capacity

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#### Notes

<sup>20</sup> This system involved the creation of a new human resources category - the 'regional expatriate'.

Figure 2. Organisational structure of IUCN in Asia



within IUCN in Asia. As with other processes and systems, these networks as they exist today may be far from perfect, but they were considered to be an important part of cultivating and strengthening regional coherence and identity. Many of the respondents interviewed for this study referred to the importance of the senior management forum,<sup>21</sup> or the information sharing that is encouraged by the matrix management structure<sup>22</sup> practised in IUCN in Asia.

One senior manager explained, 'keeping lines of access and communication open is extremely important for capacity development, and information sharing is really important for regional coherence. The more information, the more correspondence, and the more communication there is, the more people can build links and function as a team'.

Another senior manager linked information sharing to the creation of an enabling environment for adaptation and creativity:

'I have seen that within some components of the Asia programme, information sharing is limited and very hierarchical. In others, I see people able to think laterally, come up with solutions, and they tend to have a higher degree of enthusiasm and relate their job to their personal lives. There are those components where one receives information, even if it is not directly related to one's on-the-job duty or responsibility. And I think that is what I find to be one of the most valuable elements of IUCN in Asia.'

#### Ongoing assessment and change: the reorganisation process

The two-phase reorganisation that was initiated in 2001 was repeatedly referenced as an important process through which regional coherence and identity are continually forged in IUCN in Asia. One senior manager explained,

'I think the process of reorganisation has begun to make a regional identity a reality, and in fact I

#### Notes

21 This information network allows senior managers to share information quickly and broadly among regional management team members.

22 See Jafri and Sattar (2002a).

see that IUCN in Asia is now perceived *externally* as a regional institution. So while our members in Nepal may see a Nepal country office, while our members in other constituencies may see IUCN country offices, the more they see the links between Asia, and the more they see what we have been able to do, the more they begin to see that there is a global organisation, and yes, there are country offices, but then there is an *Asia level organisation* which is able to look at regional issues and which is able to bring regional skills and capacity together. I think this regional identity has emerged, and that the pace of this emergence has been fastest since we reorganised two years ago. And I think it has to do with structures, but more so with continuously [repeating] to ourselves and our colleagues that *we are part of a larger entity than the office we are currently managing*. And it is the ability to be flexible, to be able to change from the day-to-day operational level to the longer term conceptual and ambiguous entity that we aim to be, which will make us a regional player in environment and development in Asia.'

The reorganisation process also evidences an organisation that is self-reflective and consistently interested in understanding and addressing its weaknesses.

### 3.4 Creating the capacity for learning

A crucial aspect of capacity development in IUCN in Asia is the organisation's commitment to learning. A stated objective of the Asia region reorganisation is to build opportunities for learning about alternative organisational models, organisational life cycles, and the management of change. While formal training takes place from time to time,<sup>23</sup> by far the most prevalent, and often interlinked, modes of learning in IUCN in Asia are experiential, and involve mentoring and on-the-job training. When asked to identify some of the key ways that the capacity for learning is built in IUCN in Asia, the director of organisational development noted the following:

- Regular management and programme reviews - a habit originally established in IUCN Pakistan - were consciously transferred to the regional programme.
- The Ecosystem and Livelihood Groups hold regular retreats that are designed to examine and self-evaluate programme and financial achievements,

relationships with other parts of the organisation, systems development, and other issues. These retreats are also used to map out new directions and necessary shifts.

- Programme coordinator meetings bring together coordinators from across the region to develop instruments for programme development, coordination and monitoring.
- Finance managers from each of the countries in the Asia Region meet regularly to learn from each other and to build, for instance, better ways of providing information for management decisions.
- Human resources focal points have provided important inputs to human resources systems, which has enhanced organisational capacity at the regional as well as the country levels.
- The terms of reference for specialist staff members who are responsible for developing new areas of work (for instance, environmental economics) make that specialist responsible for developing organisational capacity to work in a particular field. For this, others need to understand and learn to utilise and incorporate the newly acquired specialty into their own programme. This is often done through planning and working together on joint initiatives, as well as through papers, presentations or discussion groups.
- Orientation programmes at different levels introduce new staff to IUCN's mission and programme, and help familiarise them with its structures and systems. Most importantly, they give a first taste of IUCN in Asia's organisational culture and principles.

