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Organisations thrive on personality and leadership. Academic analysis sometimes does not give sufficient attention to the role of individual people in policy making. Yet, the head of a non governmental organisation can be just as influential as the chief executive of a major corporation, or a minister, in establishing a 'personality style' for the institution.

In this column, Simon Batterbury, shows that the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) has been blessed by distinguished and high profile founders and campaigners from its inception. This is why it is so influential and transformational. In the modern day politics of partnership, forum, think tanks and focus groups, the role of the individual personality can become less distinct. This delightful historical assessment of IIED's achievements since 1972 speaks volumes for the well networked organisations of unforgettable people. Long may they continue to remain distinctive!

Finally, this is the very last editorial we shall write in this series. It began in 1994, so we have covered much in our institutional odyssey. It has been fun to create and sustain a column that has attracted so many different concepts and authors. In the process, we have learned a lot about how institutions emerge and evolve. We also have enjoyed sharing with you our editorial observations.

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The International Institute for Environment and Development: Notes on a small office

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The Stockholm conference on the Human Environment took place in 1972, but its central message, the need for lessened economic growth and poverty reduction, made its mark with a generation of environmental policymakers, activists, concerned citizens, development professionals, and students. By 2002, when the Johannesburg Summit on Environment and Development took place, it was clear that some of these early messages had found their way into popular consciousness worldwide, although other elements from Stockholm had fallen by the wayside, due to indifference or outright hostility in some quarters towards the ideas and the reality of a global "sustainability transition" (Raskin et al., 2002).

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), a "policy research" institute, also celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 2002. IIED, headquartered in Bloomsbury, London (and with smaller offices in Dakar and Edinburgh) was also a child of the early 1970s and of Stockholm. Its anniversary is marked by the publication of *Evidence for Hope*, a collection of the work of the Institute edited

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by its former Director, Nigel Cross (Cross, 2003). As Cross notes, ''Institutional history can be dull'', but IIED's sparkles with energy, incident, and maverick thinking. It is one of a small group of organizations which has provided core concepts and methods for thinking about sustainability and social change. From small beginnings, this has involved an ever widening range of collaborators and co-authors in the developing and developed world. IIED conducts passionate, relevant research and lobbying on environmental and justice issues in a manner completely unlike a university or a foundation, using scarce funds charmed out of key donor organizations and using a variety of inventive tactics. *Evidence for Hope* is a fitting reminder that organizations and the texts they produce have an intellectual history and biography, since the backbone of IIED, its staff both past and present, are fascinating characters in their own right.

The key player in the early days was of IIED was Barbara Ward. By the time of her death in 1981, she was best known as an environmentalist (Ward, 1979). Yet Ward was also a leading intellectual of her time—a respected economist and former professor at Columbia University, a governor of the BBC, an expert publicist, and an advisor and friend and confidante to people that mattered. In Ward, ''analysis and idealism'' formed ''heady compounds'' (Johnson, 2003). Following her major input to the Stockholm Conference (Ward and Dubos, 1972), she agreed to head up IIED from 1973, with the initial backing of an industrialist, Robert Anderson. Ward provided IIED's ''institutional persona'', at a time when concern over western consumption, and poverty in the developing world, was still in its infancy. Her message was strong, and people listened. Following her death from cancer, IIED was left with a vacuum. It was the job of ''Barbara's boys''—as anthropologist Margaret Mead had once dubbed Ward's tiny staff—to keep the ship on course, afloat, and to develop a ''post-Barbara identity'' (Tinker, 2003, pp. 49).

How was this achieved? Not without some difficulties. IIED's small but important USA office was incorporated into the World Resources Institute, which also meant relinquishing the *World Resources Report* to WRI. Earthscan Publishing had grown as a semi-autonomous media service and publishing house in IIED's London building, but in 1986 a complicated series of events led to its head, Jon Tinker, being asked to leave. He established the Panos agency instead, eventually taking most of the Earthscan team with him. Confusingly, today a different commercial publisher is licenced to produce Earthscan books, although it remains the publisher of choice for many IIED research outputs.

