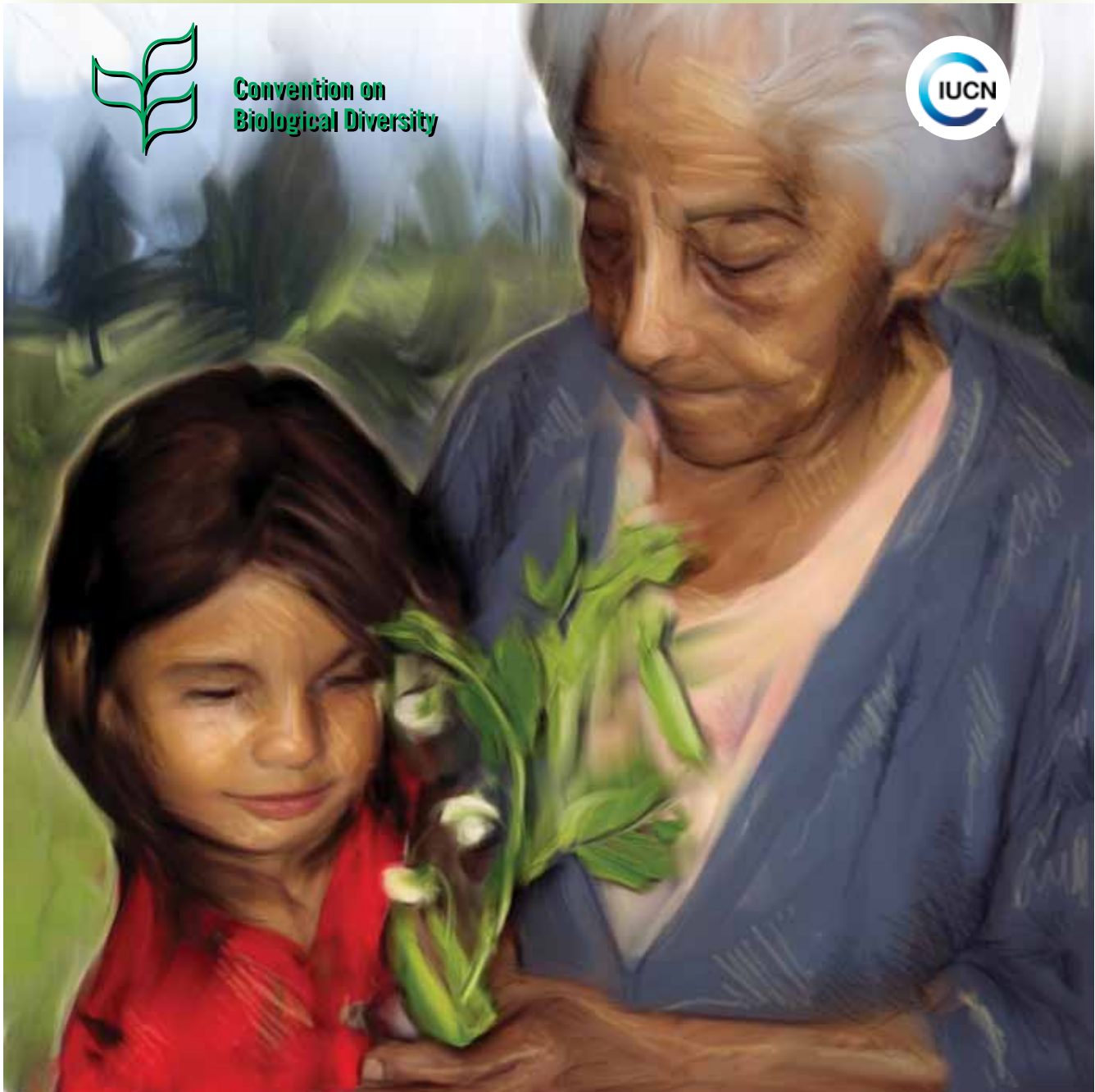


Gender and Access and Benefit Sharing of Genetic Resources (ABS)



The third objective of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) seeks “the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources, including by

appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies, taking into account all rights over those resources and to technologies”. The mainstreaming of gender considerations in ABS and

Traditional Knowledge (TK) could contribute to the achievement of this goal, since gender equality is an essential element of any action to ensure the conservation of nature and the fair and equitable distribution of benefits. In particular, mainstreaming gender considerations could help prevent the exploitation of women's TK and could transform unequal social and institutional structures that prevent women from having fair and equitable access to benefits. The use and development of genetic resources, if carried out without taking into consideration the needs and practices of communities, could endanger their livelihoods.

