COMMENTARIES

BRIDGING THE CHASM: HELPING PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT ACROSS AFRICA

*By **Jane Goodall***

About the Author

Jane Goodall began her landmark study of chimpanzees in Tanzania in June 1960, under the mentorship of anthropologist and paleontologist Dr. Louis Leakey. Her work at the Gombe Stream Chimpanzee Reserve would become the foundation of future primatological research and redefine the relationship between humans and animals.

In 1977, Goodall established the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI), which continues the Gombe research and is a global leader in the effort to protect chimpanzees and their habitats. JGI is widely recognized for establishing innovative community-centered conservation and development programs in Africa and the Roots & Shoots education program in more than 70 countries.

Dr. Goodall's scores of honors include the Medal of Tanzania, the National Geographic Society's Hubbard Medal, Japan's prestigious Kyoto Prize, and the Gandhi/King Award for Nonviolence. In April 2002, Secretary-General Annan named Dr. Goodall a United Nations "Messenger of Peace."

Jane Goodall

When I first went to Africa to study chimpanzees, I had to learn to look at the world—as best as I could—through their eyes. I came to realize that we humans are not separated from the rest of the animal kingdom, that there is not an unbridgeable chasm between us and them. The chimpanzees reach out across this perceived chasm and demand that we accept them into our world or that we join them in theirs. They have taught us that we are not the only beings on this planet with personalities, minds, and above all, emotions.

Once we admit that we are indeed a part of the animal kingdom, we will have a new respect for the other amazing animals with whom we share the planet. And we become increasingly shocked when we look around the planet and see what we have done to the environment. We see that our actions have destroyed the homes and the lives of countless millions of animals. And we are ashamed and shocked when we think of the way that we treat so many animals in our daily lives.

In 1986, I went to a conference with other scientists who had been studying chimpanzees in different parts of Africa. The conference had a session on conservation, and it was absolutely shocking to see that the forest habitat of chimpanzees was disappearing rapidly across the whole continent. That conference motivated me to explore what I could do to help conservation in Africa's chimpanzee-range countries (21 countries across what used to be the Equatorial Forest Belt of Africa, which is now an increasingly fragmented patch of forest). And I began to realize that so many of the problems of Africa are due to the unsustainable lifestyles of the elite communities around the world, as well as the way we are exploiting the continent's last remaining resources.

One of the things which particularly shocked me occurred about 15 or 16 years ago, when I was flying over the Gombe National Park as part of a film team that wanted to get aerial shots. The flight made it very clear to me that deforestation around the Gombe Park was very extensive. The forest had once stretched around 300 miles of the lake, as well as inland away from the lake to the east as far as the eye could see. Indeed, there had been more or less unbroken forest when I had first arrived in 1960. And now,

that forest had disappeared.

It was also very clear that there were more people living on the land around Gombe than the land could possibly support. At only 30 square miles, Gombe is the smallest national park in Tanzania, and the park is also in a part of Tanzania that is very economically poor and overpopulated. The local human population has grown, as it has around the world, since 1960. But there the indigenous Tanzanian population was under tremendous stress from refugees fleeing from troubled Burundi in the north and from what was then Zaire during the conflicts and the ethnic cleansings in that part of Central Africa. UNHCR had set up refugee camps, but many of the refugees had relatives around Gombe, so they instead settled in and around local villages. Those refugees coming over from Zaire brought with them a culture of eating primates—a custom that didn't exist in Tanzania—and they began a small bushmeat trade around Gombe National Park.

Outside the park, the situation was very grim. The people struggled increasingly as each year passed because the land became more infertile as the forests were destroyed. Without trees, the soil was washed down the steep, rugged hillsides and into the lake each rainy season, clogging up the fish-breeding grounds. The lake, which was crystal clear in 1960, is now very murky during the rainy season because of this deforestation.

Developing the TACARE Program

This was the point at which we at The Jane Goodall Institute (JGI) conceived the TACARE program. Because how could you even try to save the chimpanzees when the local people were just trying to survive? Right from the beginning, TACARE sought to address the various needs of the people living around Gombe. It began by emphasizing the creation of tree nurseries by providing tree seedlings to residents.

At the same time, JGI vice-president George Strunden put together a team of Tanzanians who knew the local languages and were skilled in forestry, agroforestry, and health issues. The team began going into the villages around Gombe National Park and talking to the village elders about the kinds of things the elders would like to see improved. Unlike many other well-meaning aid programs, TACARE was not a bunch of white people sitting down around the table working out the best thing for people living in a situation, and then going into that situation and introducing a program. That type of strategy has very often not worked. Many well-meaning attempts to help people have absolutely failed because they did not take into account the needs, the wants, the expertise, and the wisdom of the program's beneficiaries.

