

## Application of the Ecosystem Approach in Latin America (Aplicación del Enfoque Ecosistémico en Latinoamérica)

Angela Andrade - Editor

As pressures on nature and natural resources increase worldwide, it has become increasingly apparent that the environmental and social tools applied to guide economic development are too reactive, and that they rarely have more than a marginal influence on our development pathways. The negative outcomes of this state of affairs are visible everywhere: loss of critical ecosystem services that human societies depend on and accelerated species extinction. Add to this the increasing likelihood of severe climate change, and it is clear that more proactive approaches to sustainable development are needed now more than ever.

The Ecosystem Approach is a pro-active strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way. It puts people and their natural resource use practices squarely at the centre of decision-making. Because of these qualities, the Ecosystem Approach can be used to seek an appropriate balance between the conservation and use of biological diversity in areas where there are both multiple resource users and important natural values – as is common in many parts of the world.

There have been many encouraging examples of practical applications of the Ecosystem Approach, but not yet at a scale sufficient to make a difference. It is relevant to increase knowledge and dissemination of practical experiences of the application of the Ecosystem Approach in order to convince decision makers, planners and project managers, at different governance levels.

As a strategy endorsed at global level by the Convention on Biological Diversity, **there is only one Ecosystem Approach**. When it comes to implementation, however, **the Ecosystem Approach can be applied in many different ways**, all consistent with the strategy. The application of the Ecosystem Approach should reflect, and be tailored to, the different ecological, social and political situations in specific geographical area

The Latin American region provides an interesting testing ground for the Ecosystem Approach. On the one hand, there have been considerable efforts to apply the Ecosystem Approach, not just by people with a vested interest in nature conservation, but also in the management of water resources, wetlands, the so-called *paramos* and the implementation of experiences in Payment for Environmental Services schemes. On the other hand, the region still has large, non-fragmented areas of high conservation value, so that the adoption of a proactive approach to natural resource management has enormous potential to contribute to biodiversity conservation and long-term sustainable development.

Therefore, the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM), the Alexander von Humboldt Institute, the Tropenbos Foundation, and the Regional Office of the Environmental Program of the United Nations (PNUMA) developed a proposal to hold a two-day workshop on 20-22 June 2007 in Villa de Leyva, Colombia, to review experience gained with the Ecosystem Approach in Latin America and draw lessons learned that can help to further its application.

This publication includes some of the case studies presented during this workshop and other initiatives presented by CEM members from the region, and draws on recommendations and conclusions to be shared during the preparatory meetings of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, where the review of the Application of the Ecosystem Approach will be one of the main issues to be discussed, and the next IUCN Congress. Both events will take place during 2008.

The selected case studies are representative of the application of the Ecosystem Approach under different ecological, social, economic and cultural contexts of Latin-America. There are experiences related to the application of the Ecosystem Approach to Conservation and Biological corridors: the Chocó-Manabí between Colombia and Ecuador, and the Oak corridor in the Santander Department of Colombia; the biosphere reserve of the Mbaracayú forest in Paraguay; the integrated water management in Latin America; the sustainable management of wetlands; the Paraguay-Paraná system and the Fuquene wetlands in the Colombian Andes; the Paramo Ecosystems of the Andes; and the creation and management of the Marine Protected Areas System in Chile. At the institutional level, there are experiences from the National Agroecological Zoning Programme of Panamá, and three planning experiences of the Alexander von Humboldt Institute in Colombia: the Regional Biodiversity Programme of the Eastern Orinoquia, land-use planning of rural landscapes, and local community planning in the region around Villa de Leyva.

Several conclusions of the Villa de Leyva workshop are included as well as other practical recommendations oriented toward Governments, the IUCN and the CBD in order to promote future research and dissemination of experiences of the application of the Ecosystem Approach at global and regional levels.

In this way, the Latin American region presents its contribution to the application of the Ecosystem Approach to the CEM, the IUCN and CBD to orient future actions and to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

I hope that this document will be useful.

Angela Andrade Pérez Ed.  
Regional Vice Chair of CEM for South America  
E-mail: [aandrade@conservation.org](mailto:aandrade@conservation.org)  
Web: [www.iucn.org/themes/CEM/](http://www.iucn.org/themes/CEM/)