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UNEP AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE
Inputs from UNEP to the Workshop



1. Introduction

UNEP considers Indigenous Peoples and their traditional knowledge as important stakeholders and partners in environmental management. UNEP is working towards the development of relevant components and specific strategy/guidelines in order to formalize the involvement of indigenous peoples and the inclusion of traditional knowledge in its programmes, projects and policies.

UNEP is currently working towards the enhancement of civil society engagement in general within the organisation as well as the intergovernmental processes. As an important first step to improve and support the participation of IPOs in the Governing Council of UNEP as well as the preceding Global Civil Society Forum is to encourage IPOs to become accredited to UNEP. This is currently being implemented and IPOs are being contacted on an individual basis.

In addition, a Database on all past as well as ongoing programmes and activities with Indigenous Peoples is being developed as well as a website on Indigenous People, which will be hosted under the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch Website in UNEP.

2. Overview of current work relating to Traditional Knowledge and indigenous peoples by UNEP:

Throughout the years UNEP has undertaken various activities with regard to the engagement of indigenous people in its programme of work. These activities cover areas ranging from participation in policy-making, to integrating traditional knowledge in project implementation and assessing the situation of indigenous people in the world. In what follows a brief overview will be given of some of UNEP's major activities with regard to indigenous people.

a) United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Since 2002 UNEP regularly participates in the annual UNPFII. UNEP delivers reports and statements on its past and current activities concerning indigenous people's issues.

In 2003, the special theme was dedicated to "indigenous children and youth", to which UNEP contributed by reporting on the work undertaken by the Children and Youth, Sports and Environment Unit in its Division on Communication and Public Information (DEPI) and invited indigenous children and youth to participate in the Children's Conference in Connecticut in July 2004. As a follow-up, the November 2004 edition of TUNZA magazine was dedicated to "Indigenous Knowledge and the Environment".

The special theme of the 3rd session of the UNPFII in 2004 was dedicated to “Indigenous Women”. UNEP/DPDL officially launched the publication “Women and the Environment” during the Forum in New York.

Despite its active participation at the UNPFII, the reporting back to UNEP about the Forum sessions as well as the response to recommendations from the PFII to UNEP has remained fairly limited. Therefore, UNEP has identified appropriate channels to distribute relevant recommendations and outcomes to the different divisions and branches in the organization in order to increase their effective implementation.

b) Participation in policy-making

Participation at the global level

In decision SS.VII of the seventh special session of the GC/GMEF, the Executive Director was requested “to further develop, and review and revise as necessary the strategy for engaging with civil society in the programme of activities of UNEP in consultation with Governments and civil society. The strategy should provide clear direction to the secretariat to ensure that all programmes take into account opportunities for multi-stakeholder participation in design, implementation, monitoring of activities, and dissemination of outputs”.

Decision SS.VII/5 of the UNEP GC/GMEF

UNEP has encouraged civil society organizations and NGOs to seek accreditation to the UNEP Governing Council / Global Ministerial Environment Forum. So far, however, only one Indigenous People’s Organization has obtained accreditation to UNEP. UNEP will, therefore, further encourage and invite Indigenous People’s Organizations to get accredited.

On the other hand, Indigenous People’s Organizations who are not accredited to UNEP have successfully participated at the Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF) as well as in its preceding preparatory Regional Civil Society meetings. The GCSF, which is held annually prior to the GC/GMEF, is the main entry point for civil society organizations. Meanwhile the draft documents for the GC are distributed to all accredited NGOs and CSOs in advance for comments. During the GC/GMEF, one global statement by Civil Society, which includes all the regional positions and views, is presented to the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum as the official outcome of the GCSF.

The twenty-third session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum held in February 2005, can be seen as a milestone in regard to the improvement and enrichment of meaningful participation of civil society. Statements and contributions by civil society were made in the Plenary, Committee of the Whole as well as during the Ministerial Consultations and the Drafting Committees upon invitation by the Chair.

