

**'NAE FUR THE LIKES OF US'
POVERTY, AGENDA 21 AND SCOTLAND'S ENVIRONMENTAL
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

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Two women sat holding a group transfixed in Edinburgh University's Centre for Human Ecology. Somehow they had found their way into the ivory tower, recounting tales of what to many of the assembled was a far-flung and alien culture. Tricia McConnalogue was given poverty as a birth-rite. Her Gorbals childhood passed briefly. Her life story was one of survival. It blurred for those of us present the distinction between people's search for social justice and our own work to understand more fully the environmental crisis facing humanity.

'When we were asked to speak it was like a big black door opening'
- Tricia McConnalogue

ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS, PEOPLE AND AGENDA 21

Mainstream environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which began as either staid conservation bodies or part of the 'radical-fringe' have now developed into a powerful political lobby commonly focused around the shared theme of 'sustainable development'. This has broadened their remit from traditional nature conservation. As the director of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has stated, it means that environmental work is now also 'about people' (Pellew pers. com.).

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But does the environmental agenda as currently articulated speak to the priorities of the poorest sectors of Scottish society? Does it speak especially to those whom urban ghettoisation in post-industrial bleakness has kept substantially alienated from 'nature'. To investigate, I used participative techniques to explore environmental relationships with fifty people who live in poverty in Glasgow and Edinburgh. In addition, I interviewed staff from twenty environmental NGOs. This permitted assessment of how far present NGO policies address the needs of disadvantaged groups. From this, policy recommendations are made for future action consistent with Agenda 21, to which the British Government is a signatory.

Agenda 21 is the global action agenda for achieving 'sustainable development' in the 21st Century. It was the core document agreed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, 1992, and marked a new stage in the legitimisation of the role of NGOs in catalysing social and ecological change (Grubb et al. 1993, 45). Increasingly, NGOs world-wide are seen as essential for a thriving civil society, becoming key shapers of public policy across a range of sectors (Edwards and Hulme 1995, Korten 1990). This paper illustrates the opportunity that Agenda 21 holds to be a platform endorsed by the government on which to link environmental justice with social justice.

The agreement, to which 52 governments are signatories, is long and repetitive. Wilding (1995, 6) summarises its key themes as being:

- The connections between environment, society, and economy, especially regarding poverty, health, trade, debt, consumption and population.
- The conservation and management (sustainable development) of physical resources.
- Support for the role of major social groups in this 'sustainable development'.
- Means of implementation, including funding and the roles of NGOs and governments.

Agenda 21 repeatedly stresses that environment is more than the natural environment: it describes the links between economy, society, environment and poverty. Chapter 3 of the 'agreement' is called 'Combating Poverty'. It calls for its 'eradication as a matter of urgency' and highlights the adverse

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social and environmental effects of viewing conservation, people and economic development in isolation.

The essence of Agenda 21 is the legitimisation of 'the local' as fundamental to any move towards sustainable development. Too often issues are addressed in packaged answers from national or international bureaucrats and are ill-fitted to local contexts. Chapter 28 therefore asks local government to undertake a consultation process with their citizens to hear their needs and wishes for the future. This consultation process is called Local Agenda 21. NGOs are expected to play a crucial role in its implementation.

Some critics suggest that Agenda 21 is nothing new. Cathy McCormack, a community activist from Easterhouse, attended the UNCED process. She sees that the gulf between governments' rhetoric in the UN spotlight and political action is often wide. For her, Agenda 21 is merely the world's relatively rich making 'a belated recognition that if the people they made poor don't have a future then neither will they' (**Evening Times** 1995).

Agenda 21, if taken seriously, fundamentally challenges the manner in which political and social relations are conducted. It calls for a willingness by power-holders to operate new standards of democracy founded on 'participation'. The process requires both significant resources and grass-roots action across a broad social spectrum. To support such action NGOs will have to become more self-critical, considering closely whose interests they really represent. In Britain these interests are predominantly those of the white middle class, reflecting the culture, ideologies and interests of membership and staff (Harrison 1989, Ling Wong 1992). It is from this affluent sector that NGOs are primarily dependent for funding and social legitimatisation. The summary of my interviews with environmental NGOs will indicate the extent to which this has caused them, no doubt inadvertently, to fail the poor.