Despite these upsets, a much leaner IIED survived the mid 1980s. It built up new research programmes, hired a few enthusiastic new staff, and began to publish widely and vigorously. Books like Lloyd Timberlake's *Africa in Crisis* (1986) and Paul Harrison's much more optimistic *The Greening of Africa* (1987) made a big impact, as did *No Timber Without Trees* (Poore, 1989) and *Beyond the Woodfuel Crisis* (Leach and Mearns, 1988). IIED also made a large contribution to the Bruntland Report (*Our Common Future*) in 1987. By the late 1980s the Institute had developed a reputation in some quarters for challenging, at times populist research and writing. Yet it has never claimed to be truly 'radical'. Under the direction of William Clark, Brian Walker and then Richard Sandbrook, it preferred to nudge international institutions and governments (and latterly, corporate interests) towards sustainability via an advisory role, through sound analysis and an ''instinct for pragmatism over theory'' (Tinker, 2003, pp. 57). It balanced its fundraising between the private sector, governments and foundations, and has conducted some multi-partner projects that rival those conducted by the universities in their size and prestige. The ''Sustainable Paper Cycle Project'' of the mid 1990s, for example, took industry money to review the entire paper cycle from timber growth to waste paper disposal, and developed intriguing findings about the relative merits of incineration versus landfill and recycling options (IIED, 1996).

Work at the Institute is divided into Programmes, each with a Director, although some projects and 'Groups' cut across these, and the structure has been altered several times.[1] Duncan Poore initiated applied research on forestry issues in 1982, and his team developed a forerunner to the Tropical Forestry Action Plan, as well as helping to get the International Tropical Timber Agreement successfully ratified in 1988. Recent work has been more explicit in addressing the causes of unsustainable forestry and logging—especially in a series of case studies and publications called 'Policies that Work for Forests and People' directed by James Mayers and Steve Bass (Mayers and Bass, 1999). Individual country reports are concerned with gaining consensus on the merits of sustainable forestry practices in several timber exporting countries, and with implementation through new agreements and certification schemes. The Programme continues to prod and cajole the timber industry and the governments with which they are often complicit, to consider more than easy yields and quick profit. It also works with marginalized forest dwellers and labourers in several countries.

[1] A research shift from European issues to the global South was in train by the 1980s, although today a higher percentage of work once again involves Europe and North America. The lights were turned off in Gerald Leach's Energy Programme in 1988 and a recent addition has been Saleemul Huq's Climate Change programme in 2001. Several themes have taken new directions over the years, for example in biodiversity assessment and the support of national environmental planning procedures.

Work on sustainable agriculture down the years has not only addressed some of the major preoccupations of researchers and activists (agricultural pollution, the plight of small scale farmers, etc.) but also positioned IIED as one of the two or three originators of participatory rural appraisal (PRA), of the type now incorporated into mainstream development planning. Gordon Conway (now President of the Rockefeller Foundation) founded the forerunner of the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods programme in the 1980s and was succeeded by Jules Pretty and then John Thompson as its director. Conway's agroecosystem analysis identified the tradeoffs made in farming systems between productivity, stability, equity, and sustainability. But it was PRA that sustained the programme and brought it international recognition for fifteen years. The first PRA techniques were developed by Conway and Robert Chambers (IDS, Sussex) in Ethiopia. During village fieldwork in the mid 1980s, Chambers asked "why… did the experts have to draw all the maps and ask all the questions? Why could the farmers not do this themselves?" (Conway, 2003; p. 111). The two of them re-orientated their village study, and the rest is history—participatory methods and philosophies have taken off worldwide, and a whole generation of development researchers and project staff now find themselves "listening as much as talking" (p. 113). IIED's *PLA Notes* and other publications and videos are used and read globally.[2] Agriculture has remained a core theme at IIED, although the focus is now more on food systems in the round, with some sterling work on organic food production, GMOs (at times highly controversial—Pimbert and Wakeford, 2002), wild food collection and marketing, rural–urban linkages, rural development planning and agricultural livelihoods, pesticides, gender dimensions, and fair trade, to name just a few themes.

