

Report for
CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP
ON
NETWORKING AND INFORMATION EXCHANGE
FOR
NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS AND INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES
IN LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN REGION.

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Prepared by
Sean Townsend
Senior Research Officer –JA.-CHM
Jamaica Clearing-House Mechanism
CHM Focal Point
Natural History Division
Institute of Jamaica

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Introduction

At its second session, in May 2003, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recommended that a world conference on indigenous peoples in the information society be organized on the occasion of the World Summit on the Information Society. The Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society was one of the largest official parallel events of the Summit. It was attended by representatives of six United Nations Member States (a total of 18 government departments), eight United Nations system entities and other inter-governmental bodies, 12 private-sector participants and 90 indigenous and non-governmental organizations. A total of 286 persons attended the Global Forum, which examined both potentials and obstacles to the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the information society. Obstacles included (but were not limited to) a lack of basic community infrastructure, limited access to modern technologies and the urgent need for gender and age-sensitive capacity-building. Potentials included (but were not limited to) access to new marketplaces, increased indigenous networking (both regionally and internationally), new strategies to revitalize and pass on culture and languages, and the opportunity to fully participate in the new information and connectivity revolution facing humanity.

The Convention on Biological Diversity uses the term “indigenous and local communities (ILC)” in recognition of communities that have a long association with the lands and waters that they have traditionally lived on or used. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has considered this concept with regards to data-collection and indigenous. Governments have long recognized the close dependency of many indigenous and local communities on biological resources and the desirability of sharing equitably benefits of traditional knowledge, innovation and practices relevant to the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components.

Arising out of the Convention on Biological Diversity are the following:

Article 8, paragraph (j) states that parties undertake to

- Respect, preserve and maintain traditional knowledge relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity
- Promote its wider application with approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge
- Encourage the equitable sharing on the benefits

Article 10(c): Protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices;

Article 18 (4): Develop methods of cooperation for the development and use of technologies, including indigenous and traditional knowledge.

The eight conferences of the parties developed a plan of action for the retention of traditional knowledge by strengthen networking between local and indigenous people and the works of the convention. This would be achieved by conducting regional and sub-regional workshops aimed at capacity building to promote more effective participation of ILCs. These workshops are to acknowledge new information, web-based technologies and establishing communication networks. Workshops are targeted at Africa, Asia (Pacific & Middle East), Artic (Far eastern Russia) and the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The workshop for the LAC was the first of these to be conducted and took place from December 14-16, 2006, in Quito, Ecuador.

Because of this long association and reliance upon local resources, local communities have accumulated knowledge, innovations and practices regarding the sustainable management and development of these territories including useful environmental knowledge. Many communities may be considered local and may also be described as traditional communities. Some local communities may include peoples of indigenous descent. They are culturally diverse and occur on all inhabited continents. For example, small farming communities in France, who have occupied and farmed their lands for many generations acquiring useful environmental knowledge

including specialist knowledge about a variety of activities including sustainable agriculture, cheese making and wine making or even animal husbandry, represent a local or traditional community. Long term established rice and fish farmers in Asia may represent another type of local community. In Brazil, local and traditional communities are an important segment of the national population

Day 1

The opening ceremony started with a welcome message from the Ministry of Environment which was represented by Mr. Antonio Metamoross, Ecuador's Focal Point. This was followed by a greeting from the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) secretariat who offered special welcome to the representatives from the Local and Indigenous Communities. Special welcome and prayers were also offered by Mariano Marcos Terena of Brazil, he expressed how important it is to strengthen the communication between the ILC and the government so that each may regard other as allies. Members of CBD secretariat were then introduced. They were Olivier De Munck (in charge of CHM), Sofia Gutierrez and John Scott (indigenous of Australian decent) (photograph 1).



Photograph 1: The secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD)

Mr. Scott and Ms. Gutierrez facilitated the introduction of participants both in Spanish and English as well as outlined the activities of the workshop. Participants were of two main groups, they were either a representative of the government of their country or of ILC in Latin America. Governmental representations were from Paraguay, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Columbia, Chile, Brazil, and Argentina from Latin America (photograph 2) as well as representatives from the Caribbean (Antigua & Barbuda, Jamaica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines and Trinidad & Tobago; photograph 3).



Photograph 2 Latin American Gov. reps



Photograph 3: Caribbean Gov. rep.

The ILC representatives were from Columbia, Conia Republica Federal de Loreto (Columbia), Argentina, Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela (photographs 4 & 5)



Photograph 4: Representatives from the ILC



Photograph 5: Representative from the ILC

Unfortunately some representatives from the Caribbean were detained at the airport and subsequently sent back to Miami due to visa requirements (St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia and the Bahamas). The secretariat expressed their regret of this unfortunate incident and will be taking the matter further.

