

Wisdom

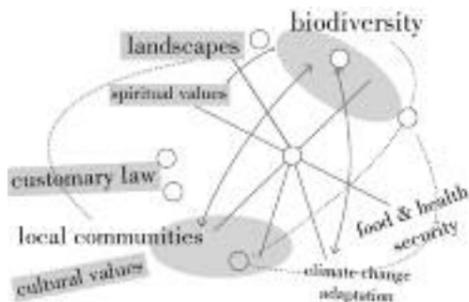
Objective III: Plant diversity is used in a sustainable and equitable manner



Target 13: Indigenous and local knowledge, innovations and practices associated with plant resources, maintained or increased, as appropriate, to support customary use, sustainable livelihoods, local food security and health care

“Knowledge matters - understanding how people and societies acquire and use knowledge is essential to improving people’s lives, especially the lives of the poorest.”

World Development Report 1998



Indigenous knowledge, innovations and practices are often collectively referred to as ‘traditional knowledge’. Developed from experience gained over the centuries and adapted to the local culture and environment, traditional knowledge is generally 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. Traditional knowledge is

mainly of a practical nature, particularly in such fields as agriculture, fisheries, health, horticulture, and forestry.

There is today a growing appreciation of the value of this kind of knowledge and many widely used products, such as plant-based medicines and cosmetics, are the products of it.

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 plant genetic resources are found. Many of them have cultivated and used biological diversity in a sustainable way for thousands of years and continue to do so today. An example is sub-Saharan Africa, where over 90 per cent of food is produced using traditional farming practices.



Alan Hamilton



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Indigenous knowledge in Belize

From 1988 to the present, a group of traditional healers and conservationists in Belize has worked with The New York Botanical Garden on a project to inventory and catalogue the flora and ethnobotanical knowledge of that country. The most significant printed results of the project to date have been a primary health care manual, a checklist of the flora of Belize, and a forthcoming encyclopedic treatment of the useful plants. From the standpoint of traditional knowledge, one of the most important outcomes has been the establishment of an association of traditional healers, aiding the development of a community of individuals dedicated to this practice.

A cultural diversity crisis

While we are all well aware of the extinction crisis facing biodiversity, it is less well known that this is being accompanied by a cultural diversity crisis, which could lead to the disappearance of up to 90 per cent of the world’s languages, and of the traditional knowledge and cultures expressed by them, over the next 100 years. Concern for the loss of traditional knowledge is the driving force behind many of the ethnobotanical and culture-related projects now underway throughout the world.

Where are we now?

A Traditional Knowledge Information Portal has been developed by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which will promote awareness and enhance access by indigenous and local communities and other interested parties to information on traditional knowledge, innovations and practices relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. A wide range of initiatives to conserve traditional knowledge have been developed at national and local levels, and increasingly these are being documented using video.



Joachim Gratzfeld

Find out more:

www.bdl.n.net/
<http://biocultural.iied.org/>