Apart from participation at the GC/GMEF and GCSF, UNEP has also opened up other channels for indigenous people's involvement. During the WSSD in 2002, UNEP together with UNESCO convened a high-level roundtable including indigenous peoples representatives (Rigoberta Menchu and Esther Camac) on "Cultural Diversity and Biodiversity for Sustainable Development" to draw attention to the important linkages between biodiversity and cultural diversity. The contributions and presentations made during the roundtable as well as UNEP's and UNESCO's positions on the topic were published in a booklet under the same title in January 2003.

In addition, in 2004, the first Global Women's Assembly on Environment: Women as the Voice for the Environment (WAVE) was held in Nairobi. More than 150 participants from 65 countries attended the meeting. Indigenous women representatives from all regions were invited to participate in the conference and ensured through their participation that their views and visions were taken into account and brought to the global agenda.

c) Research and Assessments

Until now, UNEP's research and assessment activities with regard to the situation of indigenous people and their knowledge have been relatively few. There have been, however, two major exceptions:

One major contribution to UNEP's mandate in the field of indigenous issues has been the publication "Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity", published in 1999 as an Addendum to the Global Biodiversity Assessment. This book is the result of a joint effort of many institutions and persons, including 290 indigenous contributors and highlights the important links between biodiversity and cultural diversity. In several of its chapters, the book stresses the significant contribution indigenous people can make in safeguarding our planet's natural heritage and as such it has underscored indigenous people as one of the main natural allies of UNEP.

With its focus on Arctic people's issues UNEP/GRID-Arendal (Global Resource Information Centre) dedicated the third issue of the Polar Environment Times to the indigenous people of Russia and examined how climate change and toxic chemicals are affecting traditional food chains, which play a central role in the health and survival of indigenous peoples. This issue of the Polar Environment Times was released in October 2003. Other editions of the Environment Times have also included several articles on the situation of indigenous people in the Arctic and their traditional knowledge with regard to the environment.

UNEP is looking at the possibility to extend its research and assessment activities in regard to indigenous people in the following areas: effects of environmental degradation on indigenous people's well-being, the use of traditional knowledge for

natural resource management, and on conflicts between indigenous people and conservation efforts.

An exception regarding research and assessment within UNEP is UNEP/GRID-Arendal as "*the UNEP key centre on Polar environmental assessments and early warning issues, with particular focus on the Arctic*". See also paragraph e) for further projects under GRID Arendal.

The Vital Arctic Graphics is a compilation of illustrations and case studies intended to describe the Arctic, the livelihoods of Arctic indigenous peoples and the future well-being of this region. It summarizes some of the key threats to the future sustainability of the Arctic including the rapid pace of climate change, worrying levels of persistent organic and heavy metal pollutants, and increasing natural resource exploration. The coastal regions are particularly important to the peoples of the Arctic and their current protection status is therefore given particular focus.

d) Project Implementation

UNEP has already implemented several projects related to indigenous people and their knowledge, mainly through the Division of the Global Environment Facility. The next paragraphs give an overview of some of the main projects in the fields of Environmental Resource Management, Participation and Capacity Building and Training.

Environmental Resource Management

Ongoing projects

Currently, the Division on Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI) and its Disaster Management Branch is implementing a project on *Capacity Building through Partnership and Information and Communication Technology for Using Indigenous Knowledge for Nature Conservation and Natural Disaster Management in Africa*. The project seeks to strengthen the capacities of local stakeholders in the application and use of indigenous knowledge in natural conservation and natural disaster management. At this stage, the project is being implemented in four pilot countries: Kenya, South Africa, Swaziland and the United Republic of Tanzania. Proposals are being developed to extend the project to other countries in Africa as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Another project that is currently being implemented, is a project funded by DGEF on *Biodiversity Conservation and Integration of Traditional Knowledge on Medicinal Plants in National Primary Health Care Policy in Central America and the Caribbean – Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama*. This project supports conservation and sustainable use of forest ecosystems in Central America and the Caribbean by identifying conservation and management needs of medicinal plants within key forest ecosystems, and integrating these issues into the broader management of selected forest ecosystems.