The objectives of the 3 day workshop were the exchange of experiences within the LAC region on activities which bring about an increase in awareness of biodiversity and traditional knowledge as well as to enhance networking within the LAC between ILCs and the CHMs. The main output of this workshop was a set of recommendation/guidelines which would be compiled. All of these objectives and output would be in keeping with the 2010 biodiversity target which aims to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth. These guidelines would be presented to the article 8(j) working group to aid with the development of strategies to share information; this group is scheduled to meet in September 2007.

Olivier De Munck presented on the CHM outlining its goals, status and progress to date. The CHM's strategic plan for 2005-2010 has 3 main goals:-

1. Facilitate technological and scientific coordination between government and non-governmental organizations
2. Promote the exchange of information
3. Develop a network of partners.

Currently of the 180 countries that are parties to the CBD only 158 CHM focal Points have been designated, with 80 websites being established and of all these Focal Points only 10 are without an email address. The CBD has recently purchased the domain name chm.cbd.net therefore it is possible that all CHMs worldwide can utilize this domain to post their websites.

One of the greatest obstacles to the worldwide CHMs is the issue of funding to maintain the CHM and their activities. The secretariat of the CBD (SCBD) expressed its commitment to assist all the CHM in a technical capacity and not necessarily financially. However they are committed to sourcing potential funding agencies and making this information available. Further discussion lead to the proposition of the development of a strategy to secure funding.

Other objectives of the CHM were to redesign the official website and make it more user-friendly (the RAMSAR website was a good example). Also, the SCBD would also like to develop and enhance non-internet methods of communication. Spain has also agreed to facilitate the translation of the CBD and CHM website into Spanish thus making the information available in both Spanish and English.

Antigua & Barbuda complimented Olivier for the detailed presentation and inquired of the extent of CBD support and the collaboration with CEPA (*Communication, Education and Public Awareness*) especially since the three Rio Conventions were synergizing their initiatives. The response to that was that CBD could only give technical support and information pertaining to funding from GEF and World Bank. In respect to collaboration with CEPA, talks have begun but negotiations are moving slowly. Nonetheless it was expressed that such collaboration was necessary, especially as it relates to overlapping goals, such as public communication, public awareness and education, despite the fact that priorities may be different.

PRESENTATIONS OF NATIONAL EXPERIENCES

This was followed by a set of presentations which highlighted some of the effort of participants in increasing public awareness and preserving traditional knowledge as it relates to biodiversity. Antigua and Barbuda was the only island which presented in this forum from the Caribbean. Other presentations made on day 1 were made by Latin American presenters (Argentina, and Guatemala).

Antigua and Barbuda

Carol-Faye L. George of the Ministry of Public Works and Environment in Antigua and Barbuda highlighted the activities and challenges being faced by her country. She commented that the challenges faced were as a result of a lack of knowledge, the complex technical language of available information, as well as bad environmental practices. The country faces problems such as illegal dumping (in mangroves and other marine ecosystems), sand mining as well as the destruction of natural habitat. There has been an incident where a mangrove area being backfilled by its private owner and the removal of the top soil to allow for development.

As a result, they have engaged in several activities to heighten public awareness via the use of signs, posters and the media. Their education program has infused environmental issues and good practice into the school's curriculum. The Education department of the Ministry has also organized activities such as Arbor Day, Mangofest as well as several competitions between various communities (Ecozone - TV programme). To achieve this, government agency worked in close collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community based organizations (CBOs). Their experiences have proven that increased public awareness is imperative in achieving behavioral changes. A young leader programme was also developed, aimed at producing "Environmental Cadets". These youths are responsible for the preservation of a designated area as well as disseminating information on environmental good practices.

Argentina

The representative from Argentina pointed out that the government of that country does not recognize indigenous people therefore there is a barrier between the two groups. She highlighted that they are in danger of losing their cultural identity as despite the fact that many of the youths reside in areas of high biodiversity, they leave these areas to work in the city therefore there is potential for the loss of TK. This is of great concern as TK is usually passed on from generation to generation via practicing as well as "word-of-mouth". Another barrier to their efforts is due to language barriers as there is high language diversity. The most successful activity conducted was the development of a six week course which teaches participants to produce short films. This is one way to get the youths involved in the preservation of their cultural heritage.