NGO ACTION: LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE

Little concrete action has yet occurred with Agenda 21 in Scotland, in part because of local government reorganisation. A recent Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoE) survey of all the local authorities in Scotland reported that 'while many are doing valuable work on the environment, half had taken no action at all. Of the rest only around a dozen have begun the task of defining sustainability at the local level' (FoE, Scotland press release, Dec. 12 1995).

NGOs have been closely associated with the promotion of Local Agenda 21 in Scotland. Scottish Environmental Forum (SEF), in close co-operation with FoE, has recently been involved in promoting Agenda 21 through conferences for local government and for grass-roots activists.

Ultimately it is the role of governments - not NGOs - to institutionalise reforms of social policy. Presently, social policy condemns about one-in-four Scottish households to a life of poverty (**Scottish Declaration On Poverty 1996**). Understanding this, NGOs must not allow themselves to become substitutes for sound political action by elected representatives. As Simon Pepper, Chair of WWF Scotland, says, these organisations should exist to 'influence the ways in which public moneys are spent - not to substitute for them' (Baxter 1995, 10).

The new Scottish Unitary Local Authorities took power in April 1996. If current trends continue, NGOs will play a crucial role informing the creation of Local Agenda 21 plans. However, before NGOs or public authorities can adequately address a participatory agenda which necessitates the linking of social and ecological justice, they have to appraise their own organisational structures.

All staff interviewed from membership NGOs characterised their membership as predominantly made up of the white middle classes.

These NGOs' organisational structures have come to reflect the biases of the membership. The structures may often reinforce and maintain systems of social privilege. In addition, trends toward elitism militate against an agenda which encourages the targeting of specific groups for greater participation in decision-making about their local environments.

If NGOs are to address the needs of socially marginalised groups, a clarification of organisation goals to this end may be necessary. For example, voices from Craigmillar and Pollok need to carry as much weight as those of the 'great and the good' on NGO Boards of Trustees. NGOs must therefore wake up to their full responsibilities described by Agenda 21 as appropriate for any 'sustainable development', especially with regard to the new roles invested in them through the UNCED process. NGO staff are not unaware of this. Simon Pepper describes NGOs as the 'first force' in the voluntary sector, acting as 'gadfly, innovator and watchdog' (op. cit.).

But will the NGOs perform?

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Recently, NGO performance and accountability of NGOs have been questioned (Edwards and Hulme 1995). Such studies highlight the importance of self-critical examination by NGOs. Critical appraisal is a prerequisite if organisations are to address the sustainability agenda and not merely react conservatively to a narrowly conceived traditional conservation agenda.

Whilst representation of present membership is necessary, their new and widened remit needs to include advocacy for those who are excluded. NGOs not willing to undertake this ought not to appeal to such democratically mandated processes as Agenda 21 to add weight to the urgency of their programmes.

RESEARCH ISSUES WITH PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

Research into the relevance of 'sustainable development' to the lives of those who live in poverty presents methodological problems. Negotiating these has been important to this work, and so they will be discussed in some detail.

When working with marginalised groups one has to grapple with serious questions of power and authority. Quantitative methodologies such as questionnaires may cause alienation, telling us little about people's lives.

Alternatively, participative methodologies are more descriptive, qualitative, and can better touch on underlying factors. They are rooted in the feminist thought of women and men who saw the need to bypass research mind-sets implicitly imposed by patriarchal world views (Wright and Nelson 1995, Neilson 1990). Other parallel approaches come from those who have confronted their own cultural conditioning, often through living with the poor or working with dissimilar cultures in Britain or abroad. Their work over the past decade has given rise to radically new approaches.

One such approach, Participative Action Research (PAR), was used in the study described below. Here the researcher participates in action with local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, helping them plan and act (Chambers 1994). The researcher concerns herself with what the research might mean to the 'known' - to those being researched. A process of mutual learning thereby evolves. Knowledge and information flows freely in both directions as people identify, discuss and criticise a world which is theirs. The attitude and disposition of the researcher is

essential. By being relaxed, eating together and staying with folk in their houses as I did, an atmosphere of mutual respect and sharing is created.

