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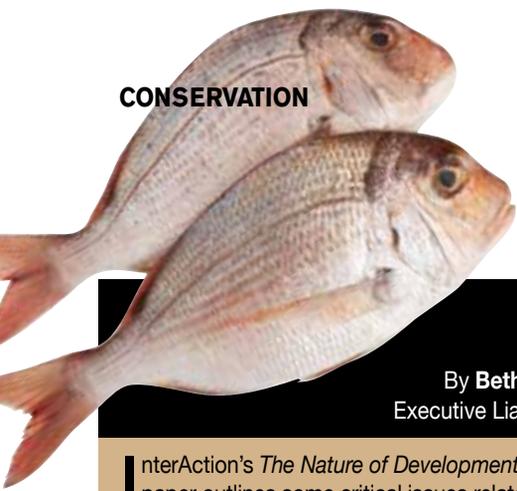
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Valuing Nature

By **Beth Allgood**, Campaigns Manager, and **Katie Miller**, Executive Liaison, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)

InterAction's *The Nature of Development* paper outlines some critical issues related to the complex relationship between poverty alleviation and ecological sustainability. It acknowledges that the environment is not one leg of a stool, but the very fabric into which our human community is woven. If the fabric's threads break under the strain of a growing population and increasing exploitation, human survival, particularly of the most vulnerable, will be jeopardized. Yet by focusing largely on capturing the economic value of nature, the paper leaves other critical values unaddressed.

More fully accounting for the economic value of nature, while an important step in assigning responsibility for the costs of environmental degradation, is not sufficient to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the planet. Indeed many ecosystem components, including the untold millions of species that remain undescribed by science, might have no economic value to some, whereas others consider them "priceless." Even the most sophisticated efforts to calculate the value of nature will involve judgments made by individuals, societies and governments. These human judgments are shaped by human values, which have many dimensions beyond the economic, including ethical, cultural, social and political.

For example, the many passionate and global efforts to protect habitats, species and the welfare of individual animals point to a very different type of value, that of intrinsic value: the value of something for its own sake, independent of its worth to anyone or anything else. Species cannot simply be exchanged or replaced and extinction is forever. In Yunnan Province, home of China's remaining 350 wild elephants, IFAW has worked closely with the government and local communities since 2000 to help elephants and people coexist on the land. Microcredit loans enable farmers to develop alternative income generating schemes that do not compete with elephants for habitat. A community-wide early warning system alerts neighbors of elephants in the area and ongoing education programs help en-

sure safety and effective land stewardship without harming the elephants. Participating villages, which once viewed elephants as a threat to their well-being, have come to take pride in protecting this fragile elephant population.

If we recognize the ethical as well as ecological and economic importance of maintaining biodiversity, we should strive to avoid consumptive use when there are viable alternatives. When managed effectively, nonconsumptive alternatives can be among the most ecologically and economically sustainable means for humans to benefit from nature. As noted in *Gaining Ground: In Pursuit of Ecological Sustainability*, they also provide the opportunity to recognize and highlight the importance of other values such as aesthetic, cultural, educational, intrinsic, recreational, scientific, social and spiritual values.

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Whale watching, which is fast becoming the predominant use of whales in the 21st century, is nonconsumptive and thus inherently ecologically sustainable when managed and regulated appropriately. It is economically sustainable—in fact it is potentially a huge economic boon for most developing coastal communities worth upwards of \$2.1 billion annually. And it is ethically sustainable because the entire industry is predicated upon a human appreciation of whales—a recognition of the intrinsic value of these beloved giants of the deep.

The Nature of Development places ecological sustainability at the heart of the sustainable development model. But a more holistic understanding that addresses ethical, social and other often overlooked strands of nature's value will be critical to safeguarding the ecological fabric into which our species and legions of others are woven.

International conservation and development actors are mobilizing to do just that. As global natural resource degradation combines with more extreme weather, development experts are increasingly focused on eliminating extreme poverty while restoring the natural resource base. And as the global population surpasses 7 billion this year and perhaps rises to 10 billion by this century's end, international environmental organizations are increasingly focused on human development.

Such integration would have profoundly positive results. Preserving functional ecosystems saves money, as it is almost always less expensive to preserve a critical ecosystem service (such as pollination, soil maintenance or fresh water) than to restore or replace it. Conserving ecosystems also ensures that gains in poverty alleviation, food security and other development fundamentals can be sustained over the long term. And conservation can prevent catastrophic loss from natural disasters caused or exacerbated by ecosystem decline and climate change.

Finally, effective development and natural resource management supports jobs in both developing and developed countries. With nearly half of all U.S. exports purchased by developing country markets, the U.S. economy and U.S. jobs depend on trade with developing countries. Yet 54 percent of the developing world's workforce is employed in agriculture, fisheries and forestry, sectors that directly depend upon the health of natural resources. Preserving the global resource base is imperative for the economic health of both developing and developed economies.

With this in mind, InterAction convened a series of discussions in early 2011 to chart a common path forward for the conservation and development communities. Participants from more than 30 organizations took part, discussing key barriers to integration as well as opportunities to more effectively coordinate policy and programming. The results are captured by author Laurie Mazur in InterAction's new publication, *The Nature of Development: Integrating Conservation and Development to Support Sustainable, Resilient Societies*.

The conclusion is simple: An integrated approach to conservation and development can yield better outcomes for both. Yet the real-world policy and program barriers to integration are significant. Three of the most important are: