



International Expert Meeting on “Community to Community Exchange and Capacity Development Workshop for Traditional Knowledge”

2-4 October 2015

Bengaluru, India

Summary of the Workshop¹

1. Inaugural Session

The inaugural session of the international Community to Community Exchange and Capacity Development Workshop for Traditional Knowledge was hosted in Bengaluru, India (2-4 October 2015) with the participation of about eighteen country delegates from Asia, Africa and the Central Asian countries.

The inaugural session was addressed by Dr. P. Unnikrishnan representing the United Nations University-Institute of Advanced Studies on Sustainability (UNU-IAS), Dr. Darshan Shankar, Vice Chancellor, Trans Disciplinary University, Mr. Andreas Drews, of the ABS Capacity Building Initiative, Mr. T. Rabikumar, Secretary, National Biodiversity Authority, Ms. Alejandra Pero of the UNDP, Equator Initiative and Ms. Douchi Latifa, representative from the community. The panellists looked forward to a great learning experience and also put forth the major objectives of the three day workshop.

¹ This brief is prepared by Mr. Pratik Harish, Ms. Bhavani Seetharaman, Ms. Srishti Pandey and Ms. Meenu Maria Joseph, Fellows at Forum for Law, Environment, Development and Governance (FLEDGE), India. They are currently pursuing Master’s programme in Public Policy at National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru. Access detailed reports from <http://www.fledge.in>

2. Technical Sessions

2.1 Experience sharing sessions - Group Work

In order to understand the practices in India with respect to preserving traditional knowledge and access and benefit sharing (ABS), the delegates were taken on a pre-meeting field visit to Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka in India. During the session, the participants were divided into three groups each of which went to the states (provinces).

The Francophone group went to Karnataka and visited the Karnataka Biodiversity Board, a Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) and three traditional communities. Based on interactions, the group reflected that India had made significant progress in terms of management of biodiversity through the People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs). Along with proper documentation of traditional knowledge in biodiversity registers to ensure protection, there was also decentralisation of decision-making, which ensured that interests of the traditional communities are safeguarded

The second group that visited the state of Tamil Nadu visited the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) at Chennai, a Fishing community at Mahabilpuram and the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS). The group learnt about the legislative framework and the three tier institutional setup for protection of biodiversity in India. This group too commended the advanced, well-structured and participatory system of ABS in India which allowed for integration with corporate social responsibility (CSR) in order to achieve the objectives. They however, suggested the need to have greater levels of collaboration between the civil society and the government to improve community rights and their livelihood.

The third group that visited Kerala looked into the integration of ABS requirements in the governance systems of India through their visits to the Kerala State Biodiversity Board and interaction with the traditional Kani Community. They too praised the decentralized structure of biodiversity conservation, which had been successfully functioning in the state, and the remarkable levels of awareness regarding ABS among the local communities. The one area for improvement, which the group pointed, was the need to bridge the disconnect between the various stakeholders so that there was a coherence in

objectives. The group suggested the integration of traditional governance of biodiversity with ABS.

2.2 Session on Documentation and Assessment

The afternoon session on 'Documentation and Assessment' was facilitated by Dr. Unnikrishnan representing the UNU-IAS along with Mr. Hariramamurthy from Transdisciplinary University (TDU).

The session delved into the detailed process of documentation and its importance to prevent the erosion of traditional knowledge of traditional communities. Dr. Hariramamurthy felt that documentation of traditional knowledge was important primarily for two purposes, to ensure primary health care and for passing on the knowledge to the younger generations of the community. It was felt that traditional knowledge cannot be protected by the government alone. There needs to be active cooperation between the traditional community, the local associations and the government to ensure comprehensive documentation of knowledge.

The process of documentation involves both data collection and data processing. Data collection involves interviews, video documentation, focus group discussions among others. The panellists stressed on the need to develop a sense of trust and confidence amongst the community to ensure an effective documentation process. Only after establishing a good contact with the community is when the actual work of documentation can be initiated. Documentation of the traditional knowledge in health does not merely focus on documentation of medicines; there is an equal focus on every intricate detail right from the specification of how the medicine should be taken or the kind of diet which should be followed during medication etc.

After discussing in detail about the method of documentation, the participants concluded that not all traditional knowledge can be documented. It was felt that there was need to develop new methods to ensure inter generational transfer of knowledge.

2.3 Session on in situ and ex situ conservation

The concluding session of the day was a panel discussion on how best to conserve biodiversity, *ex situ* and *in situ*. The panel had representation from India, Tajikistan, Madagascar and Togo.

The panellist from India highlighted the need to step-up conservation efforts owing to 312 plant species in India that are being threatened of which 47 are medicinal plants. He recommended the use of *in situ* method for conservation as it was the most cost-effective method for long-term conservation. He also pointed towards the success of setting up Medicinal Plant Conservation Areas (MPCAs), which are treated as “hands-off” areas with minimal interference, that have succeeded in protecting biodiversity in these areas.