This results in research that speaks outwards from within a situation rather than presumes to be able to analyse from the outside. PAR does not carry a presumption of objectivity. It tries to lift some of the biases which that presumption inevitably creates leading to a denial of obvious injustice and a perpetuation of the status quo.

One of the problems which governments and NGOs alike repeatedly encounter is the fact that the public is not automatically consultable. Judy Ling Wong of the Black Environment Network (BEN) points out that the public 'need to build up the skills to be consultable'. These skills are particularly absent in deprived areas where many have internalised the contempt in which society appears to hold them. Participative methodologies can be used in helping people, especially those from marginalised groups, to build up these skills.

Women are disproportionately affected by poverty - yet they are solely responsible, because of absent fathers, for one fifth of the next generation. In the formation of an Agenda which has the potential to change their lives it is essential that women who live in poverty participate fully. For this reason one of the case studies (described below) was undertaken with a women's support group in Glasgow.

The research was a qualitative scoping exercise conducted during April-September 1995 with fifty people. Although a small sample, work was carried out in-depth and it therefore offers preliminary findings that further research might explore.

'THE LINK': WOMEN, POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENT

The Glasgow-Braendam Link was founded in response to the need for continued support which families experienced on their return to Glasgow after a stay at the Braendam Family House outside Stirling. People from all over Glasgow who live in extreme poverty make their way to the flat at 99 McCulloch Street. From this base the group's work radiates back through the city.

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A group of women meet for lunch weekly. Once a month, a meeting of all the families is held. My research entailed attending all these meetings over a three-month period in summer 1995. In addition, I spent time getting to know the areas from which the women came. By the end of the research, I had made several new friends.

Over this period I organised two workshops on 'Poverty and Environment' with the 'lunch group'. These explored views of the countryside and of the city as 'environments'. The aim of the first workshop was to stimulate discussion and reach consensus on the views which the groups held of the city and countryside environments. One man (an ex-volunteer and 'honorary woman') ten women and six children attended. In the second workshop, a different man and an additional four women and two of their children were involved. We prioritised problems, identified possible solutions for those which were deemed most urgent, and planned practical outcomes.

The women were passionate and articulate. They saw the city as alienating, dangerous and unsafe for children. Poor housing was a central issue arising early in the discussion. For many of the women, visits for respite care to the Braendam Family House in rural Stirlingshire have been their only meaningful contact with 'nature'. In discussions and workshops they recounted the sense of deep peace which they experienced there. It meant space for contemplation and safe unsupervised play for their children. Only one of the group felt differently. For her the countryside meant long hours of boredom and contact with creatures (such as spiders) which frightened her.

In another case study, I worked with Venture Scotland, a small Edinburgh-based Charity dedicated to providing personal development opportunities with a strong conservation element to young people who would normally be unlikely to get such chances. The group's aims are achieved through residential stays in what is affectionately known as 'the bothy' in Glen Etive. The courses are run by trained volunteers.

In Britain, people in lower socio-economic groups, the young and the elderly feature prominently amongst that proportion of the population who rarely engage in outdoor recreation (Harrison 1991). Care must be taken, however, in making generalisations about reasons for this. It may be due more to a disadvantaged socio-economic position than to personal apathy. In addition, attitudes to the countryside have been shown to vary according to gender, class and ethnicity. Accepted norms of recreation have been socially constructed by powerful land-owning and conservation interests (ibid.).

Without a positive induction to countryside, which many of us receive early in our lives, nature can be perceived as another world in which one is not welcome.

On one of the Venture Scotland courses which I attended, many of the participants had never been to the Countryside before. Several said that they had been aware of 'environmental issues' previously through the media but had not had an opportunity to act on their concern. Tree planting work over the weekend made it possible to 'do your bit' and all found the conservation activity to be personally valuable. After only one weekend there was a marked increase in appreciation and knowledge of the Highland landscape and ecology.