Mainstreaming gender in ABS governance could contribute to the realization of obligations under human rights law, sustainable development law and the CBD. In the end, meeting international obligations on gender equality in relation to ABS and TK could create a win-win situation for all, and help in meeting the CBD's three objectives and the 2010 target to significantly reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss (Tobin and Aguilar, 2007).

It is urgent for all stakeholders (users, source countries, source communities and resource owners, user country researchers, and others) to include a gender perspective in their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and to take the appropriate actions to ensure gender equality for men, women, boys and

girls. To promote this inclusion of gender, the Secretariat of the CBD has established a gender focal point and elaborated a Gender Plan of Action, in collaboration with IUCN.

Examples

- According to the Guatemala NBSAP, the benefits derived from the use of all biodiversity aspects, ecosystems, species and genes should be distributed in a fair and equitable manner, without discrimination regarding to gender, ethnic group, age, socio-economic level or place of origin.
- In Bhutan, rural women's livelihoods depend significantly on the genetic value of crops. Women are more informed of the crop genetic potential and the compelling environmental determinants. Given their dependence and knowledge, rural women could therefore play an important role in the strategies developed to utilize genetic resources and should receive a fair share of the benefits (Bhutan NBSAP).
- Traditional medicine is a primary source of health care in some 80% of the population of some developing countries, and women often have a more specialized knowledge of wild plants used for medicine than men (Sillitoe, 2003).
- As men are increasingly drawn to seeking paid work away from

In a study conducted in El Salvador, women were found to have a greater knowledge of the diversity of plants and animals used for medicinal purposes. This knowledge is due to their traditional role as carers and has a positive impact on the health of the community (NBSAP El Salvador).

their lands and resources, women are responsible for the control, development and transmission of significant traditional knowledge (TK). Subsequently, TK is passed through generations of women, from grandmother to granddaughter, aunt to niece, mother to daughter and older sister to younger sister (Turner, 2003).

- While a small number of species provides a large proportion of the world's food needs, hundreds of other species are utilized by specific communities to complement their diets. In many regions, women have a key role in growing and preserving these underutilized species. In Yemen, women grow certain crops such as groundnuts, pumpkins, leafy vegetables, cowpeas, cucumbers and sweet potatoes, which have the effect of raising biodiversity and food security on the farm. These crops have been identified as "women's crops" and require a lot of precision and patience in planting, weeding, harvesting, processing, preservation and food preparation (NBSAP Yemen).
- The genetic diversity of many species is preserved because women prefer specific characteristics. For example, Andean women choose potatoes with characteristics that reflect their cooking requirements (Howard, 2003). Rwandan women are reported to produce more than 600 varieties of beans; and Peruvian Aguaruna women plant more than 60 varieties of manioc (FAO, 2001). Yemenese women select seeds with preferred characteristics such as colour, size, genetic stability, disease tolerance, palatability and good processing qualities for planting (NBSAP Yemen).
- Gender imbalances exist in land access and ownership, and on average fewer than 10% of women farmers in developing countries own land (Henri, n.d). In Kenya, although statutory laws do not prevent women from owning land, they still face numerous difficulties in trying to own land (NBSAP Kenya). Lack of land ownership could hinder women's access to many of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources.

Natura, a Brazilian Company that produces cosmetics, personal hygiene and perfume products, made use of the traditional knowledge of the Ver-as-Ervas women. The Ver-as-Ervas women initiated an administrative procedure before the competent authority, in order to claim benefits associated with the use of the knowledge they supplied. This agreement has been signed by Natura and the Ver-as-Ervas, but has not yet been approved by the Genetic Patrimony Management Council (CGEN) of the Environment Ministry, due to the complexity of the issue and lack of clear legal guidance on access and benefit sharing associated with traditional knowledge (CBD, 2008).

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