

Foreword

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The search for paths to an environmentally sustainable future is more urgent than ever before. The developing world has shown that progress is possible, and on terms that respect the social and cultural norms of diverse peoples and places. This can, in part, be attributed to a growing recognition that conservation and development are often inherently compatible and mutually supporting goals.

Local, indigenous, and resource-dependent communities are showing that great gains can be made when livelihoods and environmental needs are viewed together. The growing successes that local people – and their NGO, governmental and United Nations partners – have had in these areas indicate that the silos and divisions that once separated the conservation and development communities are breaking down. Local and global actors are jointly engaged in a coherent and collaborative attack on poverty that recognizes the interconnectedness of environmental sustainability and poverty issues: the effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The MDGs range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS, and providing universal primary education to ensuring environmental sustainability –all by the target date of



2015. Moreover the MDGs have unprecedented political backing: never before have such concrete goals been formally endorsed by rich and poor countries, and never before have the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the international system come together behind the same development agenda.

Historically, the role of biodiversity and natural resources in underpinning key development issues was often overlooked, with dire consequences. Far from being a luxury, biodiversity and ecosystem services – such as the provision of clean water, the maintenance of soil fertility, protection from floods, and the regulation of disease – are essential to the well-being and livelihoods of the poor. The poor, with the greatest direct dependence on the natural world, bear the brunt of environmental degradation, species loss, and pollution. Biodiversity, whether privately or commonly held, has global benefits. By working with all those who manage biodiversity to promote conservation and sustainable use, the entire global family can reap rewards.

This book – with its focus on the interface between poverty and the environment – reminds us that achieving the MDGs will require a genuinely integrated approach to conservation and development, which recognizes intact ecosystems as a basic human need. It also highlights that communities and local partnerships are a vital driving force for sustainable development. Continued success towards the full achievement of the MDGs will require that we learn from innovative and diverse experiences at all levels and think and act across disciplines and approaches.

This volume is a valuable contribution to the effort to bridge conservation and development issues and address the challenge of sustainable development as a unified whole. The importance of this work resides in its ability to outline the challenges that face us while also illuminating promising solutions. Collaborative, culturally relevant, and locally informed experience must be the bedrock of our shared global effort to achieve sustainable development and improve the human condition.