### 3.5 Specific capabilities and the evolution of capacity in IUCN in Asia

What current capabilities characterise IUCN in Asia, and did they develop in a discernible order? Is there an evolutionary trajectory through which we can understand how a specific trajectory of capability development in IUCN in Asia led to growth in capacity? When asked to trace the development of capabilities in IUCN in Asia, and in turn to link that development to the evolution of capacity in the organisation, one senior manager responded by emphasising that capability development was definitely not linear. She noted, 'the best analogy I can find is an upwardly rising, exponentially expanding, multi-stranded spiral with dynamic interplay and iteration between and within each strand or bundle'. She iden-

#### Notes

<sup>23</sup> Undoubtedly formal training has contributed to individual and organisational capacity development. Though valuable, such individual training is costly. Less costly group training at the regional and country levels has been used both for learning and team building.

tified IUCN in Asia's current bundle of capabilities in the following list:

- *Institutional culture and systems*: enabling and regulating values, management approaches, management constructs, and consultative decision making, knowledge management.
- *Content/technical*: contributing to the fulfilment of the mission, generating value for partners and beneficiaries. This includes programme delivery (planning, project development, coordination and monitoring) and convening (brokerage on knowledge-based issues, outreach, influence).
- *Strategic interaction with the external context*: establishing and maintaining a regional identity while balancing the global and national levels.
- *Adaptability/flexibility*: 'morphing', repositioning, reshaping content, recrafting systems, seeking new partnerships and new dimensions to old ones.

She continued,

'Initially, to pull the discrete parts of the IUCN Secretariat in Asia together into some management construct, the *institutional systems capabilities* already available came into play. Then they were adapted and enhanced. Three pressures - i.e. the need to be visible in the regional programmatic "marketplace", the need to revitalise some of the country offices, and shortages of funds, coalesced to force *content/technical capabilities* to develop new dimensions. Without certain elements from the *strategic interaction with the external* paving the way and then nurturing the programme efforts, these would have failed. Success meant added credibility and new contacts, so it also raised the bar for *strategic interactions*. These brought more opportunities, using and enhancing our *content/technical capabilities*, which triggered the need for changes in *institutional systems*. So the story goes on.'

She concluded by emphasising the critical importance of adaptability and flexibility as inherent characteristics of a vital 'spiral'.

Even as capability development was not necessarily linear, certain capabilities from the content/technical bundle were shed or reshaped. As examples, a senior manager explained that the capacity for undertaking environmental impact assessments that was initially to be built at the regional level had since reverted to the country level, and the concept of sustainable use

had changed into 'the ongoing building of capabilities for ecosystems and livelihoods approaches to IUCN in Asia projects and programmes'. While shedding capabilities from other bundles was said to be more difficult to detect, this manager noted that 'it seems as if the more primitive forms disappear by absorption into a higher evolutionary form, such as how our capacity to establish a country office using all of the bundles remains, but it is now becoming only one page in a portfolio of alternative ways of establishing a country presence'.

## 4 Conclusion

Scholars of private sector management have long noted the challenges involved in managing transnational companies.<sup>24</sup> IUCN in Asia presents an example of a successful transnational non-profit organisation in which a strong sense of purpose and commitment to environmental change unites managers and staff across the region. Although complexity and dynamism characterise the context in which they work, a combination of specific organisational characteristics and ongoing management efforts have allowed IUCN in Asia to rapidly develop its capacity.

It is worth noting in conclusion that managers and staff in IUCN in Asia were adamant that organisational change and improvement are ongoing. Few would say simply that IUCN in Asia had developed its capacity; rather, they would note successes in capacity development and go on to identify new opportunities for growth and improvement. An interconnected process of ongoing assessment and change characterises IUCN in Asia, and many of those consulted for this study felt that this was central to the growth of capacity itself.