A separate Drylands programme was formed in 1987 under Camilla Toulmin (now the Director of IIED) and staff have included some well known associates including Charles Lane, Ian Scoones, current Director Ced Hesse, and the late Richard Moorhead. The Drylands Programme has focused on social and environmental conditions in the dry francophone and anglophone countries, primarily in Africa. The Sahelian famines of the mid 1980s focused world interest on this region, and provided initial funding for research. One can find the Programme's free *Issue Papers*, and its small newsletter *Haramata*, anywhere from dusty NGO offices in the Sahel, to the headquarters of major development agencies. The programme has tackled the plight of Maasai herders excluded from conservation areas, the need to strengthen pastoral associations in the lobbying work needed to secure basic rights of access and livelihood, and support to innovative farmer methods of soil fertility management and soil/water conservation. In its work on land tenure in Africa, Toulmin has argued that it is incumbent on government and donors to help make land access more secure, in the light of their enthusiasm for too-hasty privatization (Toulmin and Quan, 2000). Drylands also supported the training and diffusion of participatory rural appraisal and management techniques for farmers and pastoral organizations, based out of Bara Gueye's Dakar office, and for some years the Programme gave direct funding to small NGOs. This focus on pushing logical local solutions and learning from success stories, encapsulated in collaborative publications like *Sustaining the Soil* (Reij et al., 1996) did not make Drylands a natural bedfellow with some top-down initiatives such as the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, which Toulmin confesses "has not been the right mechanism for drylands" (Toulmin, 2003; p. 160).

IIED has also been strong on addressing the problems generated by urban poverty—the 'brown agenda' of improving urban health, environmental quality, and housing. The Human Settlements programme has been avowedly pro-poor from the outset, as David Satterthwaite (an Institute fixture since 1974, when he started a 6 month temporary job with Barbara Ward!) notes in his contribution to *Evidence for Hope* (2003). It was founded by Jorge Hardoy, a visionary Argentinean planner and activist who tried to channel research efforts and funds directly to developing country research teams. Diana Mitlin and other team members encouraged local partners—some in universities, but increasingly in NGOs—to carry out applied research and to develop their own management capacities, with minimal interference from London. This was a different way for working to most IIED ventures, although it has latterly become more widespread—it de-emphasized major published outputs and was insistent about working through organizations and practitioners with good grass roots credentials. Hardoy, who died in 1993, established IIED América Latina in Buenos Aires, now a separate organization. Several publications synthesizing grass roots experiences have included *Squatter Citizen* (1989), *Environmental Problems in Third World Cities* (1992, rewritten and renamed in 2001) and the journal *Environment and Urbanization* (dominated by developing country contributors).

As I have argued, IIED never ignored the corporate world, but it was sometimes hesitant to engage with it, or to take its money. But several key figures like Richard Sandbrook, Nick Robins and Koy Thomson developed a strong conviction that corporations and business are the third 'corner' of the sustainability triangle alongside

[2] Conway and Chambers later produced the first paper on 'sustainable livelihoods', a hugely popular and holistic approach in contemporary development administration, while on holiday together in India in the early 1990s.

government and citizens' groups, and progress would be limited without them on board. Robins notes that… "When IIED was founded thirty years ago, many of the actions…that companies are now taking to reduce their environmental burden, [to] become more accountable and [to] deliver positive social benefits, would have been inconceivable" (Robins, 2003; pp. 204). Yet by 2000 IIED had completed the Paper Project, and set up a large programme to conduct a comprehensive social and environmental appraisal of the global mining industry; a fast-paced and ambitious project that was completed in two years and funded largely by the industry itself (IIED, 2002). In the 1990s there was a new initiative led by Nick Robins and Sarah Roberts called Sustainable Markets, which focused on environmentally sustainable production and fair trade. The team produced some influential reports and cases studies, but corporate donors were strangely indifferent, and staff departures sealed its fate. Later IIED's work in this area has been reborn as Corporate Responsibility for Environment and Development under Halina Ward, and included a project on ethical business practices and food sourcing by supermarket chains (www.racetothetop.org) as well as a concerted effort to involve partners in the South. IIED has also run a Programme in Environmental Economics (EEP) since 1988, initially led by Ed Barbier, and borne out of a request by the UK government for a report on the implications of the Bruntland Report. The document, 'Blueprint 1' (Pearce et al., 1989), argued for the adoption of 'green' economic accounting and eco-taxation as a mechanism to achieve more widespread sustainable practice. EEP's work on these instruments was pioneering, and most international organizations from the World Bank downwards now use them in some way. The assumptions and theory behind ecological taxation can sometimes yield conclusions that are politically or practically difficult to implement, but EEP is locating conditions where markets for environmental services (biodiversity, carbon storage, watershed protection, landscape, etc.) can benefit the poor.

