

# **Translating Environmental Awareness into Action**

Ismid Hadad

KEHATI – The Indonesian Biodiversity Foundation

## **The overburdened Earth**

Humans beings are an incredible species. Compared to other species, humans inhabited the Earth relatively recently and yet, they are rapidly dominating and changing the face of the Earth. The human population increases by three people each second which is nearly 81 million per year. However, the consumption rate of the Earth's resources and the waste generated create global environmental degradation. Millions of tons of carbon dioxide and other gases are released into the atmosphere each year, creating "the greenhouse effect". There is a significant biodiversity loss, with the general extinction rate of approximately 140 species per day. Almost half of the forest that originally covered the Earth has been lost. During 1980-1995, almost 200 millions hectares of forest in developing countries have been lost, a size bigger than Indonesia (FAO, 1997). Many foods are now made with genetically-altered components with the long-term effects still unknown.

Furthermore, the current global trends such as economic globalization and liberalization of trade are having a strong impact on the environment at local, regional, and global levels. Because globalization processes tend to remove these barriers, many productive activities traditionally associated with developed economies are gradually being transferred to developing countries. Such transferred operations can be carried out at a lower cost at the receiving site because of lower labour and environmental costs. Most of the industries or activities moving to developing countries have some potential for environmental degradation. The result is systematically negative: less care is exercised or responsibility taken; fewer resources are applied to environmental protection; soil is eroded; aquifers, streams, lakes, and coastal waters are contaminated; forests are disappearing; exotic species are introduced without consideration of their ecological effects; and the atmosphere is polluted (Anton, 1995).

Overall, the human ecological footprint has exceeded the carrying capacity of the Earth. Unless actions are taken, it will be too late for saving the Earth, which all life-forms depend from on.

## **Global Movement Towards Sustainable Development**

These trends and problems should be addressed globally. There is a shift in development paradigms because of negative experiences. The green revolution that was once seen as a global solution for the world food security has turned out to have many environmental and socio-cultural problems. There is a strong relation between the inequitable social structure of the world and the main processes of environmental degradation that are taking place across the planet. A sustainable approach to environmental management must therefore address the paramount need to restructure the distribution of wealth among countries and among people. Harmonization of production–consumption and the more equitable distribution of wealth are preconditions for sustainable environmental management.

The Earth Summit in 1992, held in Rio de Janeiro is one of the important milestones in the struggle to globally tackle the environmental issues. The Rio Declaration is a set of 27 principles covering environmental protection and responsible development. These legally non-binding principles define the rights of people to development, and their responsibilities to

safeguard the common environment. The Declaration recognizes that the only way to have long term social and economic progress is to link it with environmental protection and to establish equitable global partnerships between governments and key actors of civil society and the business sector.

Sustainable Development is about balancing three pillars of development, i.e. environment, economy, and social. In the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, 2002, all the problems above have been brought to the table. This summit not only saw participation by the government, but also NGOs, private sectors, and individuals. The outcome of the Summit was a plan of implementation to focus on poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, and sustainable development in a globalizing world.

### **Getting from Environmental Awareness to Action**

Environmental awareness is the basis for environmental action. Environmental education was brought up during the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Environment. One of the recommendations made at the conference was to promote environmental education as a critical means to address the world's environmental crises. This recommendation was addressed at the 1975 International Environmental Workshop in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, which resulted in the Belgrade Charter: A Global Framework for Environmental Education. The Belgrade Charter was further refined at the Intergovernmental Conference on EE in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia in 1977:

Environmental education, properly understood, should constitute a comprehensive lifelong education, one responsive to changes in a rapidly changing world. It should prepare the individual for life through an understanding of the major problems of the contemporary world, and the provision of skills and attributes needed to play a productive role towards improving life and protecting the environment with due regard given to ethical values (UNESCO, 1977).

The Tbilisi declaration also explicitly stated the objectives of environmental education as: awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills and participation.

Moving from awareness to action is not simply providing information on a particular issue, because this will rarely result in behavioral changes. People are far more responsive to a message that is directly relevant to their own personal experiences and concerns. In order to have any far-reaching effects, an environmental initiative's message must give consideration to more than just the fundamental goal of protecting the environment for the environment's sake.