Building IUCN in Asia into a 'truly regional institution' that was embedded within the global IUCN entailed identifying and meeting a complex array of challenges, both external and internal. While the tremendous volatility of Asia, and the ever-evolving objectives of international donor organisations posed particular external challenges, the internal directive to decentralise and the consequent aim to coordinate and unite several autonomous country offices at the level of the region posed extraordinary internal challenges. The management strategy for meeting these

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Notes

24 See Bartlett and Ghoshal (1998).

challenges combined a formal, documented agenda for organising the region with a daily practice of strategic management that allowed flexibility beyond that afforded by fixed, long-term plans.

Respondents for this study emphasised the importance of strong leadership for capacity building in IUCN in Asia, but many pointed to an equally important and capable 'followership'. Through collaboration and collective strategic thinking, leadership in the organisation is sometimes diffused and shared.

It is important to understand the growth of capacity in IUCN in Asia, particularly in the nascent stages of the organisation's development, as a process of scaling up from the country level. The IUCN-Pakistan programme provided organisational models, financial backing, and important human resources to IUCN in Asia as it came into being. It was from the capacity of IUCN-Pakistan that IUCN in Asia built its own foundation.

This report emphasises the importance of crafting and maintaining regional coherence as IUCN in Asia sought to build its capacity. In the context of cultural, linguistic, political and national diversity, the balance between unity and difference among the region's country programmes was identified as a key challenge, and a key opportunity for capacity development. The Asia Working Group/Asia Regional Directorate, the practice of co-location, specific positions created for the regional organisation, information-sharing networks, and the ongoing reorganisation were all identified as key structures that enabled capacity development unique to Asia, but informed by and informing the global organisation.

While certain aspects of the trajectory of capacity development in IUCN in Asia resemble that of many private transnational organisations, there is a uniqueness to IUCN in Asia's management culture and commitment that defies quick categorisation, and instead is best represented through the extended quotations presented in this report. It is apparent to anyone who spends time among the senior management of IUCN in Asia that a key to the high level of energy, commitment and performance that resonates throughout the regional organisation is the enduring belief that necessary change is always possible, regardless of how difficult or challenging it may be.

## Appendix: IUCN in Asia

### IUCN in Asia - organisational development timeline

Resolution #18.6 on increased IUCN support for Asia Region, Perth, 18th session of the IUCN General Assembly	November-December 1990
Establishment Regional Wetland Coordinator's Office	September 1991
Resolution #19 containing basic recommendations for regionalisation, Buenos Aires, 19th session of the IUCN General Assembly	January 1994
Asia Working Group established	1995
Asia Regional Coordination Office	1997-1998
ARD established	Between 1997 and 2000
Bangkok trip followed by development of ToR of ARD	August-September 1999
Asia Regional Office set up and regional programmes initiated	Between 2000 and 2001
Regionalisation of IUCN: A reiteration via 2nd WCC resolution #2.5	October 2000
Internal evaluation via the Dhaka and Bangkok meeting	February and May 2002
Regionalisation review by IUCN Headquarters	March 2002
Asia reorganisation stage 1	Between 2002 and 2003
Revised ToRs for ARD developed	January 2003
Reorganisation of regional programmes and establishment of the Ecosystems and Livelihoods Groups (ELG)	January 2003
Terms of reference for ARD finalised	Effective January 2004
Asia reorganisation stage 2	January 2005



## IUCN status

1. IUCN is an international organisation, registered and headquartered in Gland, Switzerland, with Observer Status in the United Nations General Assembly.
2. Evidence of IUCN's international, intergovernmental status is available from several sources:
  - a. *The relationship of State governments with IUCN.* Eighteen governments - including two Asian States, India and Siam/Thailand - were among the original founders of IUCN in 1948. The way States become IUCN members is similar to the way they become parties to an international agreement: they submit a formal statement, in writing, that they agree with the contents of the IUCN Statutes and agree to abide by them. As they would do in becoming parties to a treaty, States that become members of IUCN designate a ministerial-level authority as their representative to IUCN. Many States designate the Ministry of Environment or its equivalent; others the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or its equivalent. Any other institution that wants to become a member of IUCN - including government agencies - must submit to an application and approval process. A total of 81 States worldwide have agreed to IUCN's Statutes. They include the countries with the world's largest population centres and more than half of the 'mega-diverse' countries that harbour the greatest concentrations of biodiversity, including China, India and Malaysia.
  - b. *IUCN Headquarters status.* Article 1 of the IUCN Statutes states that IUCN is constituted in accordance with Article 60 of the Swiss Civil Code as an international association of governmental and non-governmental members.
  - c. *The relationship of the United Nations with IUCN.* The UN General Assembly granted IUCN Observer Status for four reasons: because of the importance of IUCN; because of the need to promote and support every effort towards the conservation of nature; because IUCN's main objective is to encourage and assist the international community on conserving the integrity and diversity of nature; and in order to promote cooperation between the UN and IUCN.
  - d. *The relationship of international agreements with IUCN.* Multinational environmental agreements - the Ramsar Convention and the World Heritage Convention - designate IUCN to carry out specific functions on behalf of the parties.
3. The international organisation most similar to IUCN is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Like IUCN, the ICRC is registered in Switzerland under Article 60 of the Swiss Civil Code, has Observer Status at the UN General Assembly, and is designated to carry out specific functions under international agreements.

