



Convention on Biological Diversity

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KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE AND PERSPECTIVES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

1. “Living in harmony with nature” is the theme of the 2050 Vision of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 adopted at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Its vision statement is: “Living in harmony with nature”, where “By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.”¹

2. In the light of this and taking into account the multi-year programme of work of the Conference of the Parties up to 2020,² the Conference of the Parties, in its decision XII/2 C, paragraph 4, invited the Executive Secretary, subject to availability of resources, to facilitate the organization of an interactive dialogue on living in harmony with nature at the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and invited the United Nations General Assembly to make available to the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth meeting the outcomes of the interactive dialogues on harmony with nature of the United Nations General Assembly.³

3. The present document reproduces annex III of the report of the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, containing the outcomes of the interactive dialogue on the theme “Living in harmony with nature”, with the view to facilitating the discussions of the AHTEG with particular reference to the knowledge, experience and perspectives of indigenous peoples and local communities in the context of living in harmony with nature for comparison and better understanding of the potential benefits and adverse effects of synthetic biology, as per decision XIII/17, paragraph 10(f).

¹ Decision X/2, annex.

² Decision XII/31.

³ <http://harmonywithnatureun.org/index.html>

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE ON “LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE”

1. At the 4th plenary session of the meeting of the Conference of the Parties, on 13 December 2016, an interactive dialogue was held on the theme “Living in harmony with nature”. The scene for the dialogue was set by a panel of five experts, drawn from Parties, the United Nations system, indigenous peoples and local communities, and the religious community, each of which presented their views on the theme. The dialogue was moderated by Mr. Rafael Pacchiano Alamán, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico and President of the Conference of the Parties.

A. Panel presentations

Mr. Diego Pacheco Balanza, Vice-Minister of Planning and Coordination, Ministry of Development Planning of the Plurinational State of Bolivia

2. Mr. Pacheco Balanza noted that the importance of living in harmony with nature for achieving sustainable production and consumption was globally recognized and had resulted in the emergence of a new legal framework that codified the inherent right of nature to exist, thrive and evolve. The concept of “Earth jurisprudence” represented a shift away from traditional anthropocentric environmental regulatory systems that understood nature as property to be used for human benefit, recognizing that the welfare of humanity depends on the welfare of the Earth. Examples included the Bolivian Law of the Rights of Mother Earth (2010), the Bolivian Framework Law on Mother Earth and Integral Development for Living Well in 2012 (2012), the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008, and the amendment of the municipal constitution of São Paulo, Brazil, all of which recognized nature’s inherent right to life. Other examples included the 2012 ruling of the Supreme Court of India that had confirmed that environmental justice could only be achieved by moving from anthropocentric to eco-centric principles, and an amendment incorporating the rights of nature the constitution of the state of Guerrero, Mexico, in 2014.

3. The concept of living in harmony with nature had been part of the ancestral ways of indigenous peoples and local communities around the world since time immemorial. Indigenous and local knowledge, norms and customs and socio-economic models had always been part of ongoing efforts to strike the difficult balance of living in harmony with nature. Despite their diversity, indigenous peoples’ and local and traditional communities’ approaches shared a common understanding of the interdependence of peoples and nature. In order for the modern world to live in harmony with nature, those approaches, relevant customary laws and norms, knowledge, codes and values, needed to be replicated from the local communities at the national and international levels. The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was an important tool in that regard. It was also important to achieve economic, political, cultural and legal pluralism and to transform unequal power relations including male-dominated gender relations. Bolivian legislation was rooted in the long-standing tradition of American indigenous peoples’ respect for Mother Earth. Living in harmony with Pachamama (Mother Earth) meant recognizing the interdependence and complementarity of the rights of Mother Earth, the rights of indigenous peoples, the rights of peoples to their holistic and integral development, and the rights of peoples to live without material, social and spiritual poverty. Recognition of those four groups of rights guided Bolivian public policy and decision-making and allowed for the articulation of a system of life whereby poverty was eradicated, environmental functions protected and restored, sustainable patterns of production achieved and the rights of indigenous peoples respected.

