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Population, Health, and Environment: Lessons From East Africa

Thursday, May 8, 2008

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Edited Transcript – Emmanuel Mtiti

Good afternoon. Once again, my name is Emmanuel Mtiti. I work for the Jane Goodall Institute in Tanzania. I would like to thank you all for giving us your time, but most importantly, I would like to thank the Woodrow Wilson Center for organizing this event.

What I'm presenting to you today is what the Jane Goodall Institute has been doing in western Tanzania where we have a project known as the Greater Gombe Ecosystem Program. The whole story starts with Jane coming to Tanzania in 1960, Jane Goodall, and setting up a research center, and then starting a youth movement on the environment. Finally, we started a program called TACARE, Lake Tanganyika Catchment Reforestation and Education, and now we are having other programs like the Greater Gombe Ecosystem Program as well as the Masito Gala [spelled phonetically] Ecosystem Program.

I mean, what I just want to show you is that when we started, like many other organizations, we didn't think about PHE. We just thought about the village land that was being degraded at a rapid rate. You know, when Jane and the colleagues were in Gombe, and they saw the difference in between the vegetation in Gombe National Park and the surrounding villages. What you see as dark green, that's Gombe National Park, and the white towards the left, that's the Lake Tanganyika, so the park is just on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. And by that, time, JGI thought, like, we can put up a program and tell people to plant trees, but do they really plant, because what was the problem?

This is the typical situation of the environment within the villages surrounding the Gombe National Park. This village is just located south of the park, where we have about 100 chimpanzees. Now, the major problems, as you see, include deforestation, soil erosion, and therefore we have the loss of habitat, and this leads to decrease in the ranging site for the wildlife, including chimpanzees.

But why? Simply because our population has been growing very fast. We have tripled our population since independence in 1961, and we are having a lot of refugees in the area, not to



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forget, again, that our birth rate is almost about 2.9 percent and, again, poverty and disease lead us to use our natural resources, because they are the only readily available resources that we have.

Now, the moment we started the program, it was apparently clear that when we did the assessment, especially participatory rural appraisal, we found out that we are not targeting what the community needs, because they had other priority needs, and we thought like environmental degradation was their problem, but then they said, “No, we have so many other problems,” and they ranked it as you see: education, health education, water, and access to capital, so environment ranked number seven, eight, nine. The highest was seven. So the conclusion was environmental degradation was not the people’s problem, so what do we do? It was JGI’s problem by then.

The conclusion then came that we cannot work with these guys, with the communities, unless we include their priority problems, and that’s why we changed our approach to this model that we call a holistic model.

This model calls for focusing on environmentally sustainable natural resource management but addressing community needs; where we are doing the forestry and agriculture, we promote some cash crops, we do agro-forestry and soil erosion control so that people sustain their living, but also we work on social community development, which includes the micro-credit. We copied a little bit from the Grameen approach, and we are supporting them with social infrastructure, like classrooms and dispensaries.

But, again, on the other side it became apparently clear that they needed to have some family planning services, so family planning education, including getting the family planning methods. AIDS is, of course, a cost-cutting issue. And then the other one is the water and sanitation, which includes also sanitation education.

From experience, then, after working with people, all this grew organically. I mean, we have been taught by people that you are going there the wrong way, and then we come back with advice. We just realized that now we have these synergies, so we are having these thematic areas: forestry, agriculture, water sanitation, health and population, including HIV, and all issues of livelihood. And we have our “Roots and Shoots,” which is our Youth Environmental Movement included as an educational strategy for young people.



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What we have realized is, it's cost-effective, and we share effort, but it also leads to increased effectiveness in implementation. Thereby, we hope to have improved conservation, and that's what we are seeing now, and the livelihood is improving.

With that, we came then to change our mission and vision. That includes the ecosystem health and the livelihood of the people, so that is our mission, which also encompasses that we have to work on the natural habitat and wildlife, but without forgetting improving the standard of living of the local communities. Otherwise they don't go together. People will not really understand. They need to cut trees for charcoal, and once they sell charcoal they get school fees, or they buy their food or they buy their medicines. Now, if you tell them, "Don't cut trees," then what next? It's like telling Americans "don't drive."

So this is the change of focus. I mean, you can see how many years it cost us that we started with our initial idea that we were going to arrest the rapid land degradation. It took us about four years or so to realize that we have to put people at the center of the implementation.

I just wanted to share with you quickly our results, because some people might now start thinking how do you put them together. Of course, we do, and we have two sub-goals, which one addresses reduction of deforestation. The other one is improving the livelihood of the people. Of course, the green one leads to health improvement, and the other blue one leads to good environment and livelihood improvement.

We work through the local communities, and they have their own community resource people who do the work. Our work is to facilitate and do the capacity building. So on the left we have the conservation aspect where we use the village nursery attendants and forest monitors. The village nursery attendants and forest monitors are volunteers from some communities. We train them, and we equip them with working tools. The village nursery attendants, they get materials to develop nurseries. The forest monitors, we equip them with GPS and other gear to be able to monitor whatever is going into the environment. So they do mainly the activities like tree planting and tree planting campaigns, raising trees, monitoring the forest.

And then on the right side we have the health agents, who are the community-based distribution agents for family planning methods, who provide education and counseling on family planning but also provide pills to people, and they refer people for more complicated methods like injections, Depo-Provera, and subsequent interventions like the BTLs. But at



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the bottom of the line, all these people are being connected by the village government, and what they do, they exchange clients that the conservationist refer their clients for family planning and water, and the health people refer their clients to the conservation group for establishment of food laws, environmental education and things like that, and they're all connected by the village government.

Now, how did we come to that? Just to emphasize that the reason why we went back to that was when we did a PRA, a participatory rural appraisal, and saw that people had different ideas than what we had, they had problems that needed to be addressed, and the second reason was as we were now revising the other phases, the next phase of the program, we had to develop problem-tree with them and try to see where can we cut the problem, and that's how we came with all those interventions.

So this just emphasizes why and how we can keep our PHE integrated, and we have some lessons learned. The PHE approach is cost-effective and increases credibility. I mean, for JGI in that area, I don't know. There's nothing that we can introduce that people cannot accept, unless otherwise it's detrimental to their life, because they know that we care about them, so when we come up with a new idea, they know that we still care for them. But, on the other hand, we are seeing that by having the PHE approach, there is a high chance of sustainability.

Now, the challenges – there are not many, though. Some of them are just the usual challenges as you work, but a big one is funding. When you are having different components and donors are not yet there to accept that you have to fund holistic approach, they would like you to be so specific. They say, "I'll give you money for agriculture, only agriculture." If you do something else, you get into problems.

We once had even problems with AID, with AIDS money, and we were doing home-based care. We found it important to do voluntary counseling for people so that we give them better service, and they said, "No, no, no, no. You are not for VCT. You have to do home-based care."

So you see how donors are so specialized. So then you find out that you have money for agriculture, and you don't have money for forestry, and this has been a limitation, to some extent. I think we need to do a bit of donor education.



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I mean, the community aspect is that PHE raises a lot of expectations, because you are doing more than, let's say, four aspects. Then they think like you can do everything. So it really takes energy to tell them, "No, no, no, no, let's stop here. At least here is good enough."

So just to end up, I just want to say that this is what we believe, and I just want to remind you that Jane once said, "Only if people living around the wilderness become our friends, that we can conserve," and I assure you the baby chimp and the mother chimp are there. They are watching to see what we are discussing and what we have to decide, whether it really takes their interest as well, because we people seem to be greedy.

Thank you so much.



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