



**THE EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY**  
**Partnerships to Impact Policy**  
**Prepared for: The Partnering Initiative**  
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**Rationale**

Cross-sector partnerships that seek to impact policy have been the subject of much discussion. This case study profiles a multi-sector partnership that brings together the United Nations, civil society, business, governments and communities to develop policies that reduce poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. It captures how this cross-cutting partnership is building the capacity of local grassroots organisations to influence policy around the world.

The Equator Initiative is a partnership of UNDP with the government of Canada, Conservation International, Fordham University, the German Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ), the Convention on Biological Diversity, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), IUCN – the World Conservation Union, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), GROOTS International, the Television Trust for the Environment (TVE) and the United Nations Foundation.

Launched in 2002, the Equator Initiative focuses on the region between 23.5 degrees north and 23.5 degrees south of the Equator, a zone which holds the world's greatest concentrations of both human poverty and biological wealth.

The Initiative is dedicated to:

- (i) celebrating successful local initiatives
- (ii) creating opportunities for sharing community experiences and best practice
- (iii) informing policy and forging an enabling environment for local action,
- (iv) building the capacity of grassroots organisations to deliver results and scale-up impact.

This cross-cutting partnership is based around four pillars:

- a. **The Equator Prize:** a prestigious international award that recognizes outstanding local efforts to reduce poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.
- b. **Equator Dialogues:** an innovative programme of community and local-global dialogues, learning exchanges and meetings that celebrate local successes, share experiences and inform policy.
- c. **Equator Knowledge:** a comprehensive research and learning initiative dedicated to synthesizing lessons from local conservation and poverty reduction practice.
- d. **Equator Ventures:** a unique investment programme focused on blended finance and capacity development for biodiversity enterprises in the most biodiversity-rich locations of the world.

This case study explores how through these programmes the Initiative is impacting policy in the region and globally.

### **Equator Prize:**

The Equator Prize honours outstanding community initiatives that effectively reduce poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. First awarded in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, the prize has since drawn some 800 nominations from around the world and has received extensive coverage by international media.

Equator Prize winners and finalists serve to represent examples of best practice in biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction and to champion local knowledge and community empowerment. The Chibememe Earth Healing Association provides a good example of how Equator Prize finalists and winners have benefited from the Prize.

*In 2004 Chibememe Earth Healing Association (CHIEHA), Zimbabwe was selected as a finalist for the Equator Prize and invited to attend the Community Kampung in Malaysia in February 2004.*

*Since 1999, the Chibememe community had taken a pro-active stance and had constantly sought dialogue with relevant ministries and organisations to seek opportunities to be part of both policy development and implementation processes. These efforts went without a significant impact until 2003 when CHIEHA partnered with the UNDP Equator Initiative.*

*Through its association with the Initiative CHIEHA established critical partnerships with local and national partners who became pivotal in future policy discussions with entities such as IUCN – The World Conservation Union, Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) Parks and Wildlife Authority and many others. Furthermore, as a result of the ties made during the Community Kampung CHIEHA was invited to contribute to the drafting of policies and became part of the National Environmental Policy draft steering committee.*

*Endorsement by the UNDP Equator Initiative not only created willingness among relevant partners to help CHIEHA in lobbying for inclusion of their concerns in national environmental policies, but The Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) also nominated a CHIEHA representative to represent Zimbabwe on the advisory group for CBD Article 8(j) and related provisions.*

*Since then CHIEHA has also been contributing to the output National Tourism Policy, and has been invited by the MET to participate in planning for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).*

This is just one example of how The Equator Initiative is empowering local grassroots organisations to get involved in local, national and international policy discussions.

### **Equator Dialogues:**

*“It is truly inspiring to see the incredible progress being made towards the MDGs by grassroots communities. This is especially true because local input will be crucial if we are to meet the MDGs and really raise the quality of life for the world’s poorest people. Participation and dialogue between communities, like that facilitated by the Community Commons, will bring us one step closer to hitting the mark on the MDGs.”*

Shoji Nishimoto,  
Director of UNDP Bureau for Development Policy

In 2005 the Equator Initiative’s Equator Dialogues programme, organized the Community Commons Dialogue; A three day event featuring 150 participants including representatives from 44 countries, the United Nations, international organisations, governments, NGOs, academic and media institutions.

Drawing on the wide experience and insights of community representatives from around the world, the dialogue sessions targeted key themes relevant to the MDGs such as HIV/AIDS, poverty reduction, natural resource management, gender empowerment, and conflicts and disasters. The

participants' recommendations on these issues were presented at the Civil Society Hearings held the following week at the UN Secretariat.

The Community Commons culminated with the "Local-Global Leaders Dialogue," which offered representatives the chance to sit face to face with high-level development officials and other global leaders to voice their concerns and opinions on the role of communities in development as well as present poignant examples from their own work.

The Community Commons dialogue space demonstrated that communities, often working in partnership with local governments, local and national NGOs, and international organisations are fundamental to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and make unique and essential contributions towards this global effort.

### **Equator Knowledge**

Launched at the inception of the Equator Initiative, Equator Knowledge promotes the sharing of knowledge and best practice and seeks to both deepen local impact and inform and influence policy. The Equator Knowledge portfolio delivers a quarterly "Between the Lines" newsletter, manages a network of over 760 community initiatives and produces a comprehensive series of research papers, book chapters, and other publications focusing on local approaches towards poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation.

When community delegates from the Community Commons dialogue space were invited to participate in the Informal Interactive CSC Hearings of the General Assembly, it presented them with a major opportunity to impact the 2005 World Summit - the largest gathering of heads of state to review progress towards achieving the MDGs. The delegates drafted and submitted a written Summary document which was then included among the official documents to be considered by the member states at the World Summit. They also produced a Community Voices Declaration, a significant portion of which was incorporated verbatim into the final unedited Summary of the Hearings.

As a result of their recommendations to the CSO Hearings, new text was added to the outcome document of the 2005 World Summit. New references to "sustainable production and consumption patterns" and language on water and sanitation were added to the section on environmental protection. Also, language on enhancing the role of NGOs, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in national development efforts was inserted into the section on global partnerships and development.

### **Equator Ventures**

Equator Ventures was formed in 2005 through an expansion of the Equator Initiative and Conservation International's existing partnership and through a process of thoughtful inquiry into how best to confront pressing needs at the interface of poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation.

Equator Ventures is an innovative development and investment initiative capitalized by grants and loans from resources in the public and private sector. It supports viable small and medium sized biodiversity businesses by offering them a "blended" offer of debt finance and enterprise

development support. These enterprises must contribute to biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction in Equator Initiative and Conservation International priority areas.

### **Conclusion**

The Equator Initiative demonstrates the power of working in partnerships to influence policy at a local, regional and global level. The Equator programmes and the grassroots organisations they work with are strengthened by the support of the multi-sector partners from civil society organisations, governments, international agencies and industry that come together to form the Equator Initiative.

For more information see <http://www.undp.org/equatorinitiative/>