Professor Tohru Nakashizuka, Graduate School of Life Science, Tohoku University, Japan

4. Professor Nakashizuka’s presentation focused on how science could contribute to approach living in harmony with nature and the lessons that could be learned from international interventions such as designation systems, partnerships and scientific assessment, in promoting local practices for living in harmony with nature. Professor Nakashizuka said that Japanese scientists had observed that many

common plants and animals had become endangered, and about half were found in situ in traditional agricultural zones called *satoyamas*. Thus, many species that were adapted to traditional agricultural and traditional water and sea management systems found it difficult to survive in modern production systems. Additionally some ecosystem services had been declining due to changes from traditional to modern agriculture, underuse of certain species, with the abandonment of farmlands, coppice forests and plantations, which also resulted in declines in some regulating and cultural services. Also, he noted that some traditional agriculture systems were more resilient to natural disasters such as tsunami, and recovered faster than modern systems.

5. In relation to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), Professor Nakashizuka noted that it had been useful for evaluating ecosystem functions and changes, indicating decreases in biodiversity and ecosystem services and suggesting future scenarios. In Japan, the IPBES approach was combined with natural capital evaluation to enhance recognition of biodiversity and ecosystem services. He described several examples in which a proposal to designate a site as a World Natural Heritage site, a UNESCO biosphere reserve or a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System had resulted in local action to revive traditional knowledge and practices, with greater awareness of global contributions of local communities and increased pride in their participation. The International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative, launched at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, promoted such trends by sharing both good practices and failures. It also mobilized scientists and scientific knowledge to meet the needs of local communities, creating two-way or multi-stakeholder dialogues. For example, activities conducted by non-governmental organizations and local communities, supported by international donor organizations, could be shared with and analysed in academic institutes, producing information relevant for policymaking by Governments. Its diverse membership also facilitated sharing of information at different levels, contributing real information to global and national discussions, while assisting local activities to be in line with global strategic directions, such as the Aichi Targets and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ms. Penninah Zaninka, United Organization of Batwa Development in Uganda

6. Ms. Zaninka said that, for indigenous peoples, living in harmony with nature was achieved through practising their customary sustainable use of natural and biological resources, including for the benefit of future generations, in which context gender played a significant part. Indeed, the rights, roles and responsibilities of men and women were quite different and yet critical for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, with the different interactions of each gender providing different opportunities for enhancing the sustainable protection and management of biodiversity. Traditional knowledge resulting through those unique interactions could be successfully harnessed in the design and implementation of relevant conservation and sustainable use programmes, including management of protected areas. However, such programmes in using traditional knowledge must take into account gender perspectives in addressing social, cultural and economic issues so as to promote gender equality and enhance the effectiveness of interventions for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

7. The traditional practices of the indigenous Batwa, such as rotational hunting and gathering and sustainable extraction of wild yams and honey were based on the concept of sustainable use and enhancing natural regeneration. In that connection, actions by the Government of Uganda to address customary sustainable use and, more broadly, sustainable use of biodiversity should include initiating an open-ended dialogue with the Batwa aimed at understanding the role and value of their traditional knowledge and customary sustainable use for conservation and sustainable use, in general. Ms. Zaninka further recommended: allowing Batwa communities access to traditional forests in order to gather traditional medicinal plants, basketry materials and non-timber forest products; fully involving the Batwa in the management of national parks on their traditional territories and ensuring that they shared in the benefits; and implementing policies guaranteeing full recognition of and respect for Batwa rights. She

concluded by saying that, in order to achieve effective conservation and sustainable use biodiversity, indigenous peoples and local communities need to be empowered, including through equal participation of both women and men.

Monsignor Ramón Macías, member of the delegation of the Holy See

8. Monsignor Ramón Macías said that the concept of “living in harmony with nature” in the 2050 Vision of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, was linked to the concept of “integral ecology” outlined in the recent Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, on “Care for our common home”. In the Pope’s words, the concept of “integral ecology” encompassed the inseparability of our concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace. It also pointed to the need to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with the spiritual – with God. It was based also in the recognition of humankind faces not two separate crises – one environmental and the other social – but rather with one complex crisis combining both elements. An integrated approach to tackling poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and, at the same time, protecting nature was necessary for its resolution. Strategies for environmental protection and biodiversity conservation must be underpinned by the conviction that everything is interconnected and, in the words of the Holy Father, that genuine care for our own lives and our relationship with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sent out the same message. Its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals highlighted the integral and indivisibility of economic, social and environmental concerns.

