

IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 kicks off in Sydney
Anna Cadiz, Senior Technical Officer, Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)
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CANARI's Anna Cadiz is at the IUCN World Parks Congress, a landmark global forum on protected areas held every ten years. This gathering of key stakeholders from around the world sets the global agenda on protected area management for the following decade. Early talks focus on the role of protected areas in a changing world and how the business sector can be better engaged.

You would think that being one of 5,000 delegates at the IUCN World Parks Congress (WPC) 2014 in Sydney, Australia would be overwhelming. No. What's overwhelming is trying to decide which sessions to attend each day! With over 100 different and mostly overlapping sessions consisting of panel discussions, poster presentations launch events, workshops, lectures and debates, not to mention the impromptu networking to be had - it's a tricky business deciding how to spend your time. Did I mention that I am also still completely jetlagged from the two days travel to get here?

The opening ceremony held on Wednesday 12 November helped to set the tone for the congress. Government leaders made bold environmental commitments and we were reminded of the key message from the late Nelson Mandela, patron of the last WPC in Durban in 2003, of the importance of engaging youth in conservation and protected areas. Although it has been a decade since Mandela challenged delegates to this task, his voice is still heard echoing through this week's congress.

Another central question has been how to bring 'more people into the room'. That is, it is high time for the conservation community to reach outside the bounds of traditional stakeholder groups and seek to have meaningful dialogues with the business sector as well as those living in urban areas. In one of the World Leaders' Dialogue sessions held on Thursday 13 November, Ms Margareta Wahlström, Secretary-General of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction said, "my biggest fear...is in a few decades 70-80% of the world population will live in cities. In some countries and regions they already do...so what does it mean for the protected areas? If nature remains an exotic product and we don't see the relationship between the economics, the people and survivability, and children and young people grow up not knowing what the cow looks like, let alone an orangutan - I see this as a major challenge that we need to tackle in an upfront way".

Business as unusual

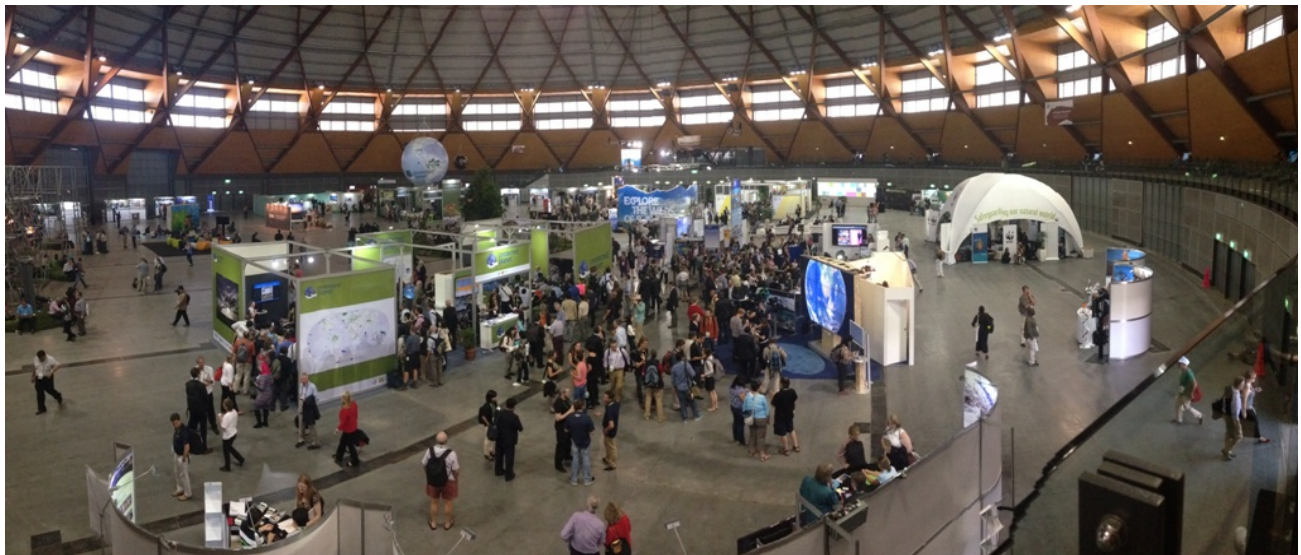
Another session I attended this morning in the Business and Biodiversity pavilion looked at IUCN's business engagement strategy and explored how biodiversity can not only be better valued by the business sector but how it can be better managed, considering that the bottom line usually has the final say. Mr. David Steuerman, Programme Officer at the Convention on Biological Diversity Secretariat noted that, "there is an increasingly vigorous mandate to engage business; it has to be part of the conversation". He stated that some key outcomes from the Twelfth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 12), which took place a mere two weeks ago in Korea, include developing a framework by which businesses can report on their actions in a standardised way and exploring how business can play a more active and direct role in contributing towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Dr. Helen Crowley, Conservation and Ecosystem Services Specialist at Kering, a French multinational company comprising 18 luxury brands (do the names Gucci, Alexander McQueen or Stella McCartney ring a bell?) and five sport and lifestyle brands, gave a powerful presentation on how business can

indeed be a part of the solution. A key part of Dr. Crowley's job is to look at sustainable sourcing within supply chains for Kering's brands. It can be quite difficult for a large company that sits so far at the end of their supply chain to know exactly how to become a sustainable business. Even though Kering had the willingness to become sustainable, they recognised the need for support to understand exactly what changes had to be made. When I asked Dr. Crowley what the driving force behind Kering's decision to have someone like her on board in a special Sustainability department of the company, she noted that it came from Kering's leadership but quickly remarked that, "it doesn't mean everything is a given though...you always have to make a business case for your recommendations".

Conservation and Business - overcoming the language barrier

There seems to have always been a gap between the conservation and business communities. However, the two groups can no longer operate in silo and now more than ever, must find ways of communicating and working in partnership. Dr. Crowley advised that the business community must be reached on two levels: relevance and language. Conservation action must be relevant to businesses - for example, how can you demonstrate in a tangible sense that protected areas are not a separate entity to business but that there is strong connectivity and sustainable action can actually make businesses more profitable? It's also important to talk conservation in a language that business people will understand. Most company executives are busy people who simply don't have time to understand the details but they are interested in knowing how their supply chains are affecting (positively and negatively) the environment.



Panoramic view of the pavilion at the World Parks Congress 2014 in Sydney, Australia

Similar to the need for NGOs to build their capacity in policy advocacy and communication to effectively engage governments, capacity also needs to be built in communicating with the business world. The natural capital accounting approach is one way for scientists and the conservation community at large to speak 'the language of business' and help companies understand the impact they have on the environment, providing them with information to make more informed and responsible decisions.

The debate emerging from the Sydney Olympic Park (the venue for the Congress) is certainly one presenting and questioning innovative solutions for the future of protected areas in a changing world.

About CANARI: The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute is a regional, technical, non-profit organisation which has been working in the islands of the Caribbean for more than 30 years. Our mission is to promote equitable participation and effective collaboration in managing natural resources critical to development. Our programmes focus on research, sharing and dissemination of lessons learned, capacity building and fostering regional partnerships.

Connect with us:



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