### Countries in the IUCN Asia Intersessional 2005-2008 and members in Asia

	Members			
	State	Govt. agencies	NGOs	Affiliates
People's Republic of Bangladesh	x		14	
State of Brunei				
Kingdom of Bhutan				
Kingdom of Cambodia			1	
People's Republic of China	x	2	3	1
Democratic Republic of East Timor				
Republic of Indonesia		1		
Republic of India	x	4	14	1
Japan	x	1	19	
Democratic People's Republic of Korea				
Republic of Korea		1	4	1
Lao People's Democratic Republic	x			
Malaysia	x	2	3	1
Republic of Maldives				
Mongolia			1	
Union of Myanmar				
Kingdom of Nepal	x		9	
Islamic Republic of Pakistan	x	7	14	
Republic of the Philippines		1	2	
Republic of Singapore			4	
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka	x	3	9	
Kingdom of Thailand	x	1	1	
Socialist Republic of Vietnam	x		2	

## Integrating tools and processes that allow for coherence and autonomy

	Regional coherence	Autonomy
1. MOU/agreements governing IUCN presence in a country	Regional Law Programme provides model and lays down essentials.	Country programme negotiates and redrafts beyond the model.
2. Delegation of authority	The delegation of authority from the DG to the regional directors is considerable and largely commensurate with the responsibilities.	Formal sub-delegation of authority to country representatives, ELG heads & heads of corporate services to match responsibilities and some sub-sub-delegation in larger offices (with agreement of ARO).
3. Asia Intersessional programme (4 years) + annexed country programmes	Regional and country levels concurrently designed through consultative process - ELGs lead at regional level. Regional programme coordinator (PC) works with ELG & country PCs to create an integrated Asia IP - country specific annexed. Tied together from country to region to global through results.	Country specific programme (consultative process with national stakeholders) helps to shape regional and visa versa.
4. Project development processes	Asia project development group and guidelines. Responsible for quality control and programme fit of projects designed by country and regional units.	Delegation to country /ELG level project development groups depending on capacity and size of project.
5. Budgets	Region prepares Asia budget based on country/ELG budgets and overall needs of region.	Country/ELG prepare own budgets but adjusts in consultation with the region.
6. Asia Region HR rules and procedures	Establish regional norms based on commonalities between countries, within framework of global HR policy.	Local conditions of service re-tailor Asia rules to country-specific needs (for all staff in the same location whether regional or national).
7. Iterative processes which may begin in one country, go to region and back to country (or countries). The orientation presentation is one example.	Created initially in a country office - further developed by ARO for regional staff.	Now regional HR supporting country office in enhanced design for country-specific portion. Will then become Asia Region orientation pack, with a portfolio of country specific elements.
8. Functional group focal points: -programme coordinators -HR focal points -Finance heads	Regional PC involves all other PCs in developing /reviewing/ redesigning regional operational systems and guidelines (within global framework) Similar to above Similar to above	Country 'manageability' built into regional operational systems

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The results of the study, interim reports and an elaborated methodology can be consulted at [www.ecdpm.org/dcc/capacitystudy](http://www.ecdpm.org/dcc/capacitystudy). For further information, please contact Ms Heather Baser ([hb@ecdpm.org](mailto:hb@ecdpm.org)).

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