



Living in harmony with nature

Traditional Knowledge, Innovation and Practices

Traditional knowledge is the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world. Developed from experience gained over centuries and adapted to the local culture and environment, it is transmitted orally from generation to generation. It tends to be collectively owned and takes the form of stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local language, and agricultural practices, including the development of plant species and animal breeds. Sometimes it is referred to as an oral tradition for it is practiced, sung, danced, painted, carved, chanted and performed down through millennia. Traditional knowledge is mainly of a practical nature, particularly in such fields as agriculture, fisheries, health, horticulture, forestry and environmental management in general.

Appreciation of the value of traditional knowledge is growing. This knowledge is valuable not only to those who depend on it in their daily lives, but to modern industry and agriculture as well. Many widely used products, such as plant-based medicines, health products and cosmetics, are derived from traditional knowledge. Other such valuable products include agricultural and non-wood forest products as well as handicraft. Traditional knowledge can make a significant contribution to sustainable development.

Most indigenous and local communities are situated in areas where the vast majority of the world's genetic resources are found. Many of them have cultivated and used biodiversity in a sustainable way for thousands of years. Some of their practices have been proven to enhance and promote biodiversity at the local level and aid in maintaining healthy ecosystems.

However, the contribution of indigenous and local communities to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity goes far beyond their role as natural resource managers. Their skills and techniques provide valuable information to the global community and a useful model



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www.cbd.int/traditional



for biodiversity policies. Furthermore, as on-site communities with extensive knowledge of local environments, indigenous and local communities are most directly involved with conservation and sustainable use.

The Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity recognize the crucial importance of traditional knowledge to the objectives of the Convention and are considering specific laws, policies and programmes to protect and to promote it, and to ensure that indigenous and local communities obtain a fair and equitable share of the benefits arising from the use of their knowledge.

Parties are committed to the effective participation of indigenous and local communities in all matters of relevance to them. To facilitate this process they have established a voluntary fund to assist indigenous and local community representatives to participate in Convention meetings and processes. Additional information, including application forms, is available in the six UN languages at: www.cbd.int/traditional/fund.shtml.

Fast Facts

- ▶ Many indigenous and local communities have lived in long term sustainable ways for millennia
- ▶ Indigenous and local communities have much to contribute to a world facing serious problems as the result of the unsustainable use of resources
- ▶ Traditional knowledge can contribute to solving serious global problems through practices such as local conservation, sustainable use of plants and animals, and addressing issues such as climate change, desertification and water quality
- ▶ Because of their close association to their environment and direct reliance on plants and animals, indigenous and local communities are often the first communities impacted by climate change. Their traditional knowledge however, provides a key for successful local level adaptation and advice on sustainable mitigation activities
- ▶ Traditional medicines are based on traditional knowledge and, in many developing countries, 80% of the population continue to rely on traditional medicine for primary health care
- ▶ Traditional medicine adopted by other populations (outside its indigenous or traditional culture) is often called alternative or complementary medicine

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