Raising public awareness to result in action at a grassroots level needs effective skills repackaging of information on an issue of concern so as to make it meaningful to the target groups but linking it to the bigger picture as well. This usually involves developing the ability to encourage the community-at-large to begin to reflect on and question fundamental norms guiding a community's actions.

### **Think Globally, Act Locally**

This famous environmental proposition was first mentioned during the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Environment by Rene Dubos, the French thinker. This slogan encouraged people to think about the effect of what they do on the global environment.

Due to the magnitude of the global trends, acting globally is also needed. The practices and decisions made by transnational corporations and global institutions can affect the lives of hundreds of millions of people. Here, local actions can be our last defense. Millions of people engaged in social and ecological struggles in different countries understand the local connections between problems of land use, transportation, water supplies, air pollution, soil degradation, health and poverty, including the particular local gender and ethnic/racial dimensions of these problems. Tens of thousands of activists grasp the central role of global capital and the dominant international institutions that affect people and nature.

### **How to Convert Awareness into Action: KEHATI's Experiences**

KEHATI is a non-profit organization that aims to promote the establishment of a society which is duly concerned, capable and self-reliant for conserving biological diversity, and utilizing biological resources in an equitable and sustainable manner for the achievement of the highest possible quality of life. KEHATI was established in 1994 and has provided grants to local non-profit organizations (NGOs), research institutions, and professional groups all over Indonesia in biodiversity conservation projects that focuses on strengthening the capacity of the community in managing their natural resources.

KEHATI is not a big organization, but we believe that by promoting local acts and building the biodiversity movement, a big change can happen. KEHATI facilitates NGOs and local communities to have better access to natural resources. In addition, as government and the private sector are also key stakeholders, KEHATI strengthens the relationship among these three stakeholders to build the synergy towards sustainable management of the natural resources.

KEHATI's strategy is to achieve our objectives using public education, institutional strengthening, public policy advocacy, and networking. In developing its programs, KEHATI uses the ecosystem approach. It is an integrated approach incorporating ecological, socio-cultural, and economic components using the ecosystem as a basis of the design.

#### Public Education

In order to educate the public, better access to information is important. Access to information opens many new channels of communication to local groups in, among other things, the field of environmental management. People are becoming more involved in their communities, better informed about options, and more determined to have a say in their future — be it in devising new development models at the local level, formulating policies on local issues, or advocating decisions at the central level about issues affecting them.

Some of the programs developed by KEHATI and its partners include an environmental journalist regional forum, media campaigns, dissemination of biodiversity issues through alternative media such as community information centers, and also environmental education through schools.

- Environmental journalist forum

This forum was created to encourage more in-depth media coverage that is pro environment. With a better understanding of environmental issues and problems, more powerful and better coverage can be produced, journalists will develop a stronger and better commitment towards biodiversity conservation. Other initiatives to increase the involvement of journalists are environmental bulletins, and networking activities with environmental NGOs and with local communities actively involved in natural resources

management. Eventually, by improving the quality of media coverage, the wider community and media will have a better understanding of environmental management.

- Environmental education in schools

Early-age education is a strategic tool to grow awareness and commitment towards environmentally friendly actions. The centralized education system in Indonesia during the previous government regime caused the disappearance of localities and context to the local situation. During the reformation era, the government tried to decentralize the system and provide more room for local creativity.

KEHATI and its partners used this opportunity to develop the environmental education model for elementary schools through Local Content Education where, schools can develop their own curriculum. KEHATI facilitates the development of alternative learning methods that focus on more outdoor activities which are connected to the environment and local context materials developed jointly by teachers and parents to help teachers and build the network between them. Some of the models include building local content education for small islands in the Thousand Islands District, and growing of local food for schools in Yogyakarta, an area that faces the degradation of traditional values for the tubers due to modernization.

#### KEHATI Award

The KEHATI Award is an annual event organized by KEHATI to search for excellence in biodiversity conservation. There are five categories: community; government sector; business sector; researcher/academia; and mass media/artist. The award is publicized nationwide through public service announcements on print and electronic media. The award ceremony is attended by high profile officials from the government, NGOs, business and academia. Many award winners come from remote areas for which government focus and facilities are very limited. This event provides them with a face-to-face opportunity to call for the government's attention and support for their problems. One award winner, who struggled to keep a biosphere reserve in existence, convinced the Ministry of Forestry to issue a decree granting National Park status to the reserve. This was achieved following KEHATI's letter of recommendation to the Minister. The 2003 KEHATI award winners were taken to a learning trip to the Philippines to build more networks and learn from the neighboring countries.