9. The Earth’s resources, including its biodiversity, were being devastated by a throwaway culture and an economy founded on the desire for instant gratification. Monsignor Macías stressed, however, that the cost of damage created by selfish disregard outweighed any potential economic gain. A longer-term view and a shift in direction, away from an economy based on immediate gratification, a throwaway culture, throwaway things and a callous disregard for people, were essential if we were to embrace integral ecology and live in harmony with nature. It was important to draw on and share the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities regarding biodiversity conservation. As the Pope had indicated in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* for those peoples and communities, land was not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors, and a sacred space with which they needed to interact if they were to maintain their identity and values. Much could be learned from that interaction. New ways forward needed to be developed through interdisciplinary dialogue that was open, respectful and underpinned by a sense of conviction and responsibility. Only then could a new “culture of care” be established to counteract the individualism that was leading to environmental degradation and an ethical and cultural decline. Everyone had a part to play in that shift in direction and in strengthening the bond between humankind and the environment.

Ms. Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

10. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz said that the climate crisis, the biodiversity crisis, the food crisis and the water crisis were all symptoms of the mismanagement of the Earth and its resources. Anthropocentric economic and development policies assumed that technological “fixes” would solve any problem when nature “failed”. However living in harmony with nature, and with Mother Earth, required a paradigm shift in order to address those multiple crises. Humans had to undo the harm they had done and restore, repair, and revitalize Nature. They must address the injustices that they had committed against the Earth, the source of all life. There was a need to rethink how the Convention could provide the policies and mechanisms that would operationalize living harmony with nature and prevent the continuing decline and destruction of the Earth. Much of the world’s biodiversity hotspots coincided with the ancestral territories of indigenous peoples. The world views, or “cosmovisiones”, and cultures of indigenous

peoples and local communities were time-tested examples of living in harmony with nature. There was accumulating evidence from diverse countries demonstrating that, where indigenous peoples' rights were recognized and protected, there was less deforestation, less genetic diversity loss, better carbon sequestration, and richer cultural diversity and biological diversity.

11. Indigenous peoples made up 5 per cent of the world's population and lived in 22 per cent of the world's territory, and 80 per cent of world's biodiversity was within their territories. In the Philippines, 90 per cent of the biodiversity was found in their ancestral lands. Indigenous peoples continued to resist the wanton plundering of their lands and resources and to keep check on the excessive accumulation and abuse of power, but what was needed was the recognition and protection of their human rights. The international community had recognized that all human beings had inherent human rights and it regarded those legal systems that did not recognize and uphold human rights as unjust. For indigenous peoples, human rights included the recognition of the right to their traditional knowledge and their traditional lands and waters, and respect for their vision of their communities. The Special Rapporteur called on Governments to protect those rights so that indigenous peoples could continue to protect Mother Earth.

B. Interactive dialogue

12. Mr. Pacchiano Alamán (moderator) invited the members of the panel to give their views on what actions could be taken at different levels to mainstream the concept of living in harmony with nature across the various sectors, including, but not limited to, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and tourism.

13. Mr. Pacheco Balanza said that the paradigm of the green economy, which viewed nature only as capital, including through the economic valuation of ecosystem services and the proposed payment for ecosystem services to address climate change and conserve biodiversity, needed to be challenged. The Rio+20 outcome document, "The future we want" recognized different visions, approaches and tools for achieving sustainable development. Approaches based on living in harmony with nature should not be limited to indigenous peoples and local communities, but should be seen as part of a new universal pathway to achieving sustainable development. There was a need for new legal, economic and policy instruments that recognized the rights of peoples and Mother Earth. A holistic approach to ecology that recognized the close links between social, economic and environmental issues was needed. National legislation that established nature as a key partner in human well-being had a profound impact on public policymaking and generated fundamental change in the way problems were being addressed. However, issues such as economic globalization, climate change and security, among others, could only be addressed through international cooperation and solidarity. Mr. Pacheco suggested that a full-day interactive dialogue on approaches based on living in harmony with nature be held during the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in order to enable countries to share their experiences with integrating such approaches. He also suggested the establishment of a task force composed of representatives of Parties and indigenous peoples and local communities to compile and classify different approaches and make recommendations on ways in which they could be integrated into biodiversity mainstreaming work. He further suggested developing a universal declaration on living in harmony with nature.

