
Sustainable patterns of world development



A leader in sustainable development, IIED aims to influence environmental policy and practice at local, national and global levels. *International Innovation* tracked down Director Camilla Toulmin to discover more about the Institute's research activities

Dr Camilla Toulmin,
Director, International Institute for Environment and Development

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is one of the world's most influential international development and environment policy research organisations. Could you summarise its core goals?

IIED's main objective is to build relationships with global research partners, and provide the evidence governments need to develop policies that can improve people's lives in ways that maintain the value of the environmental resources on which our collective prosperity depends.

How did you first become involved with the Institute? What does your position as Director entail?

I first came across IIED in 1986, when a staff member asked me to contribute ideas on dryland development in Africa for the Alternative Economic Summit. It was an opportunity to reach a new audience with a message of optimism about the future of drylands, based on the knowledge and initiative of local people. This confidence in common sense at the grassroots is a building block for much of our work.

I joined IIED in 1987 and ran the Drylands Programme for 16 years before becoming Director in 2004. My position demands: first, that I keep a close eye on changes to the external scene, opportunities for making a difference, openings to spread our research findings to inform and influence decision makers, and new sources of support for our work; and second, that I work closely with my colleagues at the Institute to develop and deliver high quality work that makes a difference both locally and globally. This includes: maintaining a fresh and investigative environment within the organisation; finding the appropriate people to carry out the work; and developing our staff who constitute IIED's principal asset.

Could you elaborate on IIED's work building climate resilience, productivity and equity in the drylands? How do misconceptions about the drylands and pastoralism affect government policies?

For many policy makers, the drylands are unproductive, degraded and vulnerable areas. But communities that have lived there for generations have developed ways to track resources, such as water and pasture, that are patchy in space and time. As a result, pastoralists in the drylands produce much of the meat and milk that urban citizens consume, yet governments tend to ignore their economic value. The knowledge systems and mobility of pastoralists will be critical as the climate changes, but pastoralists also need government policies that support their mobility and promote sustainable development in the dry areas. We are currently working in Kenya, China and India to provide evidence for new policy narratives, which support pastoralists to fulfil their potential to provide food and sustain resilient livelihoods in a changing climate.

IIED identifies, generates, shares and employs new knowledge. How important is the dissemination of results? Is open source data something that the Institute has implemented?

There is no point conducting research if nobody hears about the findings. Equally, there is no point in publishing results in ways that exclude people – either because they can't access the internet, can't afford expensive books, or are too busy to read long reports. To ensure our research reaches the right people we invest in strategic communications throughout each project. We publish all of our research online for people to download freely, and we also share it in ways that suit different audiences by producing a range of policy briefs, blog posts, media releases, films and public events.

Why is it important for politicians to 'domesticate' climate change policy in their own countries? How does IIED support parliamentary capacity building in different countries?

Climate change is a global problem, but its impacts will be felt at a local level and every emission comes from a local source. It is essential for each country to have plans that deal with their own context, and those plans must address the diversity of local context and capacities in each

nation. Most countries are now developing National Adaptation Plans, for example. For these plans to be effective, all politicians – not just governmental and ministerial – need to understand climate change. This parliamentary capacity to understand and respond to climate change also means that countries can enact ambitious and effective national policies without waiting for international negotiations to inch towards a comprehensive global deal.

IIED has worked with parliamentarians in various African countries such as Ghana, Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland to strengthen their knowledge of climate change as well as their ability to ensure that government policies are effective. Our only hope of reaching a global deal depends on governments and parliaments all over the world saying 'come on – let's do it!'

The Institute ensures that development is climate-resilient by supporting public policy responses. What issues has IIED met in this area and how have they been overcome?

The Institute works with partners at local, national and global levels to influence climate policy by sharing robust evidence identified by our research. To support and influence the UN climate change negotiations, for example, we have produced briefing papers to signal whether governments have kept their promises to provide financial aid to help vulnerable countries adapt to climate change. These briefings have highlighted gaps forcing negotiators from wealthier nations to revise their own financial pledges.

We also aid negotiators from developing countries with legal research and advice as they attempt to ensure a fair global deal on climate change for their citizens. At a national level, we support countries as they develop their plans and policies for adapting to climate change. In Kenya, for instance, we have helped design a decentralised fund that national governments can use to help local communities adapt to climate change.