The panellist from Tajikistan spoke about the Equator Initiative award-winning *Zan va Zamin project* in the country that focused on conservation of different crops by roping in women living in protected areas, who have traditionally played a bigger role in earning livelihoods from agricultural activities. The organization, which works with different stakeholder groups from the national body to the local communities, had planted about 10,000 varieties of local saplings and 20 species of local varieties of apple have been conserved by the group.

The speaker from Madagascar talked about a programme that focused on mapping community based resource management. Under the project, local communities had created a micro-zoning of forest area to understand different types of conservation requirements within a forest area. This led to the discovery of alternative conservation methods and other practices such as honey bee cultivation and snail cultivation. The project had helped up to a thousand individuals in the communities, of which 60 per cent were women.

Finally, the representative from Savandurga, an NGO in Karnataka, shared how the local community had implemented the ABS system since the early 1990s with considerable success. The community began with prioritizing the protection of wild medicinal plants, which were spread over 2000 hectares with the help of women Self Help Groups (SHGs). This was followed by awareness generation and training programmes right from the village to the district level, interactions with students to promote two-way knowledge sharing and training of women-led SHGs to use and preserve traditional knowledge. The

community had successfully developed 33 medicines and marketed it across the state of Karnataka.

The overall essence of the first day of the presentations highlighted key points in the area of traditional knowledge and resource collection and documentation. The day began with sharing the multiple perspectives of the participants from different parts of the world on what they had observed in India and how it was different from their home country practices. The discussions focussed on various aspects such as women empowerment and the linkage between local communities and their ownership rights based on the multitude of experiences from the different countries.

On the second day the meeting focused on the theme of '**Research and Innovation: Intercultural Methods**' by looking at the notion of research and the collection of evidence as a linear approach.

The discussions facilitated by Padma Venkat, a professor at TDU concluded that research need not be linear, especially in the case of traditional knowledge. The idea of having a singular approach for varied data will not hold true with the various experiments according to the panellist's studies. Examples to substantiate this were also shared during the discussion.

The panellists further explained the concept of research in traditional knowledge through the trans-disciplinary method where they looked at both the top-down and bottom-up approaches. By doing so they were able to take part in both the scientific approach till clinical trials and also observed how an *ayurvedic* practitioner treated their patients. This led to a more thorough understanding of traditional knowledge in curing various diseases, while also understanding the cultural significance of the knowledge and the method of procurement and processing.

This was followed by a group discussion on enterprise development in which participants were required to enlist factors that enabled and restricted enterprise development. The common enabling factors that emerged from the brainstorming session included the presence of traditional knowledge, availability of genetic and financial resources, and institutional support. The common challenges identified by the groups included insufficiency of policies and their poor implementation. Also, the lack of interaction

between stakeholders—government, industry and local communities— was identified as a major hurdle.

This was followed by a panel discussion, which included representatives from India and Swaziland. The representatives spoke about the success stories of enterprises operating in their respective countries. They recommended countries to look at enterprises as business propositions with long term financial planning instead of a short-term focus. Also, it was highlighted that successful enterprises can only be built through collectivization of local communities and it was important to keep them at the centre of the decision-making process.

The afternoon session was divided into two parts. First, Dr Damodaran from the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore spoke on the rights of tangible and intangible property and protection of community knowledge. He stressed on the need to differentiate between traditional cultural expressions, folklore and cultural heritage rather than using them interchangeably. Through the process of discussion and questions the dichotomous nature of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and UNESCO's heritage of humanity policies were highlighted. Finally, it was emphasized that there was a need to develop horizontal cooperation between countries of the south in the sharing of knowledge.

In the second part of the session, Alphonsa Jojan from Natural Justice focused on the need for maintaining Biocultural Community Protocols (BCP). BCP as a code provides a clear idea to an outsider who approaches the community to access resources or to gain traditional knowledge. She recognized the need for advocacy to make different countries promote BCP as has been recognized by the Nagoya Protocol.

The concluding session of the day was about sharing of ABS experiences from African countries facilitated by the ABS Initiative. Participants of the discussion were representatives from Benin, Namibia, Morocco and Cameroon, who discussed the initiatives taken to smoothen the functioning of ABS in their respective countries. In Benin the focus was on developing a clear vision that stated the objectives of ABS. The representative explained the importance of identifying the owners and defining what they own. This has helped them improve the framework for consultation with all stakeholders in drafting the legislation.