14. Professor Nakashizuka emphasized the importance of local efforts for living in harmony with nature, as complementary to global efforts, such as the efforts of business networks to inform the business community about the value of biodiversity and ecosystems and the inevitable failure of the short-term efficiency business model, which was unsustainable.

15. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz said that governance structures systems had to be modified from the local to global to ensure that they no longer served only the interests of a powerful minority at the expenses of the majority of peoples. Promoting democracy, on earth, required participation in all aspects of life, and it required a fair sharing of the earth's resources and shared decision-making about the use of those

resources. The rights of indigenous peoples to their traditional knowledge and traditional territories must be recognized and their right to give their free prior and informed consent should not be violated in order to exploit their lands. She called also on all governments to act to protect Mother Earth.

16. Mr. Pacchiano Alamán (Moderator) invited questions from the floor for the members of the panel.

17. In response to a question from a representative of Morocco concerning the move back to traditional approaches in Japan, Professor Nakashizuka said that the population of Japan, apart from aging, was falling rapidly in numbers. Urbanization was causing rural areas to empty of young people. He called on Governments to seek ways to revitalize biodiversity and ecosystem services and industries with the use of local and indigenous knowledge for local livelihoods and occupations and rural renewal. He noted that recognition of traditional land and seascapes, encouragement of traditional crops and foods and promotion of traditional knowledge can give added value to local products and into make those rural areas more viable.

18. In response to a question from a representative of Yemen about the importance of national biodiversity strategies and law, Mr. Pacheco Balanza said that one of the important issues associated with living in harmony with nature was to understand that everything was connected, such as social, economic and environmental issues. He emphasized the importance of national legislation to achieve the vision of living in harmony with nature. Bolivia had national legislation regarding the rights of Mother Earth and integral development, as well as an integrated system of planning. He added that the existing international and global factors, such as the international market, climate change and the international conventions could must work together to find a solution of those global problems. The first importance step was to recognize the rights of Mother Earth and to open oneself to the existence of other world visions or cosmologies.

19. In response to a question about gene drives and other aspects of synthetic biology from a representative of Friends of the Earth International and the Civil Society Working Group on Synthetic Biology, Mr. Pacheco said that Bolivia had called for a moratorium on synthetic biology because of its potential consequences, including the potential negative impact on traditional ways of life of indigenous peoples and local communities. Instead of synthetic biology, his country promoted sciences of and for life, and technology for life.

20. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz addressed questions from a representative of India on how to improve decision-making at the local level, and from a representative of the Gambia concerning the role of communities in managing protected areas. She said that traditional knowledge, and traditionally managed production food systems, were the systems that had allowed humanity to maintain and prosper alongside biodiversity over millennia. Their cultural diversity and local biodiversity had co-evolved and were mutually dependent. Those important knowledge systems should be respected and fully considered and integrated into solutions for the global crises that humanity faced today. She applauded the work of IPBES on traditional knowledge regarding their assertion that traditional knowledge systems were equally valid to scientific knowledge. There was a plurality of world views and knowledge systems which had to work together to provide solutions to the complex global problems that humanity was currently facing. She emphasized there were challenges in revitalizing traditional systems because of many changes in the ecosystem, including climate change, but people had to adapt and be resilient in the face of change. Now, many indigenous peoples were developing adaptation systems, some of them use traditional but also modern knowledge. Many combine the best of both to find new solutions. She called for respect for the plurality of knowledge systems and world views. She emphasized that a human rights-based approach to development and international human rights law were crucial to overall success and

should be reflected in all the actions being taken to save Mother Earth and to create a sustainable future for the next generation.

21. In response to a question about synthetic biology, Ms. Tauli-Corpuz said that there was a tendency to rely on technological fixes, such as gene drives, a technology had not yet been fully assessed in terms of environmental and social impacts. She added that technology alone could not solve the problem of food security and that technological choices could have unforeseen consequences for human communities further down the road. Regarding the introduction of new technologies, she noted that input from indigenous peoples and local communities was rarely sought and, when provided, was often ignored, and that, consequently, communities often felt helpless in the face of the new technologies being imposed on them. In concluding, she said that, additionally, there were insufficient safeguards, including adequate environmental assessments of new technologies that adequately took into account possible economic, social and cultural impacts on communities.