Contrary to the opinions of several of the staff from environmental NGOs whom I interviewed (see below), there was no evidence that the experience of poverty of the Venture Scotland participants or of the women from Braendam prevented them from extending their concern to include 'the environment'. As one said: 'The state of the planet is part of our poverty. Caring for it should be part of how we grow up.'

The Braendam women are acutely aware of issues which concern 'environmentalists', though they conceptualised them differently. Their horrors of post-war inner-city planning have so profoundly affected their immediate environment that this is their primary environmental concern. Most are not car owners and as such are directly and adversely affected by transport policy in Glasgow where motorways are driven through the heart of the city whilst public transport is privatised and subsidies withdrawn. Said one: 'who are they planning the city for? ... certainly nae for the likes of us.'

The series of blunders with the housing stock for which Glasgow is infamous has left an indelible mark on the women's lives. It means that some of them are forced to live with extended families of twelve or thirteen in the one or two rooms which they can afford to heat, whilst the remainder decompose in mould.

Third generation unemployment, depression, frustration, and physical, sexual and emotional abuse are common currency. The women were not only aware of environmental issues but could connect them to the economic factors with which they are entwined and the social and cultural fall-out which results. Also, they expressed their concern in intergenerational terms, saying that

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these issues need to be raised, 'not for ourselves, its probably too late for that, but for the sake of the weans'.

When encouraged and helped to find a voice, the women showed no dearth of motivation. Three of them produced a report on their environmental concerns arising out of the workshops. This has been sent to a number of stakeholders they identified as being relevant to their primary concern - the housing issue. The report was also sent to the UN Conference on Women in Beijing as a testimony to the environmental issues facing many Glasgow women.

The UN Habitat conference this year in Turkey wishes to identify specific programmes for sustainable cities and better housing. As with Agenda 21, the breadth of the work is enormous and will require partnerships between governments, NGOs and community-based groups everywhere. This will not be easy, involving substantial shifts in power as outlined above. The emphasis on the local and on partnerships describes the fertile common ground between Habitat II and the Agenda 21 process. If work could be combined and moved towards concrete action, the process could provide a unique opportunity for the joining of social, environmental and poverty issues.

The women were aware that as women they are disproportionately affected by poverty. It is therefore essential that their experience is included in policy such as that arising from Agenda 21 which has the possibility to change their lives. Working with the group, it was clear that when 'the environment' was defined by the group itself several members were willing to move on and take steps towards practical action. Their environmental concerns joined economic, social, and cultural issues in the way many NGOs are only now coming to grips with.

If it appears that many people experiencing poverty are less concerned about rainforests and global warming, it may be because the desperateness of their immediate surroundings constitutes *their* environmental concern.

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These case studies suggest that the 'environment' is indeed a pressing issue for people living in poverty. Their priorities may be closer to home than for

the affluent. They are likely to be articulated through language and concepts which do not immediately mesh with conventional environmental debate.

Deprivation from the opportunity to engage with nature must be considered as being yet another facet of poverty. The Agenda 21 emphasis on linking poverty with environment can therefore be seen as an imperative which is not only pragmatic but humanitarian. How, then, does this correlate with existing policies of environmental NGOs in Scotland, and how might it shape policy development as Agenda 21 unfolds?

To find out, I conducted thirty semi-structured interviews with senior staff of twenty mainstream environmental NGOs. Although each operates in different contexts and with emphases ranging from campaigning to conservation, relevant common themes emerged from the survey data. To derive policy recommendations that the NGOs might find helpful, I organised the themes under the following headings:

- building up and using networks and partnerships;
- outreach;
- education;
- funding a new approach;
- organisational culture.

Building up and using networks and partnerships

Agenda 21 repeatedly stresses that sustainable development is a process requiring the active participation of many co-operating groups. This is often termed 'networking'. Networks help to facilitate information exchange and more formalised partnerships between co-operating organisations. Examples include the Black Environment Network's (BEN) recent efforts to build links with Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) and other environmental NGOs in Scotland through invitations to its AGM and other outreach activities. BEN aims to increase awareness of the exclusion of ethnic minorities from the work of environmental groups.

Community Service Volunteers (CSV) has an environmental wing that promotes environmental awareness and action in the community across Scotland. They are now a major provider of volunteering opportunities and information on environmental activities at the 'grass-roots' level. As members of the Scottish Environment Forum and editors of the Agenda 21 newsletter,

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Scotland's 21 Today, they are also a crucial link between grass roots activists and those who set the agenda for environmental debate and action in Scotland.

Some NGOs are aware of their strategic role as a 'linchpin organisation' (Carley and Christie 1992), forming the hub around which 'action-centred networks' may be catalysed (ibid.). For instance, in March 1995 WWF hosted a 'Real World' seminar bringing together representatives from poverty and environmental groups with a view to identifying common lobbying opportunities on the theme, 'how can environmental policy respond to the needs of poor and disadvantaged communities?'. The meeting revealed tensions between larger groups such as WWF looking to national policy development, and others who felt that the only way such policies are likely to succeed was through a community-driven approach. The seminar concluded that a two-pronged approach was called for. As the Chair summed up (Pellew per. comm.):

Policies on the environment should begin with the needs of the poorest and then try to create a policy institutional framework that will encourage more of these initiatives to develop without external resources. There is plenty of scope for addressing poverty and social issues as an integral part of an environmental agenda.

When the women at Braendam were asked if large environmental groups could help with environmental problems associated with poverty, they fell silent. Finally, one woman said: 'I don't see how they could be involved with us'. 'They' were groups such as GreenPeace, and their activities were encapsulated in the Brent Spar actions which were occurring at the time. Although the group felt that GreenPeace was doing 'good work', the women could not see how the perceived gap between the realms of large environmental groups and themselves could be bridged.

The women spoke of housing as being a major priority. A small number of NGO staff saw the building of networks with housing associations as a potentially powerful means of joining social and environmental issues in urban areas. It was felt that once the physical structure of a house was satisfactory, people active in housing associations might then begin to address issues in the local environment. The work of Landwise on back-close renovations and on small woodland projects with people in Strathclyde is an example.

Liaison with smaller local groups is vital. However, if partnership is to be more equitable than that 'between horse and jockey' it requires ceding of power from groups who presently hold it to the relatively powerless. The creation of robust NGO networks will be central to addressing this issue.

The UN Habitat conference this year will be attended by large numbers of community and environmental groups. As mentioned previously there is fertile common ground between Habitat II and the Agenda 21 process. If work could be combined and moved towards concrete action, the process could provide a unique opportunity for the joining of social, environmental and poverty issues.

Outreach

Interviews revealed that a majority of NGOs were unaware of the extent to which people living in poverty may be disempowered. Some interviewees cited provision of transport subsidies and financial support as strategies for increasing involvement of marginalised communities. These strategies are unlikely, on their own, to provide comprehensive solutions. To be effective, outreach approaches are crucial (Harrison 1991, p.149).

More realistic solutions could include full or part funding of an enthusiastic project worker who could mediate between the local community 'down there' and the organisation 'up there', thereby negotiating differences in culture and attitude. This is essentially what occurred when George Baxter, as a community worker in Pilton, Edinburgh, facilitated the founding of the Pilton Environment Group (PEG). Friends of the Earth were then able to provide advice and training during PEG's campaign against Lothian Chemicals.

Participants at Venture Scotland identified pre-course outreach work by the co-ordinator as a crucial factor in motivating them to take part. 'It helped us to know what to expect'.

Scottish Conservation Projects Trust (SCPT) saw active outreach in Wester Hales as crucial to the success of their efforts to provide young people in the area with work experience and practical skills.

Education

All interviewees highlighted the centrality of education and awareness-raising to their work. Attitude change is the ultimate goal.

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Several interviewees expressed concern over 'unrealistic assumptions' about ecology which the public adopt through ill-informed media. People who have limited access to the natural environment may be more likely to hold 'unrealistic assumptions' about it. Arguments by ecologists for increased deer culling in Scotland are not generally reflected in the popular media which tend to 'Bambify' nature.

Education may pre-empt the formation of naive political and behavioural attitudes. But it must be well resourced and targeted. In addition, innovative educational tools such as Scottish Natural Heritage's collection of resources called a 'Community Chest' should continue to be developed and targeted at all sectors of society.

