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Sustainability Communicator is a quarterly publication about population, consumption, and conservation issues. Its purpose is to promote dialogue and action among League members and others interested in building a sustainable future.

SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATOR

Izaak Walton League of America Sustainability Education Program News

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A Focused Approach

On March 1, 2007, something quiet but extraordinary happened in the U.S. Congress. At a time of polarized debate on national issues, the Izaak Walton League joined with a group of 20 faith-based, women's, HIV/AIDS, and environmental organizations. We came together around a common purpose and a shared strategy. In a Congress so tightly divided along partisan lines, the 30 representatives of these groups, whose members run the whole political spectrum from conservative Republican to liberal Democrat, did not divide themselves by red and blue. Instead, they met together with 42 House Democrats and Republicans and asked these legislators to help the environment, improve the health of mothers and children, and alleviate poverty.

The day before, Congresswoman Betty McCollum and four of her Congressional colleagues had tied a ribbon around House Resolution 1225, nicknamed the "Christmas Bill" and more formally known as the Focus on Family Health Worldwide Act of 2007. Representatives McCollum, Oberstar, Payne, Ramstad and Shays—three Democrats and two Republicans, introduced the bill. If passed, the legislation would authorize increased funding for voluntary, international programs that enable women and couples to decide the number and timing of their children. The bill also directs funding to places where the health needs of mothers and children are particularly acute, and to places with high biological diversity that are experiencing rapid population growth. Its provisions are simple and straightforward. Its potential for improved global health, poverty alleviation and conservation are enormous.

Such a "magic bullet" bill might seem to be a slam-dunk. Yet, in the last decade, funding for these programs has fallen dramatically. The Focus bill would authorize the first serious increases in funding since 1995. According to Michelle Orzech, the Izaak Walton League's



Sustainable Population Coordinator and a member of the coalition's steering committee, "This increased funding would go a long way toward making up for years of under-funding of one of the United States' most successful international development programs."

This just might be the year to turn it around. At a time of heightened concerns about the environment and human needs worldwide, the Focus bill offers a powerful vehicle for reaching out to Congressional members across the political and ideological spectrum. It has already provided dozens of coalition groups the opportunity to shape a common-sense message and a common ground strategy. "The willingness of these organizations to come together, and the reception we saw on the Capitol Hill, really underscores the deep desire for a moderate, centrist approach that can produce real on-the-ground results," says Orzech.

"When you work together to find areas of agreement instead of focusing on where there is conflict, anything can happen," she says. "We really hope this is our year. Regardless, it's gratifying to see the League's commonsense approach leading the charge."

You can learn more about the Focus on Family Health Worldwide Act (H.R. 1225) and about how to urge your legislators to support the bill at the League's Action Center at www.iwla.org or by calling (800) 453-5463.

On the Road to Ouagadougou

In February, I returned to West Africa where I had lived 25 years ago. Alan and I traveled together to three countries—Burkina Faso where he and served as a Peace Corps volunteers, Niger, where his daughter currently serves as a volunteer, and Mali, Burkina's neighbor to the west. Many people have asked, "What was different," "Are things better?" Such questions have prompted thoughts about change and progress and what is important about our lives and societies. With the reader's indulgence, I offer a few thoughts.

What has changed?

It's a Smaller World

Communications for us in the Peace Corps meant seeing people face-to-face, writing letters that took 2 months to arrive and maybe the chance to use the post office phone. Today, being "in-touch" has taken astonishing strides. One hot afternoon, I sat under a thatched shade awning, chatting with the chief of the village we were visiting. As we talked, I began to relax into the slower pace and rhythm of Africa. Suddenly, a cell phone ring tone split the air! The chief went back to where his "mobile" was carefully perched in the optimum spot to get reception. As we traveled, we found Internet café's in towns of any size. We updated our families on the trip, checked the weather and searched for friends we'd known 25 years earlier.

In 1980, few Americans ventured to West Africa. Now, with affordable air travel, today's Peace Corps parents can visit their children during their tour. Not to be outdone, several African parents we met on our trip described visiting their children living and working in the States. (Both sets complain about the weather). West Africans that Alan and I know in the U.S. piled us with packages and letters to deliver to their families. One such friend is Abdou, from Niger, who works at my local supermarket in Maryland. When we arrived in Niamey, Niger, we found him on a visit home and met his family and friends. We even attended his wedding to a woman whom he had met in that Maryland supermarket six years earlier.

A Woman's Place

While West African women are hardly shy and retiring, they have always deferred



Alan, left, and I on the road to Ouagadougou.

to men on big issues such as access to education, inheritance or decisions about work, marriage, and child bearing. Empowering women has long been seen as crucial to improving their health and that of their children, expanding economic activity, slowing population growth, etc. So we noted some striking changes. Girls and women were much in evidence on busy city streets riding motor cycles and bicycles, carrying backpacks off to school and behaving in ways that would have been scandalous 25 years ago (like holding hands with a boy or wearing pants). We saw women in military and police uniforms as well as business attire. References to women's projects and advancements appeared in the media and on billboards. In one town, we visited a private middle school where, by intention, girls made up over 80% of the students. The English language teacher, Odette, had recently graduated from the national university. She said she had sought the job to be part of the school's commitment to female education. We wondered together how the boys, outnumbered 4-1, might turn out differently from preceding male generations.

Population

The population of Burkina Faso has doubled since we were there. It now stands at 13 and a quarter million and is growing at nearly 3 percent per year. It will double again in 26 years if women continue to have an average of six children in their lifetimes as they do now. Everywhere was more crowded. The capitols and the provincial cities we visited had grown enormously, adding neighborhoods and roads, sprawling over the landscape. Traffic jams occur regularly as bicycles, motorbikes, cars, and trucks compete with pedes-

trians and donkey carts on the city streets. Outside each town and village we saw massive piles of firewood, chopped in the bush, waiting to be burned in ever more cook fires to feed the growing nation.

According to the U.S. government's own assessment, if Burkina could simply meet the current demand that couples have expressed for information and services allowing them to decide the number and spacing of their children, the country could save more than \$20 million in health and education expenditures by 2015, and avert 4,962 maternal deaths and 240,753 child deaths (*See "Focused Approach" on page 1*).

What has not changed?

The West African Welcome

In West Africa, people have freely traveled and traded for centuries and are known for their warmth and welcome of visitors. The first thing offered when you visit someone's home is a cup of "Dunan Ji" or "Traveler's Water." Get lost or have a flat tire and people appear out of nowhere to help. Daily greetings with friends or strangers can take several minutes as you ask each other about your health, your family, even your crops. Blessings are offered as you part: "May God give you a fine day," "May we see each other again." "Amina (Amen)," you respond.

The cadence of this interaction remains much the same. We were welcomed everywhere. People were delighted by our story of return and thanked us for coming to "greet them" once again. We took part in the good-natured teasing and chatting for hours on end that come from a culture where conversation is an art as well as a staple pastime.

Public Health and Sanitation

In the home of an educated, well-off African family, most Americans would feel perfectly comfortable with the "facilities." Warm water and soap are used to wash up before and after a meal. Bathrooms have the familiar conveniences. But in rural areas, just 6 percent of people have adequate sanitation and only 42 percent in urban areas. Diarrhea is responsible for 19 percent of deaths in children under five and 9 percent for all ages.

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Open Space Programs

In January 2007, the Environmental Law Institute released its publication "The Nature of Open Space Programs: Linking Land Protection and Biodiversity." The study examines 28 major state open-space protection programs to assess their legal authority to protect lands that are high in biodiversity, and thus of the greatest conservation value biologically. The findings—descriptions of individual programs and recommendations for future improvements—are useful not just for state programs, but for any public or private land conservation program that wants to better conserve biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

Across the country, the greatest threats to wildlife and biodiversity come from habitat destruction, degradation, and fragmentation as well as the explosive growth of invasive species, which all result from land development. According to the report, outright purchases of land or conservation easements are the "surest and most effective tool in the biodiversity conservation toolbox." But not all acres are equal in terms of conservation benefit. The report points out that state program administrators must meet two urgent but not always complementary objectives. One is "to acquire land as quickly and efficiently as possible, before the opportunity or conservation objective is lost." The other is to identify land that will maximize the wildlife and biodiversity "bang" for the acquisition "buck." Because of this second need, which acres are acquired is just as important as how many.

Almost every state in the country has at least one land conservation program, though their aims and mandates vary widely. The report reviews 28 major land protection programs in 21 states that include some focus on biodiversity and wildlife conservation. Each one was

assessed on two main factors that help states target the most strategic acquisitions:

Is there specific authority to conserve biodiversity in the statutes or regulations, or do they use more general terms like "wildlife," "threatened and endangered species," or simply "conservation"?

To what extent do programs have the authority to prioritize among potential land protection project applications based on biological criteria?

According to the report, 19 of the 28



USFWS

open space programs have the authority to prioritize their acquisitions. All programs refer to some sort of conservation values; however, the strength of their "biological mandates" varies considerably. Only six have specific or direct mentions of "biodiversity" in their legislation. The report stresses that acquiring and using scientifically sound biological data is critical for protecting the most strategic land. The authors strongly endorse the State Wildlife Action Plans as the most promising road map for guiding land protection decisions. These Congressionally mandated plans, recently completed by all 50 states and 6 territories, contain biodiversity data on wildlife and land cover types, often with explicit maps of priority wildlife habitat.

Based on the findings, the report out-

lines the following recommendations:

Open space programs need to adopt effective prioritization strategies and draw upon existing data resources in order to identify and prioritize biologically significant lands. This is particularly true for programs that have not previously had biological data or inventories. State Wildlife Action Plans are a very promising source of such data.

If not already specified, programs should make biodiversity and wildlife habitat protection an explicit part of their purpose by strengthening existing authorities. The increasing public focus on wildlife in recent years may provide support for acquiring such authority.

Open space programs should leverage conservation dollars by partnering with state wildlife agencies, land trusts, and others with similar missions and goals. They should also seek out other partners, such as watershed councils and water and wetland regulators that have a secondary focus on wildlife habitat or biodiversity conservation.

As a group, these state programs involved in the study are investing an average of more than \$700 million annually in the conservation of open space to protect wildlife habitat and biodiversity. The report concludes that if they are equipped with sufficient information, resources and authority, these programs can be well positioned to make better land protection decisions and to maximize the conservation benefits from each dollar spent.

The report is a publication of the Environmental Law Institute and is available for free online at http://www.elis-tore.org/reports_detail.asp?ID=11190. To order hard-copy publications, contact Linda Ellis at (202) 939-3246. Individual summaries of the state programs examined in this study are available on ELI's website at: <http://www2.eli.org/research/open-space.htm>.

E-Communicator

SC reader Jeff Devries on E-Communicating: I just got the latest "Sustainability Communicator". My issue was not printed on recycled paper with soy based ink... it was printed with 100% re-cycled electrons. Isn't that even more environmentally friendly than the recycled paper? Keep up the good work. —Jeff

If you would like to receive your Communicator on re-cycled electrons, contact us at sustain@iwla.org or call 800-453-5463.

On the Road to Ouagadougou

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We found it disheartening that so little progress has been made on this in 25 years. Sure, the problems require changes in habits and beliefs, and enough money amid so many other priorities. But it is such an avoidable tragedy. Why do these conditions remain acceptable? Why are neither local leaders nor donors simply saying, "Enough is enough!" Sadly, it is probably because, just as in this country, the problems of the poorest—the least powerful, and apt to make demands—are the last to be addressed.

Peace Corps Generations

We had the pleasure and privilege to spend time with a number of current Peace Corps volunteers. Our shared experience connected us instantly with these engaged and engaging young men and women. We swapped stories about life in the bush and held debates about community development and whether volunteers

really make a difference in two short years.

We met high school teachers, health educators, and agriculture, natural resources, and micro-business volunteers. They had the hallmark traits of Peace Corps, wearing their deprivation as a badge of honor, demonstrating an earnest commitment to make some part of life in the world better for their effort. They exhibited the humor, playfulness and willingness to bend the rules that are such a part American culture.

We took them out to dinner and bought rounds of drinks. We slept on their floors and offered them beds whenever they got back to the States. We listened late at night to hopes and fears, trying not to offer too many suggestions. They made us proud of the best parts of our country and of our own service to it. We connected each other to the generations of Americans who have taken this step into the unknown and learned so much about themselves and the world in the process. How different the world might be if more could do the same.

Founded in 1922, the Izaak Walton League of America is dedicated to common sense conservation that protects America's hunting, fishing, and outdoor heritage relying on solution-oriented conservation, education, and the promotion of outdoor recreation for the benefit of our citizens. The League has more than 40,000 members and supporters in 21 state divisions and more than 300 local chapters in 32 states.

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