There are many lessons to be learned from IIED's institutional history. Clearly, we need to include organizations like this in our sights when seeking high quality, policy-relevant research on environmental and social issues. Much of what has been achieved by the Institute is a result of the sheer dedication, commitment, and at times bloody-mindedness of its staff, beginning with Barbara Ward and her "boys" (some of whom were actually women). I doubt that the individuals involved would have achieved as much in isolation as they did collectively—IIED's unique environment brought them together and sparked ideas. Yet 'policy research' like IIED's always treads a fine line—it informs policy but rarely implements it, and neither is it pure research for its own sake. There is an effort to be engaged—to bring together qualified researchers with stakeholders and policymakers. IIED has never been an implementing agency, and this is a source of regret in some quarters (a link to a large NGO was mooted in the 1990s, and several former staff have moved into that sector on leaving IIED). In terms of research contributions, IIED is largely reliant on individual project based support, and so the potential for sustained work in a region or on a theme is sometimes much more constrained than it might be in a university environment where timescales are not as abbreviated and 'core' support comes through teaching and academic grants. But IIED has remained truly interdisciplinary, in ways that universities usually find too challenging.

IIED deserves to have an even greater influence in certain sectors. It has frequently found the ear of governments and corporations, but the degree to which it has been heard, and has made a difference, has varied. Several forward thinking Scandinavian and European government donors have sustained its programs over the years, and globally, I have shown that its ideas have found resting places. But although many of its publications make fine aids to teaching and class discussion, it has been poor at tapping the education sector. This is partly a function of working practices: having completed a project, there is rarely the time or the money left for systematic dissemination when the next grant proposal must be written. Time for follow-up and reflection is a valuable commodity, and not always available. Media work is now much more a focus of Panos, with whom IIED now has a good relationship. IIED's publication sales, once conducted from the Bloomsbury office, are now contracted out and although a small in-house information centre for disseminating participatory approaches has sadly not survived recent cutbacks, improvements in IT capacity now support a stable and ever expanding web presence with many downloadable documents.[3]

A broader concern is the question of the "institutional sustainability" of IIED itself—is it possible to run an organization entirely reliant on donor and project funding, when donor interest is itself fickle, and subject to economic and political reorientations? Can the Institute sustain its level of respect with governments and aid donors, as well as contributing to small-scale activities, *and* influence the major intellectual and methodological debates of the moment, from Stockholm to Johannesburg? Yes, but this clearly has its costs; IIED's primary export is the knowledge of its staff, and the synergies among and between them. While environmental and development concerns are now more pressing than ever, the type of applied policy research and team projects that IIED undertakes have become much harder to fund and to sustain. Despite the

[3] IIED begun investment in IT in the 1970s, with a 32k Altair used by Gerald Leach for assessing the UK's entire energy budget!

adoption over the years of good internal working conditions and a healthy number of applicants for staff positions, most (if not all) Institute staff at one time or another suffer from impossible deadlines, long working hours, and expend their share of carbon on too many international flights. A relatively high staff turnover from an office always bursting at the seams, reflects the pressures of almost constant fundraising (''covering your days'', as it is known). There are problems in running projects that frequently involve multiple partners (not all of whom may be keeping to deadlines themselves), as well as numerous bureaucratic hurdles to overcome. The result—alongside the rewards of satisfying work—is occasional burnout. Turnover of personnel can be turned to advantage when people leave to assume new positions of influence in cognate and sisterly organizations, thus broadening the social network—but sometimes this has happened too early, or for the wrong reasons (Cross, 2003).

So, ultimately, what has 'sustained' IIED? Richard Sandbrook provides one clue when he suggests the Institute is part of the ''not for profit but for change'' community. This, he says, is a ''worldwide club and basically very friendly. It attracts people who are committed but also unusually able to laugh at themselves and with others'' (Sandbrook 2003; p. 63). Laughing while drowning in deadlines? Let us hope not. Happy anniversary, IIED.

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