#### Public Policy Advocacy

Public policy advocacy is an important strategy for KEHATI to get the message across to the targeted groups, the policymakers in particular. Advocacy is a systematic and organized attempt to influence or push forward changes in (and therefore improve) the public policy in an incremental, democratic and peaceful manner. The objective pursued is that the policymakers in every sector of the government and in the legislature will take into account biodiversity as an important aspect and adopt it within the grand strategy of sustainable development. All of the advocacy process undertaken is at all times participatory and reaches out to multiple stakeholders. KEHATI has forged collaboration with individuals and organizations at national and regional levels, sharing the same vision and goals.

Some of these succeed in facilitating the NGO Coalition for People Consultative Assembly Decree on Agrarian Reform and Natural Resources Management, and the Working Group for Natural Resources Management Bill (comprises coalition of NGOs and several government offices). As part of the advocacy activities for this decree, the Coalition submitted to the Assembly a legal counter draft and discussed the matters in a public hearing. The Coalition also launched an intensive lobby group with members of the Assembly. The Working Group seeks to

draft a bill on natural resources management aimed at improving the existing pattern of natural resources management, launch advocacy activities to build up public support, and educate the policymakers about the importance of the bill.

### Institutional Strengthening

This is a tool to empower young generations and civil society through biodiversity conservation programs. During the last two decades more and more NGOs emerged in Indonesia to strengthen the civil society and address environmental problems. Many members of the NGOs are young motivated people that are eager to make a difference. In providing support to its partners, KEHATI is one of the few grant-making organizations that emphasize on building the capacity of the NGOs and community groups. It achieves this by addressing environmental problems based on a holistic approach, taking into consideration the environment, social and economic aspects.

KEHATI focuses on developing conservation programs that concentrate on strengthening the self-reliance and capacity of the community to manage their natural resources for sustainability. The strategy is that conservation can be achieved through promoting sustainable use for the benefit of the community.

### Building the Networks

Networking is a powerful tool to transform local behaviour into significant global change. Networking and building partnerships among local communities, NGOs, government, and also private sector are key drivers to bring about this change.

One of the examples of partnerships within local communities is the Locally Managed Marine Area Network (LMMA). LMMA network connects local communities in various areas that have community marine sanctuaries. One of KEHATI's local partners in Padaido Islands, Biak, Papua, became a member of Asia Pacific LMMA, where they shared their experiences and lessons learned in managing their sanctuaries.

KEHATI also facilitated networking in the private sector to encourage companies to improve their Corporate Social Responsibility Programs by incorporating environmental considerations in their programs in addition to the social aspect. Private sector companies can also help in marketing biodiversity through the development of effective and sound media campaigns.

Another program is the Philanthropy Strengthening Initiative. This initiative aims to develop a better network among civil society and leverage its environmental values to influence private sector companies to create appropriate CSR programs in their institutions.

Finally, KEHATI facilitates communication and coordination among members in various programs (aid, relief) so that it can be implemented more effectively and promptly when required (e.g. Aceh tsunami). The organisation also promotes volunteerism by inviting individuals interested in helping community social projects, and facilitates local/regional trust fund building.

### **Lessons Learned**

- ❖ The change can be made today by everybody by changing the lifestyle first (starting from ourselves). From individual action to collective actions we can help save the earth from further destruction.

- ❖ When the main target of mainstreaming biodiversity is the policymaker, advocacy can work more effectively than conventional education and public awareness programs because the target group is clearly segmented and the message can be more focused accordingly.
- ❖ Public awareness, education and advocacy are complementary to each other. In doing advocacy, one may also need to use public awareness or education tools and vice versa. The analogy is the interconnection and overlap among functions and tools of Public Relations, Marketing, Advertising, Sales and Promotion.
- ❖ Advocacy is a long-term process with results that may or may not be generated after years of attempts. In every stage of the process, in addition to short-term objectives, one should also focus on the long-term goals. So if one stage fails, make sure that there are benefits that can be gained, such as having more contact and alliance in the targeted group.

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