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## Building Human Capacity: An Opportunity for the Future

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## Building Human Capacity: An Opportunity for the Future.

Maia J. Enzer and Sally J. Loomis

Dr. Burch has elegantly discussed that as professionals educated in the West we must confront the ethics behind our actions and explicitly choose the values which shape our objectives in the fields of conservation and development. He characterizes this as the process of becoming sustainable people.

We agree that as individuals and a community of professionals we must be cognizant of the value systems we impose on others and ourselves. However, becoming sustainable people goes beyond simply recognizing the spiritual and ethical objectives which drive the educated. Creating sustainable people requires that there be an explicit effort to build the capacity of local people and their governments. This entails investing in activities that allow people to acquire the knowledge and skills that enable them to make informed decisions and to choose the development path most appropriate for their needs, within the constraints of their natural resource base. Further, beyond providing access to western knowledge and technology, it is imperative to raise the status of indigenous knowledge bases so that their wealth of insight, skills, and knowledge can become part of the decision making process. It is important that we move towards a conceptualization of a global community so we can facilitate a more egalitarian exchange of information and technology. This is a necessary step towards choosing a path of development that reflects the ethical and spiritual values of local communities.

Education is one of the most powerful tools we have available both as educators and students. To use this tool effectively requires that we extend and broaden our definition and conception of the purpose of education. As the editors of these proceedings, we suggest three educational paths that could act as catalysts for broadening our understanding of the educational process: improvements in the exchange of knowledge and skills between cultures can be achieved through formal study, participatory training, and experiential learning. We believe these components are ultimately necessary to create sustainable people and to build people's ability to address their needs for sustenance, community and equity.

The exchange of information between developing and developed countries goes in two directions. Educating the educated is an opportunity for people in developed countries to move away from their materialistic measures of success and narrow definitions of effectiveness and efficiency. Providing people in developing countries with access to information and technical skills gives them the opportunity to create and define the criteria to assess their own problems and solutions. Building bridges of communication and elevating the status of the knowledge of non-western peoples is also a step towards creating sustainable people.

In the end, we must recognize that the ecological, economic, and social problems discussed throughout these proceedings can only begin to be addressed when the "problems" are defined by the resource owners. But the problems facing the Himalayan region, and the opportunities those problems create, are not the responsibility of the local resource users alone. For in reality, as some of the preceding papers have argued, the problems confronting the Himalayan ecosystem are caused by both local and international pressures on all facets of the ecosystem (ecological integrity, economic and social stability, as well as the political climate). Therefore, the responsibility to address these issues resides with both the local users and the international community which has benefited from the practices employed in this region.

In closing we urge the conservation community to focus on the process of education and recognize the inherent exchange which defines education and learning. We suggest that the "educated" remind themselves of their permanent status as a student and teacher. This requires flexibility and an explicit intent to make knowledge inclusive: to increase the ease of access and utilization, while ultimately remaining aware of the values which shape our interpretations of the "facts."

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