DGEF is also funding a project on *Persistent Toxic Substances (PTS) Food Security and Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North*. This project assists Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North develop appropriate remedial actions to reduce the health risks resulting from contamination of their environment and traditional food sources by persistent toxic substances (PTS). The project will provide recommendations to federal and local authorities, Indigenous Peoples, and the international community on measures to reduce the exposure of Indigenous Peoples to PTS, including identification of priority areas where actions are needed. An assessment of the significance of aquatic food chains as a pathway of exposure of indigenous people to PTS will be carried out. The relative importance of local and distant sources and the role of atmospheric and riverine transport of PTS will also be assessed.

Future projects

Currently DGEF has two projects in the pipeline waiting for approval later this year or early 2006.

The first project deals with the *Conservation of Biodiversity Rich Sacred Natural Sites*. This project will create a strengthened enabling environment to support the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of sacred natural sites of indigenous and local peoples worldwide while contributing to preserve those cultural values, practices, knowledge and belief systems associated to these sites. The project will work with indigenous and local communities to promote recognition of these sites as community-conserved areas, part of more integrated protected area networks. This will in turn help in their long-term survival, expansion and effective management.

A project on *Safeguarding the Biological and Cultural Diversity of Tropical Island Systems: Palau, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu* is under preparation for submission to the Global Environment Facility later this year. Objectives of this developing project include the mobilization of indigenous communities' knowledge, innovations and practices relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the reinforcement of the transmission of indigenous knowledge, practices and worldviews through the formal and non-formal education system.

Recently completed projects

DGEF is currently appraising a project on *Integrated Ecosystem Approach through Collaborative Management to Conserve Biodiversity and Minimize Habitat Fragmentation in Three Selected Model Areas in the Russian Arctic*. The project's development objective is the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Russian Arctic, helping to secure the integrity of some of the world's last remaining pristine areas and support livelihoods of indigenous and local peoples. The immediate objective is adoption and initial implementation of integrated ecosystem management strategies and action plans in three model areas representing different ecosystems and

anthropogenic pressures. Indigenous groups have been extensively involved in the preparation of this project. Indigenous groups have also participated directly in the project's implementation through training programmes, participation in advisory committees and consultative processes and development and implementation of pilot projects to test strategies.

Another DGEF project in the appraisal stage is the project on “*Integrated Management of Dryland Biodiversity through Land Rehabilitation in the Arid and Semi-Arid Regions of Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe*”. The project's goal is to conserve globally significant ecosystems and arid lands-adapted plants and animals inhabiting the transboundary drylands between Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The project combines indigenous knowledge of natural resource management and scientific expertise to develop, with local communities, practices and approaches to conservation. The utilization of indigenous knowledge and proven community based techniques, methodologies and approaches to natural resource management are an integral part of the project.

Participation

Recently, DGEF has approved a project *International Indigenous Peoples Network for Change*. This project will promote and strengthen the engagement of indigenous peoples groups in the work of the Global Environmental Facility and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The project will establish communications and information mechanisms that promote and effective exchange of information by indigenous groups. The project also aims to strengthen indigenous peoples' capacity to formulate policy and projects with respect to the CBD and the GEF and to participate in the implementation and monitoring of biodiversity projects.

Capacity Building and Training

Some of UNEP's regional offices have strong links to IPO and NGOs and have been developing specific projects on and for indigenous peoples. The Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) supported the Environmental Education Centre in Chennai, India to replicate a successful model of environmental education and community development in five indigenous villages. The project focused on interventions in villages characterised by lack of land tenure, low income, insecure water supply, and restrictions on access to traditional forests through recent national legislation. This involved training of women's groups, youth and teachers in environmental protection, water resource management, energy conservation, desalination of tanks and water bodies, vermin-composting, and eco-friendly income generation.