Environmental education must also be grounded in everyday realities. People place a greater sense of importance on environmental issues if they are invited to conceive of them as concrete, local problems (Macnaghten 1995, 13). Once empowered to take action locally, we can begin to think globally. Rahel Saebra of the Pilton Environmental Group told me of her growth in awareness:

Once you start working against pollution in Pilton, you start working for people fighting the same pollution in England and India and so on until it is a statement against the environmental problems in the whole world ... but it has to start with an issue on your doorstep or it won't work.

An excellent community education pack about environmental issues has been developed by Geoff Fagan at Strathclyde University in conjunction with WWF. Drawing on the pedagogical work of Paulo Freire in Brazil, he sees 'community education as being at the heart of empowerment and also environmental education at its most effective' (Fagan 1993, p.9). Fagan sees action and reflection as joint steps towards a praxis that is 'liberatory'.

The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department is ultimately responsible for the provision of formal environmental education. However, groups such as RSPB and WWF and the Scottish Development Education Centre invest extensive capital in the development of educational resources. They make a valuable contribution to Scottish curriculum development.

Such co-operation has been facilitated by the report of the Secretary of State for Scotland's working party on environmental education. 'Common Agenda

Workshops' have been held jointly by the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC), Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link (SWCL) in Perth. They are a platform for the exchange of information on resources, among those from education authorities, NGOs and environmental agencies. At the first of these in March 1995, Seaton Baxter, Chair of SWCL, emphasised care of the environment as the ultimate goal of environmental education. He underscored the important contribution which environmental NGOs make to realising this goal (1995, p.13):

[care of the environment] requires a broad understanding of how people and societies relate to each other and to natural systems and how they might do so sustainably. Learning to care comes from being with people who care in an environment they care about.

The reported experience of the young people on Venture Scotland courses in Glen Etive strongly supports this view. In 1995, 93% of participants found the weekend experiences to be learning ones. Several told me that they had been aware of environmental issues previously through the media but had felt powerless to respond. The mix of conservation and adventure on the weekends had given them with a chance 'to do yer bi' '.

This opportunity to care should be a right of all. The Earth can no longer afford to be 'cared for' by the relatively affluent alone.

Funding the new approach

Several of the NGO interviewees identified financial constraints as a major block to work in deprived areas. Creation of partnerships with the corporate sector was seen to have potential, especially if NGOs stress the 'human angle' as an interest and fund-raising gambit.

The Lottery Commission has several programmes under which finance might be raised. Interviewees suggested the Millennium Forest bid has great potential. It is already being used by The Craigmillar Initiative to finance their urban forestry initiative.

One senior policy officer suggested that 'there are many trusts allocated to deprived people, and we as a large reputable charity can squeeze money out of all kinds of people.' Inter-NGO partnerships may prove more successful in raising funds, especially to appoint joint project staff for outreach activities (as outlined above).

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Organisational culture

Organisational culture can be seen as the sum of accepted norms and modes of behaviour in an organisation. Staff attitudes and embedded organisational structures combine to create unique cultures in every NGO that can only be addressed through self-reflection at an individual and organisational level.

Failure of environmental NGOs to define 'environment' widely enough is one of the greatest blocks to their interaction with the marginalised. Carley and Christie (1992, p.192) identify this as being a major cause of failure of environmental management. A representative of one of the biggest conservation organisations in Europe stated that in its work:

Places like Easterhouse are bottom of our list of priorities, ordinary countryside a little above it and special places at the top of our list and that is where most of the money goes.

This betrays underlying assumptions about what is legitimate 'nature'.

He went on to say that the concerns of disadvantaged people were very far from those of his organisation, being primarily focused on the struggles of day to day living. However, Venture Scotland participants - many of whom were homeless - were able to experience and benefit from a 'special place' such as Glen Etive, despite their 'disadvantaged background'.

Language is another major factor that filters priorities. An organisation's culture is reflected in its language. Working class people often feel intimidated by middle class language, including body language and dress conventions. This may obstruct effective outreach to deprived areas.

One interviewee confessed he would not work with children from poorer areas because he believed he would not understand them. Another displayed a disturbing lack of connection with Scottish idioms when he referred to the use of 'weans' for 'children' as 'the language of the drugs culture'.

