

## **WHAT SORT OF WORLD DO WE WANT?**

This was the question addressed at the four yearly gathering of global leaders at the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona. It is also a question relevant to us in Scotland.

Many trends are in the wrong direction. Species are becoming extinct at ever faster rates. Water is in short supply to serve basic human needs. Deforestation continues for short term gain. The environment on which we all depend has been damaged and degraded. And there is no global solution to the mismatch between energy demand and energy supply. In short, there are multiple crises in the natural world, now made all the worse by the crisis in the economic world which affects everyone. This was very stark for those in the developing world where poverty is a life long experience and the chances of sustainable livelihoods and lifestyles are remote. Nevertheless, those of us attending the Congress could be forgiven for thinking that there was no cause whatsoever for optimism. But politicians, environmentalists, economists, business leaders and communities all had cause for optimism.

All of these issues were all parts of a larger whole: the need for equity for people and for the planet. The old triumvirate of sustainable development is still valid, but its elements need to be more inextricably linked. Perhaps the old analogy of the three legged stool of economy, society and environment, should be replaced by the triple helix of the three components representing the very essence of life. So to make progress against the negative trends needs a new approach. Business as usual will no longer work. Rather a 'business unusual' approach is needed. The guiding lights should be equity across societies of the world, help from the richer to the poorer societies, more dialogue across the sectors, recognition of the need for new financing models, calculating the economics of biodiversity, development of social businesses, realising new modes of governance, and bringing business and biodiversity together under the umbrella of a rejuvenated approach to sustainable development.

What has all of this high blown language got to do with us in Scotland? A great deal is the simple answer. We are dependent on the planet's resources, and we are dependent on food and fibre and energy from other countries. We all too often fail to consider whether we are paying an equitable price, whether we are undermining social traditions and structures, and whether we are exploiting for our benefit traditional knowledge and forcing others to become dependent. So translating the global measures from the Congress to Scotland means achieving greater equity (still unresolved in our own country and an insufficient contribution to its resolution elsewhere), greater reliance on our own natural resources used in an environmentally sustainable way rather than exploiting those of others, and, just as important, helping to build just societies through our experience of democratic structures, and to help the education of all.

Back home, it means a shift in the role of government from the source of all solutions to the facilitator of a more socially just and environmentally secure society removing barriers to action and to regulate effectively where necessary, a fundamental shift in the

distribution of resources from the aggressive approach to the supportive approach and a greater focus in schools on education for citizenship. And, hopefully, the media a force for balanced debate rather than sensation and celebrity worship.

So what sort of Scotland do you want?

I want one that is compassionate in the world, shares its technological knowledge, is proud of its heritage and the value which people everywhere place on it, and the importance of our generation's role as custodians of our natural and cultural heritage for our children and our children's children. That is the vision that I brought home from the World Conservation Congress. Do you share it?