TACARE staff members laid out to residents around the park the kinds of things the program might be able to do in collaboration with them. After days of discussion, the residents decided that they really wanted to work with us to improve their lives. Some of the elder village leaders said to George, "Well, yes, we want this program, when can you deliver it to us?" And then George or one of his staff members would say: "Well, we're not going to give you anything." "Well, then why are you here talking about these things?" the elders would reply. "Because we'll help you to do it," George told them, "but we won't give it to you."

The people bought into the idea of collaboration between themselves and the program. They understood that, although we would help supply finance, they would be the ones who would make sure money was used in a wise way. I am most proud of the fact that TACARE started with a very small amount of money. It's still a very small program, but that means that $1 can do the work of $5; whereas in so many other aid programs, you find that $5 does the work of $1.

Today TACARE has incorporated aspects

Editor's Note

This commentary is an edited transcript of an address Dr. Goodall gave to a Washington policy audience at the Woodrow Wilson Center on 3 April 2003.

such as AIDS prevention and microcredit programs. The program also has experts on forestry and agro-forestry, who were helpful in our initial emphasis on establishing tree nurseries and planting trees to regenerate some of the forest that had been destroyed, which had led to such terrible conditions. Lush forests had been turned into barren, stony desert. Initially, residents wanted trees that would grow quickly and give them some immediate benefits—fruit trees, for instance, or fast-growing species for use as building poles, firewood, or timber. Gradually, the idea of indigenous trees was introduced. In particular, we focused on trees that served residents, such as medicinal plants or trees they could use for weaving ropes.

We have also introduced woodlots into all 33 villages that are a part of TACARE, so that women can avoid long trips to collect wood. And recently, with UNICEF's aid, the program is emphasizing freshwater wells and establishing some solar pumps helping to provide water to the villages.

TACARE Grows

TACARE has grown gradually. Right from the beginning, JGI planned that the program would not simply emphasize agro-forestry. We realized that the community's needs are greater, so the scope of the program gradually increased.

As I indicated earlier, more people live around Gombe than the land can possibly support, even if the refugees there were to return to their homes. Given the dire situation, TACARE began to emphasize expanding women's educational opportunities. When women who are living in poverty have increased opportunities for education, their self-esteem increases and they are often held in higher regard by the men in the village. And family sizes typically drop as well.

TACARE has also introduced family-planning information. I happened to be in Kigoma the day that our team set out for the first time to visit all the villages to talk about family planning. The area is predominately Muslim, but there are also Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, and other religions, so team members were unsure of how their message would be received. I also happened to be there when the team members came back, and they had huge smiles on their faces. They said: "Every single village said to us, 'Why didn't you come before? We need this information.'" These highly intelligent people have welcomed family-planning and AIDS-prevention information because they know that they can no longer support large families—and because the information was introduced by local people to local people.

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—Jane Goodall

TACARE also formed a relationship with Family Health International (FHI), a clinic that provides contraception. In a four-year period, FHI has seen quite a difference in attitudes toward contraception among residents around the park. Initially, women could only come in with their husbands for family-planning information. They had to get permission. After four years, women were coming in and making those decisions for themselves. This development is very encouraging for those of us concerned about growing population levels around the world.

We have also begun offering women a menu of environmentally sustainable development programs. We introduced the microcredit concept in order to enable residents to start these small development projects. While training people in the Grameen Bank system, we have established microcredit banks that are working wonderfully well and have proven to be very successful.

Youth education about the importance of a healthy environment is also a component of these programs, and one that is very dear to my heart. A JGI educational program that began in Tanzania but which is now in 70 countries around the world is Roots and Shoots. Roots and Shoots, which began with 18 high school students in Tanzania in 1991, now has about 4,500 active groups of young

people from pre-school through university. Every group is tackling at least three projects: one aimed at improving the world for animals (including domestic animals); one for their own local community; and one for the environment. The imagination of the projects is terrific.

The TACARE program also still places a huge emphasis on tree planting and care, but it also teaches the best farming methods suitable for the very steep terrain of the region. Participants are also learning—perhaps for the first time—about humane concern for animals. They get information on chimpanzees and are occasionally able to see and interact with these animals. The participants are also learning about the world outside through partnerships with children in other countries or other parts of Tanzania.

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Now the local people are our partners in protecting Gombe National Park. They are proud of the park and they know that people come from all over the world to visit it, bringing in much needed foreign exchange. The people have in essence become stewards of the park.

The success of the TACARE program—which was initially funded by the European Union and now has support from many other organizations, including UNDP, UNICEF, and the Packard Foundation—has now attracted the help of other organizations. With this help, JGI has built an amazing education center in Kigoma, the first of its kind. The center is going to educate children from all over the region to learn about the environment. We have been told the center is one of the best in Africa, and with the additional financial support we are now ready to replicate it.

The Bushmeat Trade and the Congo Basin

JGI's other area of grave concern—largely because of my initial involvement with chimpanzees—is the Congo Basin. The Congo Basin is one of the most important habitats in all of Africa. The Congo is the weather machine for Africa. You can track the state of the Congo Basin itself by following the state of the monsoon season right up to the north of Africa. If the situation is bad in the Congo, arid regions to the north of the Congo will suffer from intensified drought and flooding.

It is a pretty grim situation across Africa, because much of the continent is dependent on the health of the Congo Basin and the basin is being destroyed. More importantly, the animals of the Congo Basin are being destroyed. Many logging companies came into Africa during the 1980s after being driven out of South America, Asia, and Europe. Even if these logging companies are practicing so-called sustainable logging (which in the case of some companies is very questionable), they open up the forests that were once impenetrable to the commercial hunters and the bushmeat trade.

The bushmeat trade is not the kind of sustainable hunting that has been going on for hundreds and hundreds of years. It is a new kind of hunting, made possible by the roads and the logging trucks that provide transport. The hunters are going into the forest from the towns and camping at the edge of the logging road for several days. These hunters shoot everything: elephants, gorillas, and chimpanzees. They shoot monkeys. They shoot antelopes. They shoot endangered and threatened species and eventually everything right down to birds and bats. This meat is usually smoked and then loaded onto the trucks and taken into the towns where the wealthy and elite urban communities will pay more for a piece of bushmeat than they will for chicken or goat.

This hunting practice is absolutely not sustainable, but there is a tremendous amount of money involved. The income for the government can be huge for places like Congo and Cameroon, so it is an extremely difficult situation with which to come to grips. And the problem does not stop with the logging companies and their roads and the hunters coming in and selling in the towns and exporting to exotic restaurants overseas. The Pygmies are also being given money and ammunition to buy food and to shoot food for the logging camps themselves. There may be as many as two or three thousand loggers

and their families—immigrants to the area—who have come in search of good pay and better living conditions. These people want meat, and they are being fed on bushmeat.

There has been a conspiracy of silence about the bushmeat problem in the countries of the Congo Basin. (Those foreign NGOs that are concerned about the bushmeat trade have basically been told by their indigenous contacts and associates: "You better not say anything, it's too sensitive, you'll be thrown out of the country.") But the first residents to understand the extent and consequences of the bushmeat problem are the village women who operate the markets. JGI has worked extensively with these women, helping them to set up cooperatives to give licenses to hunters so that the trade is monitored by the people themselves. Because the women are smart and they have to feed their families, they keep a very keen eye on what is going on. They know that some animals (including all of the great apes) are not seen anymore simply because they have been driven to the verge of extinction.

The bushmeat trade is a very difficult situation that has fortunately been coming more and more into world prominence. At the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, the U.S. State Department announced a $60 million three-year initiative to try and address the bushmeat problem and the problems in the Congo Basin. The European Union more or less matched that sum, and some of the major conservation groups have also contributed. JGI hopes to use some of the funds in our programs in the region.

Because of JGI's experience on the ground, we are being seen as an important partner in this growing coalition to save the Congo Basin, which consists of NGOs on the ground as well as other interested NGOs. The only way we can hope to save the basin and many other areas under threat worldwide is by forming coalitions. We need to talk to the logging companies and the mining companies about how to ensure their roads are not used for the illegal transport of animals. Of course, we must also establish partnerships with the local governments and central governments and with organizations such as the World Bank and USAID.

One way that we hope to influence the Congo Basin project is by introducing our TACARE model there. While JGI would not replicate the Gombe Park program, we would incorporate the same process of going to the villages and finding out what their needs are—how they feel they would like to move into their own future—and then supporting them in any way that we can. Often, of course, we would provide schools and dispensaries or help with medical problems. The most important thing is to find out what residents need and then to create productive partnerships to meet those needs and save the environment.

As we develop the TACARE program around Africa and become more knowledgeable about different aspects of family planning and AIDS education and development, we must keep our eyes on where we are going and not allow ourselves to get distracted by what's going on in the world right now. We must remember a great quotation of Mahatma Gandhi, who said if you look back through human history, you find every evil regime is overcome by good. Beyond the evil in the world, there will be peace, and we need to be ready for it. We need to redouble our efforts. The work is much harder but also much more vital, so we need extra energy and we need to support each other and encourage each other. If groups want to go two slightly different ways—as long as that divergence is not going to hurt anything—they should go in two slightly different ways. It is most important for everyone to aim for the same goal.