What was the outcome of IIED's 7th International Conference on Community-Based Adaptation (CBA) to Climate Change?

IIED was among the first organisations to point out that even if all greenhouse gases ceased today, there would still be significant impacts from climate change because of lags in the Earth-atmosphere system. That means some impacts of climate change are inevitable, and the poorest people need support to adapt to them.

Whilst raising adaptation to the global policy agenda, we have shown it is mostly at the community level that this must happen. We have conducted research with partners in Africa and Asia to reveal what this means in practice, and discuss what communities are already doing to adapt to climatic variation and change. Through our annual CBA conference, we have created a community of researchers, policy makers, donors and development agencies, who now regularly share knowledge and promote community-based adaptation around the world. One outcome of this year's recent conference was that government representatives from Africa and Asia formed a network to support their efforts to factor climate change into national development planning.

Collaboration must be a major part of your work. What success has the Institute seen through partnerships?

Nearly all aspects of IIED's work is carried out through partnerships, and to promote learning. We work with other researchers, federations of urban slum dwellers, government departments, UN agencies and civil society organisations. Through our partnerships we are able to give poorer communities and countries power, ensuring decision makers hear the views of the most marginalised people.

For over 40 years, IIED's work has very clearly demonstrated sustainable development isn't going to come about by global agreement from the top-down. It needs to be built step by step from the grassroots to local and national levels.

IIED

insight



IIED was established in 1971 by British economist and author Barbara Ward. As an editor for *The Economist* she wrote many articles on the global issue of poverty in developing countries, and advocated that richer nations re-think their own development pathway. She also highlighted the importance of conservation through several of her books, especially *Only One Earth*.

Ward played a key role during the 1950s and 60s in awakening public opinion to the economic and environmental challenges facing vulnerable regions. Taking her case to global political leaders, Ward used her persuasiveness and charm to win their support.

She was made DBE in 1973 and life peer in 1976, as Baroness Jackson of Lodsworth. Ward's inspiring work has continued on a global scale through IIED's work across five continents.

IIED's work is led by four research groups. Each of these groups specialises in a particular area

Climate change

The world's poorest people are disproportionately affected by climate change; unpredictable and severe climate can destroy livelihoods and exacerbate poverty. The main objectives of IIED's climate change group are to:

- Build climate resilience, productivity and equity in the drylands
- Achieve more equitable global climate change governance
- Support public policy responses to ensure development is climate-resilient
- Help communities adapt to climate change

Human settlements

The scale, form and concentration of urban development strongly influence the pattern of resource consumption, waste generation and greenhouse gas emissions – particularly in poverty-stricken areas. Many city governments in developing countries are weak and remain unaccountable to their citizens. Consequently, most international agencies are reluctant to work there and have limited experience in urban areas.



IIED aims to improve health and housing conditions in urban centres through the promotion of ecologically sustainable patterns of urban governance and development. This is achieved by: engaging in policy research, evaluation, technical and policy assistance; and training through seminars and publications. This work is accomplished in close partnership with NGOs and academic institutions in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Natural resources

Building partnerships, capacity and wise decision making for the fair and sustainable use of natural resources relies on local control and management of ecosystem services. IIED promotes the changes needed in local and national governance to make this happen. The themes that underpin this team's efforts include:

- **Biodiversity and Conservation:** many of the world's most biodiverse areas are found in countries with abject poverty, making it even more important to protect biodiversity and promote the livelihood opportunities afforded by natural services
- **Food and Agriculture:** IIED's work with food and agriculture aims to help communities gain/maintain control of their own resources. This is achieved mainly through encouraging policy reform to allow people to build food systems that are resilient to the growing risks of climate change and water crises
- **Empowerment and Land Rights:** secure land rights are essential to maintaining the livelihoods of rural people; they are fundamental to economic development, food security and poverty reduction

- **Forestry:** more carbon is sequestered in forests than is held in the Earth's atmosphere, and deforestation and forest degradation account for some 17 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions globally. IIED aims to promote effective, integrated approaches to forestry that are locally controlled, bring local benefit and offer long-term management of carbon, water and biodiversity

Sustainable markets

IIED's work on business and sustainable development has focused on the natural resource-based sectors. This group brings together work on business and sustainable development, market structure, environmental economics, trade and investment, tourism, and mining. IIED's sustainable markets team possesses particular expertise in food and agriculture, energy and extractive industries.



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