Ethnic minorities are part of the British community. Yet few NGOs have sought to include their perspectives in their work. Only one of the interviewees stated that low levels of participation among ethnic groups needed addressing. The education department of the Royal Botanical Gardens see potential for the development of a programme targeted towards

Scots of Asian ethnic origin. When this was pointed out to a representative of another NGO, she asked: 'why should we wish to involve minorities anyway?'

Few NGOs have staff based in areas of deprivation. Staff may be more effective if based in the areas concerned so that 'the environmentalists' are seen to be integral to 'the community'. This was one of the reasons given for the success of the Land Use Unit at Wester Hailes.

In addition, environmental organisations working with ethnic minorities and people who live in poverty need to increase the representation of these groups in their general workforce and boards of trustees. Present levels of white, middle class, and non-Scottish staff in Scottish environmental NGOs are unlikely to effect great change in policies towards those excluded by their myopia.

Even where NGOs are involved, assessment procedures can be problematic. Interviewees who run urban training schemes and volunteer projects identified a need for more qualitative, longer-term performance indicators. Community involvement work cannot be conveniently measured in numbers of work days or numbers of people involved, and it is unlikely to come to fruition within the time scales (often annual or less) specified by sponsors.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Linking Agenda 21's prescription for environmentally sustainable development, participative research methodology, case studies of groups affected by poverty and the attitudes of NGO executives, the following policy recommendations might be considered by Scottish environmental NGOs.

Build up and use networks and partnerships

Use and develop existing agency and group networks and contacts to bring together a broad range of interests.

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Outreach

Raise awareness and build up credibility amongst people with limited opportunities by further development of outreach approaches to involvement with schools, community groups and individuals.

Education

Act as providers of innovative and experiential learning tools:

- Continue to develop education which is community based.
- Support research into the development of more informal education tools and vehicles to target those young people whom the formal school system is not reaching.
- Emphasise approaches that involve 'doing', play and releasing creativity.

Funding

- Consider preferential funding for marginalised groups.
- Create partnerships with the corporate sector.
- Utilise opportunities from the Lottery Commission .
- Consider Inter-NGO partnerships.

Organisational Culture

Undertake further research:

- Undertake research into the views and preferences for interaction with the natural environment of those who live in poverty. Policy objectives and strategy should be revised accordingly.

Seek to become more representative:

- Increase representation among staff, trustees and volunteers of minorities and people with limited opportunities.
- Critically examine appropriateness of organisational culture to client groups, paying particular attention to Shibboleths of dress and language which exclude.

Enhance staff training and project assessment procedures:

- Staff working in disadvantaged areas should be based there if possible and have a broad remit.
- Staff should be aware of the social as well as the environmental potentials of their work and have training in community work skills.

CONCLUSION - LINKING SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Exclusion and deprivation are issues which should be tackled through comprehensive institutional action and considerable individual commitment to social justice and environmental equity. They imply new roles for NGOs as advocates for those who are relatively powerless in society.

The challenge for NGO staff is to understand and act on a new agenda. This requires critical self-reflection, transcendence of psychological blocks, the tyranny of so-called methodological objectivity, institutional inertia and the myth of the infallible 'expert':

Policies, procedures and organisational cultures are determined by individuals, especially those in positions of power. To stem and reverse trends of dominance and deception requires personal change and action by them: to shift the emphasis from upward to downward accountability; to resist pressures to disburse; to stress trust and reward truthfulness and honesty; and above all, to enjoy giving up the normal exercise of power.... These [personal changes] in turn require a new professionalism ... and for some NGOs a redefinition of roles (Chambers in Edwards and Hulme 1995, 207).

Environmental organisations can no longer afford to confine their work to the rural and the aesthetic. Experience and knowledge of our natural heritage requires cultural, psychological and financial resources which not all have access to. This results in the alienation of the poorest sections of society from contact with the natural world and from the biological base of life on Earth. This alienation presents a serious threat to the long-term success of the goals towards which environmental NGOs stride. It makes their accompanying vision of sustainable development a chimerical folly.

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