

Striking a balance between people and nature

“Conservationists often think of protected areas as though they are islands rich in biodiversity, separated by vast deserts with little interest,” explains CIFOR scientist Jean-Laurent Pfund, “but that’s often not the case. Many landscapes outside protected areas consist of a mosaic of habitats – secondary forests, gardens, agroforests. These provide people with a means of making a living, and they’re important for wildlife too.”

One of the great challenges today is how to balance the human demands on nature – forests provide 1.6 million people with food, medicines, fuel and other products – with the need to preserve the environment. “Protecting the biodiversity of fragmented landscapes, and ensuring that those who live there can continue to make a living, requires a new approach to rural planning,” explains Pfund,

national laws with the customary laws, such as adat in Indonesia, of indigenous societies.

Research will concentrate on landscape mosaics in five countries – Cameroon, Indonesia, Tanzania, Laos and Madagascar – and it will draw on a broader range of disciplines and approaches. Using action research, for example, the scientists will explore local perceptions to biodiversity among a range of stakeholders, from the private sector to decision makers, from local communities to conservation agencies. The research, whether sociological or ecological, will be conducted along transects which include densely forested areas close to protected areas, landscapes with a mixture of forest and cultivated land, and areas subject to more intensive use, for example as oil-palm plantations.

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Sunrise at Río Manupare, Bolivia. Photo: Jennifer KleeB

“and that’s why we have established the Biodiversity Platform.”

The Biodiversity Platform is a joint programme devised by CIFOR and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF). Launched in Bogor in March 2006, the first meeting of the Biodiversity Platform brought together some 30 scientists from the two research centres, together with others who are researching biodiversity issues in landscapes where wildlife must co-exist with a variety of land-use activities.

To give the Platform long-term momentum, a three-year programme has been planned. This will generate a range of global public goods by examining, among other things, the relationships between biodiversity and the way people make a living; the sort of incentives which could be used to promote conservation and sustainable land use; and the opportunities which exist to harmonise

“This is not just an academic exercise,” explains Pfund. “We want to have a real impact on the ground. Ultimately, a better understanding of the links between biodiversity and the livelihoods of the poor should help to inform the decision-making of local policy-makers, development agencies and conservation organisations on land-use planning issues.”

The Biodiversity Platform will make best use of the complementary strengths of CIFOR and ICRAF and help to create a closer working relationship between the two centres. Other research organisations, such as the Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement (CIRAD) and Bioersity International, have also shown a keen interest in collaborating with the Biodiversity Platform.