The Namibian representative on the other hand, spoke about the success of the Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) practice, wherein communities are incentivized to participate in the ABS framework. The third representative presented the unique experience of Morocco whereby the Nagoya Protocol was translated into an indigenous language Amazighe. This has revolutionized capacity development for ABS in the country by enhancing awareness and participation of local communities. Finally, the representatives of Cameroon shared the ABS experience of one kingdom that was successful in developing a model for sharing of benefits among all stakeholders accrued from the cultivation and sale of a local traditional spice.

On the following and concluding day, the morning session began with a panel discussion focused on the use of pre-existing policy frameworks to protect local communities and traditional knowledge from exploitation. Many of the panellists believed that policies for the protection of tribal communities already exist but their implementation had been poor. They provided various reasons for this setback such as the lack of inclusion of communities in the formulation process, language barriers, hierarchical execution of laws by the government, overwriting of laws for business purposes, the lack of incorporation of traditional knowledge in mainstream medicine and the heavy cost of the practice of the laws themselves.

Most panellists and participants felt that the policy framework's exclusion of stakeholder communities led to an impractical implementation procedure. The lack of understanding of the problems faced on the ground led to issues such as the unfamiliarity of the community regarding the implementation of laws. Another issue that was heavily noted was the problem of perception of the community regarding ownership. Examples from Kyrgyzstan showcased how traditional knowledge can be used to promote the value of the resources themselves through the use of legends and folklore. It was also noted that traditional knowledge and its protection must coincide with the international and national policies on aspects such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and only with the solidarity of both mainstream and traditional knowledge can all parties prosper.

This was followed by a group discussion on the way forward. The participants were divided into smaller groups based on different themes and geographical regions. They were then asked to come up with suggestions on what steps could be taken in the future to address issues related to filling the gaps, awareness generation, capacity development, network

building, creation of an enabling environment and the establishment of south-south cooperation.

The important suggestions that emerged from the discussions were about creating cross-sector awareness that is culturally and linguistically relevant using dance, songs, etc, developing a decentralized network of region specific local communities, conducting peer-to-peer, cross-regional and cross continent exchange of knowledge and experience; engaging with policy making at different in order to include national and international platforms; and finally, developing an international forum for ABS that could facilitate exchanges between countries and ensure follow-up action in order to achieve the ABS objective.

The concluding session brought together representatives of various countries and organizations to share their experience regarding the overall workshop. Representatives agreed to take the lessons learnt from the community exchange program back home and implement them in their respective countries. Also, it was visualized that a non-institutional community-driven fourth tier of health care be created in order to achieve the two-fold objective of promoting traditional knowledge while also ensuring universal health care. In order to strengthen networks between different communities and regions, it was suggested that participants could use the online platform, WIN, hosted by Equator Initiative for documentation and build on community-community exchange. Finally, it was announced that the outcomes of the workshop would be presented as a report at different international platforms to take the ABS initiative forward.

3. Conclusions from the Meeting - Statement by the African Participants

“With the Nagoya Protocol having entered into force in 2014, the great challenge in our countries remains its implementation. India was one of the first countries to implement Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS), and there is a multitude of projects addressing the issue of traditional knowledge and genetic resources in innovative ways. While the approaches to the documentation of traditional knowledge in our countries differ, what we have seen in India has reinforced our belief that with a good awareness raising among local communities and the guarantee to secure their knowledge we could develop, in a participatory manner, valuable inventories of our resources and associated knowledge.”

We, the African participants

- *are committed to promote awareness of the Nagoya Protocol in our communities;*
- *encourage our countries to take legislative steps to include the customary rights of indigenous peoples and local communities in their ABS regulations;*
- *commit ourselves, alongside our governments, to encourage the documentation of traditional knowledge at the local and national level.*

We, the African participants of the Community-to-Community Exchange and Capacity Building Workshop for Traditional Knowledge Holders in Bangalore, warmly thank the organisers for this opportunity to share the Indian experiences in ABS and reiterate our commitments in our different countries.

We invite our partners present at this workshop - the ABS Capacity Development Initiative, the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, the Transdisciplinary University of Bangalore, the Equator Initiative (UNDP), Bioversity International and the Forum for Law, Environment, Development and Governance (FLEDGE) - to continue to support and accompany African local communities in the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol”.

Adopted by the African countries:

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Kenya, Madagascar, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Togo.

4. Take Away Message from the Meeting

The knowledge and wisdom that exists in the form of traditional knowledge continues to have significant relevance. Unfortunately, the fact that traditional knowledge and ABS do not get enough limelight in the public policy domain is a sad reality. The workshop showcased the need to protect and preserve traditional knowledge through mechanisms such as the ABS. The workshop was a great learning experience and the community to community exchange is a welcome step with the participants appreciating the fact that such practitioner’s experience sharing is largely absent in multilateral processes where the voices are heard only in the margins and never mainstreamed. As one of the participant put it *“the fight for protecting and promoting the rights of traditional knowledge holders has only begun and that ABS is a small yet significant step in this direction”.*