From 2001 to 2003 the Division of Environmental Policy Implementation together with Earth Care Africa, has implemented a project on *Empowering Women in Rainwater Harvesting in Kenya*. More particularly, the project aimed at training Maasai

women in the planning, development and management of water resources, with a special focus on rainwater harvesting.

In Latin America, the Latin America and Caribbean Training Network is coordinating, together with the Centre of Education and Training for Sustainable Development of the Mexican Ministry of Environment the project *Community Training for the Conservation of Biodiversity and the Sustainable Exploitation of Natural Resources*. The first phase of the project focuses on the indigenous peoples of Chiapas through a training programme on conservation and sustainable management of the natural and cultural wealth of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas.

Decision SS.VII/1 of 15 February 2002 of the Governing Council of UNEP concerning the strengthening of international environmental governance recognized, among other components, the urgent need to develop a strategic plan for the provision of technology support and capacity-building to developing countries as well as to countries with economies in transition. The Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building was adopted during the GC/GMEF 23 in February 2005.

One of the major objectives of the Bali Strategic Plan is to strengthen cooperation among UNEP, multilateral environmental agreement secretariats, and other bodies engaged in environmental capacity-building. These include UNDP and the GEF in particular, and bilateral donors, other United Nations bodies, regional or multilateral organizations, and international financial institutions, civil society, including the private sector, universities and other relevant stakeholders. This development will open additional channels for UNEP to work on the national level and enhance its engagement with IPOs considerably.

e) Projects and initiatives under UNEP/GRID -ARENDAL

The Polar Programme of UNEP/GRID-Arendal, with out-posted offices in Stockholm and Ottawa, is responsible for carrying out our role as UNEP's *key Polar Centre*. In collaboration with numerous partners and regional stakeholders, it undertakes projects and initiatives that aim to:

- To facilitate and/or participate in stakeholder processes that recognize different values, perspectives, and knowledge, with a particular emphasis on empowering Arctic peoples
- To provide interdisciplinary polar assessments and early warning to build awareness as a foundation for decision-making.
- To provide outreach, education and communication services.
- To provide analytical and management tools, methods and expertise to meet stakeholder demands.

UNEP/GRID-Arendal is also participating in several project proposals for the upcoming International Polar Year. The IPY is a two year international research campaign in all fields of polar research (including connecting and relating the polar regions in a global/regional context). The year is co-ordinated and under the umbrella of International Council for Science (ICSU) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Additional GRID-Arendal projects are:

Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)

This pilot project seeks to explore new economic opportunities for sustainable use of natural resources for the benefit of the Russian Arctic's indigenous peoples, who today are often left out from development opportunities in a world governed by market economies. Opportunities include outsourcing of user rights via lease concessions, sales of hunting and fishing rights, and sales of wildlife products.

ECORA

Integrated Ecosystem Approach to Conserve Biodiversity and Minimize Habitat Fragmentation in the Russian Arctic. Initiated in 2003, ECORA is a Global Environment Fund (GEF)-funded project that aims to develop and implement integrated ecosystem management strategies in the Russian Arctic. Major outcomes of the programme will include approved management strategies and action plans in 3 selected model areas of the Russian Arctic. This programme will run through 2009.

ARCIS (Linking the Arctic and Small Island Developing States) - Vulnerability to Climate Change

The Arctic and small island developing states are inextricably linked and similarly vulnerable to climate change impacts. As the name implies, ARCIS will link these two regions through examining their vulnerabilities and responses to climate change. In collaboration with numerous institutions, organizations and stakeholders from both regions, the ARCIS programme will assemble credible (scientific and technical) risk-assessment information from both regions into a plain language synthesis and make it accessible to the general public, governments and decision-makers around the world.

UNEP/GRID-Arendal's Polar Programme activities are nearly always a cooperative undertaking made possible through collaboration with various partners including Indigenous Peoples organisations, like the Saami Council, the Arctic Council, the Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference as well as the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON).