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## SPECIAL FOCUS ON FORESTS

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10 PRINCIPLES TO MAXIMIZE BENEFITS OF FOREST CERTIFICATION

# Achieving biodiversity preservation and CSR through design

THE NATURAL WORLD, AND PARTICULARLY FORESTS, IS INCREDIBLY BEAUTIFUL. GETTING PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES TO APPRECIATE THAT BEAUTY, AND ITS FRAGILITY, IS ONE STEP IN GETTING THEM TO TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT IT. DAVID OSWALD'S ARTICLE SHOWS HOW EFFECTIVE DESIGN AND AN ATTRACTIVE MESSAGE CAN HELP TO INSPIRE CHANGE

by **David N. Oswald**

President, DE Design and Environment Inc.

Targets, of any sort, are deemed important if people believe in them and action is mobilized towards achieving them. They are a very real part of the operational plans for all sorts of organizations throughout the world. In DE Design and Environment's work we are confronted with the challenge of moving projects towards a wide variety of targets such as: greenhouse gas emissions limits for corporations; numbers of viewers for websites; numbers of people given employment via capacity-development initiatives; addressing the correct demographic for science-centre exhibits; achieving low injury frequency numbers through corporate environmental health and safety programs; and many others. Global biodiversity preservation targets need to be understood and be deemed important in order to be achieved. Based on our work I believe the private sector can play a significant role in this process. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a strategic vehicle to make this happen and design is an enabling process.

A significant part of DE's work revolves around education and communication of content relating to the environment. With 2011 being the international year of forests we have certainly been focused on using our design skills and scientific expertise to sensitize people to the importance of forest conservation and biodiversity. A key lesson we have learned is that in order for people to connect with content there needs to be an 'experiential impact', more specifically, a story.

## A BIODIVERSITY STORY

DE's work with the Biotechnology for Development in Africa (BDA) Foundation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) tells the story of how biodiversity conservation, economic development, and climate change mitigation and adaptation can be realized at a human scale. The BDA Foundation trains entrepreneurs to cultivate medicinal plants that are used as key ingredients to medicinal, nutraceutical, and cosmetic products sold on the global market.

The training and capacity-development program of BDA brings knowledge of quality control for medicinal plant production, as well as business skills, to people of the DRC who are enrolled in their 'ecopreneurship' process.

Concurrently, BDA's project promotes reforestation, prevents further deforestation and realizes biodiversity conservation while at the same time mitigating climate change by avoiding greenhouse gas emissions and sequestering CO<sub>2</sub>. What has become apparent to me through working on this project with BDA and affiliated organizations is that the true essence of the project is not only the tonnage of CO<sub>2</sub> sequestered, the hectares of rainforest preserved, or the amount of medicinal plants that are directed to global markets – it is the story of the ecopreneurs who are on the ground making this happen in the DRC.

Their faces, their expressions, and the tangible change in their lives that result from this initiative are what engage people. In fact, many companies have become interested in the BDA project for their CSR programs because of the social and environmental value it creates and also the human face that the project has. This has been repeatedly reinforced for me from the responses received when we have presented this project at forums and international meetings such as the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya.

## GETTING THINGS DONE WITH CSR

Meeting targets means promoting action and even the most compelling story may not result in concrete engagement. CSR is an enabling process that can turn businesses into proactive agents for biodiversity conservation. Definitions of CSR vary depending on what industry you are working in or what part of the world you are in. For example, my experience in Brazil and the Amazon showed me that there was a greater emphasis on social aspects there – to the extent that they use the term "Responsabilidade Socio-Ambiental" (social and environmental responsibility). What is important here is context. What are the objectives of the business? What is the culture? What markets are they dealing with? What is the structure of the business – public, private, cooperative?

Our experience developing environmental management and CSR programs in the downstream oil and gas sector has revealed to us that there are very conservative tendencies in that industry. Initiatives such as biodiversity conservation must therefore be integrated in a way directly relevant to those companies. We have also worked with organizations with very progressive views that make them more receptive to different ideas. International standards for CSR such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) help provide a baseline from which the most conservative to the most



IMAGE PROPERTY OF TELUS WORLD OF SCIENCE - CALGARY

progressive companies can improve their performance. There is a fundamental design process involved with aligning business goals, CSR strategy, and metrics to connect with international policy goals such as biodiversity conservation.

#### THE NATURE OF DESIGN AS APPLIED TO SUSTAINABILITY

Design, in my opinion, is an integrative and creative process essential to moving business and society as a whole further towards sustainability. Creative solutions for biodiversity preservation can be found by looking at synergistic relationships. Groups that hold different prime objectives but share values and interests may find strategic common ground. We can look to the numerous partnerships between major corporations and NGOs to see this working today. Designing information related to biodiversity and sustainability in an engaging way is fundamentally important because without the engagement of people in the private sector, public sector, and civil society, biodiversity conservation targets will not be met. I look to our experience with design challenges such as museums, science centres, world expos, events, and corporate environmental communications and I can honestly say that there is no silver bullet. But one common element is the fact that having an adaptive and open approach can bring in scientific expertise, corporate intelligence, policy perspectives, and various types of artistic talent to create some very interesting results. Although the DE team brings artistry to many of our projects, we ultimately see ourselves as designers in that we focus our skills on solving problems using design and environmental science.

We look forward to taking on more challenges that allow us to build connections between business and the natural world.



IMAGE PROPERTY OF BDA FOUNDATION

**LEFT: Exterior view of the TELUS World of Science Calgary's New Science Centre;**  
**BELOW: BDA Ecopreneurs producing GACP African botanicals**

Achieving biodiversity conservation targets as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and stabilizing the global climate are daunting tasks, but our team takes on these challenges daily with the hope and optimism that creativity and rational thinking can affect change. What gives me even more room for optimism is the fact that our growing cadre of partners, clients, and collaborators share this same view. ❖

*DE is an SME comprised of creative designers who work with museums, science centres, multimedia and events, as well as environmental professionals who provide scientific and strategic consulting expertise to corporations, governments, NGOs, and IGOs. The DE team also collaborates with the United Nations and various NGOs on forest carbon and policy projects. DE's work is worldwide and follows the company mission to solve projects using design and environmental science. For details: [www.design-environment.com](http://www.design-environment.com).*