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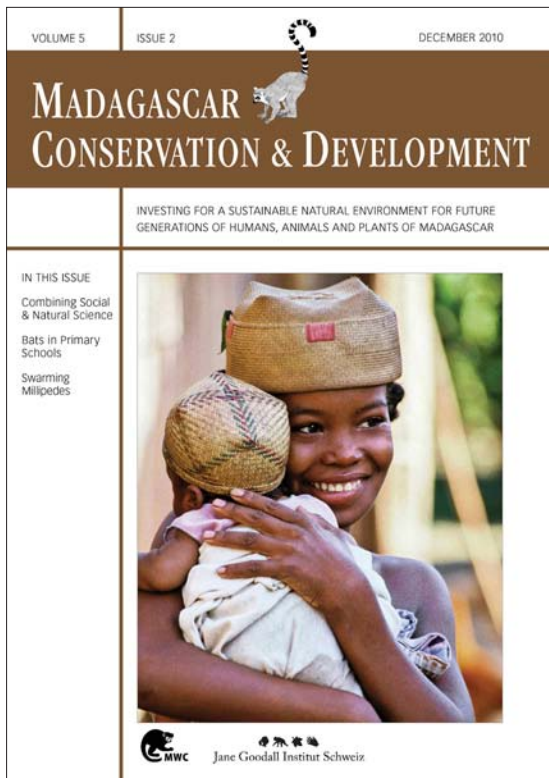
## EDITORIAL

# Looking back and thinking ahead – where next for conservation in Madagascar?

Conservation in Madagascar has seen some notable advances over the last two decades; massive policy reform and the launch of a large number of field-level initiatives have resulted in a range of new policy frameworks and institutions, a reduction in deforestation rates in many regions, the creation of numerous new protected areas and the participation of local stakeholders in new forms of natural resource governance. Such efforts have not been enough, however, to stem the tide of increasing resource degradation, and the biodiversity and functional ecosystems that underpin Madagascar's development continue to be eroded at alarming rates. These are among the conclusions of two recent reviews of the environment sector in the country, those of Freudenberg (2010) and Kiefer et al. (2010). Although different in scope, both reviews serve as useful entry points for us to reflect on progress, challenges and scenarios for the future of conservation on the island.

Kiefer et al. (2010) provides an overview of the interdependence of conservation and development in Madagascar generally, and Freudenberg (2010) focuses specifically on the interventions of USAID environment programmes over the last 25 years. Both conclude their analyses with hypothetical scenarios for the future of the conservation sector in the country. These reviews, published during the International Year of Biodiversity, provide an opportunity for reflection on the successes and failures of the environmental sector so far. At a time when the sector is facing new challenges and opportunities that will shape conservation in the decades to come (including climate change, carbon markets and REDD, population growth, political instability and increased foreign interest in Madagascar's resources), this issue of Madagascar Conservation & Development in turn provides an opportunity for further reflection on the critical question 'where next for conservation in Madagascar?'

Freudenberg's future scenarios are for the international community investing in Madagascar's sustainable development. There are, she summarises, three paths we could follow: 1) we abandon hope and give up the fight, because the challenges are simply too great, 2) we continue our current approaches, but try to do bigger and better, or 3) we collectively decide that what is at stake is so important to the world that we tear up the rule book and try radically new approaches. Kiefer et al.'s analysis, on the other hand, assumes that our collective interest in conservation will be maintained, and focuses on the respective roles of the environmental and development sectors in achieving sustainability. They argue that conservation and development are so interlinked that conservation success will only be achieved when all development sectors (including health and population, agriculture, and mining) work holistically to promote environmental sustainability in a mutually reinforcing



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loop – conservation cannot happen without development, and development will not occur without a sufficient natural resource base. Both analyses converge on a number of issues: There is agreement that the stakes, for the Malagasy people, the national economy and global stakeholders, are high and reaching crisis point, and that progress towards a sustainable future depends largely on governance. We draw on two issues raised by these reports which help us imagine what kind of changes might be useful to the policy processes as well as in the actual concepts and substance of conservation policies themselves.

The interviews with social scientists in this issue add to the case made in Freudenberger's report; That policy processes should be more inclusive of people from all sectors of Malagasy society, as well as both Malagasy and international thinkers from multiple disciplines. In working out how actually to implement this in practice, Madagascar could consider drawing on experience from the participatory policy planning processes developed in other developing countries through FAO National Forest Programmes (FAO 2006, O'Hara 2009). More inclusive conservation policy processes also need to be supported by good governance processes in the implementation of the resulting policies. To do this, the inclusion of forms of independent international scrutiny of governance across natural resource sectors would provide tools with which to tackle the institutionalised 'weak governance' which has plagued progress in conservation. Recent experience with the difficulties of resolving illegal precious wood exports (Ballet et al. this issue), and the negative social impacts of mining companies (Harbinson 2007, ALT and Panos 2009) illustrate the important role that international investigations and scrutiny can play in these matters. Rather than continuing this somewhat *ad hoc* and crisis-response approach, the systematic adoption of international monitoring standards would help. Models for Independent Forest Monitoring (Global Witness 2005) already exist and similar approaches could be adopted for the independent scrutiny of REDD, mining, biofuels and agricultural activities (see interviews in MCD 5(1)).

More inclusive and well informed policy processes would be expected to lead to innovation, policy reform and improved practices to produce more equitable and effective conservation. These reforms might be expected to include more effective decentralisation, more substantial economic rewards and incentives for the local people who are the custodians and customary owners of the natural resources, and to deal with one of the elephants in the room, the substantive securing of local tenure of both agricultural and forest lands. While the detail and orientation of future conservation policies is a matter for debate, we would like to use the remainder of this editorial to advocate more nuanced forms of communication by conservationists and conservation commentators. Conservation in Madagascar, as in many African nations, has become characterised by a discourse-practice divide (Benjaminson and Svarstad 2010, Büscher and de Beer In press), with relentlessly positive publicity emanating from conservation organisations extolling the virtues of their interventions (Brockington 2009) and a growing literature of critique produced by commentators on conservation (Ferguson 2010). In this issue's Spotlights article, Joerg Ganzhorn puts forward some useful approaches to remedying this situation, which otherwise risks increasing polarisation and entrenchment of positions. Among his proposals are increased collaboration between researchers and conservationists, and

better availability of project reports to enable us to learn from our successes and failures. We would add to these suggestions a call for the explicit recognition of the tradeoffs which will inevitably have to be part of conservation programmes as policies are discussed, implemented and reviewed (Hirsch et al. 2010, McShane et al. 2010), and an encouragement to practitioners, policy makers and researchers alike to keep the debate alive through publishing in, reviewing manuscripts for, and reading this journal. Madagascar Conservation & Development was, after all, created as a forum for debate and exchange – let's keep using it.

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