Guatemala

The Guatemalan experience was presented by a representative of Consejo Mundial de Pueblos Indigenes which is the indigenous council of Mesoamerica (Costa Rica, Panama & Guatemala). This council has the mandate of promoting collaboration of different indigenous groups within the region to achieve their goals as well as to give the indigenous people a voice in the political arena. This was important as previously the cries of the indigenous people of Mesoamerica were ignored. Therefore, collaboration between the different groups would strengthen the voice of the indigenous people in the region and would be beneficial to all as the issue faced by each were cross-cutting. This group does not only deal with biodiversity issues but also advocates the rights of indigenous people. They have four designated focal points working on an ambitious biodiversity project which incorporates all aspects of biodiversity (fauna and flora) as well as climate change. This project is based on using the knowledge of the indigenous people to achieve its goals as all aspects are interrelated. This activity has strengthened the negotiating skill of the people, better decision making and increased biodiversity knowledge. They have also had their first congress on protected areas which was attended by 32 organizations. As a result of this collaboration (council) Mesoamerican indigenous people now have representation in other organization such as the Global Environmental Facility (GEF).

GROUP DISCUSSION

The participants were divided into four groups, they were:-

- English-speaking (Caribbean- Antigua & Barbuda, Jamaica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago)
- Central America (Honduras, Panama, Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala)
- South America 1 (Peru, Argentina, Chile and Bolivia)
- South America 2 (Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Brazil).

After an hour of deliberations the groups presented their findings, reporting for South American group 2 was Columbia, Central America was presented by Panama, South American group 1 was presented by Chile and the Caribbean was presented by Jamaica. The deliberation was focused on three main questions.

The Caribbean's input as it related to question posed were as follows:-

1. What are the needs of indigenous and communities?

- Finance e.g. NGOs and CBOs
- Laws and legislation
- Integration of knowledge on culture i.e. both formal and informal taking into consideration the advancement of Science and Technology
- Institutional Strengthening of the indigenous people
- More collaboration between Government, Indigenous, CBOs and NGOs
- More public access to information
- Capacity building in totality
- Simplicity of technical jargons inclusion of visual presentation
- Participation of Private sector

2. What are roles of each actor i.e. government, CBD etc.?

Government

- Laws and legislation
- Enforcement
- Public awareness/education
- Dissemination of information to all levels.
- Development control
- Make decision on renewable energy
- Encourage participation/ collaboration of private sector

Indigenous & Local Community

- To get informed/education
- Activities to bring about behavioral change
- Be more supportive to local Government

SCBD

- Technical & financial advice
- Enhance the proposed activities of the government, NGOs and ILCs

3. Which types of activities would be most effective?

- Songs /Poetry/Slogans
- Drama/plays
- Short film videos
- Celebrity endorsements
- Televised shows e.g. EcoZone
- Special events/festivals Mangofest (Antigua), Cassava fest (St. Lucia) etc.
- Young leaders/environmental cadets programmes
- Public speaking competitions/talk shows
- Environmental competitions/Non-curriculum activities
- Erection of more posters/billboards

Day 2

The second day of the workshop saw more presentations of national experiences by representatives from Bolivia, El Salvador, Brazil, Colombia (three-part presentation by representatives from indigenous, local communities and government), Argentina, Ecuador-Peru (DarwinNet non-government) and Ecuador (ISTER- non-government). These presentations highlighted the different activities being carried out by each showcasing the challenges they faced and their achievement.

Bolivia

Bolivia's efforts have revolved around the rescuing of their traditional knowledge by documenting it as well as activities to protect the rights of indigenous people. Subsequently, they have produced an array of CDs, radio and TV programs. The hour between 6-7 am has been designated by the government as time for programs to be broadcasted in the language of the indigenous people. This was achieved owing to the fact the Prime Minister is from the local community. It is interesting to note that at the end of the workshop it was articulated that the

government of Bolivia does not recognize local communities. Therefore, as long as local communities and indigenous communities are grouped, the Bolivian government will not support the activities of article 8(j) of the CBD.

El Salvador

El Salvador has many beliefs that based on nature, such as each day commemorates a different aspect of nature, which have helped to preserve the natural biodiversity. For instance, it is thought that trees are important as they contribute to the conservation of water ('no water, no life'). Also contributing to the success of preservation and conservation activities is the official recognition of these beliefs by the government. There are several women's groups which seek to preserve traditional methodologies and utilize it by producing clothes and dye from plant extracts. Workshops have been developed to preserve and share this knowledge. The traditionally produced products have become a primary source of income for these groups. El Salvador activists however believe that first they have to fight for the rights of the indigenous people and then work on the preservation of their cultural heritage.

Brazil

Brazil was represented by the Director of Programs of the National de Conservation de la Diversidad Biological which acts as the CHM of Brazil. This organization deals with the preservation of Brazil's biodiversity and genetic resources as well as is integral in the development of the National Strategy on Biodiversity. It was expressed that the indigenous people of Brazil number approximately 4.5 million and are composed of 220 different groups with more than 50% of Brazil's population residing in the Amazon. The organization is also participating in a national plan aimed at protecting the rights of indigenous people incorporating the participation of 9 governmental ministries and 22 groups. This plan should give the right to the indigenous people to own their traditional knowledge as well as acknowledgment of the origin of the traditional knowledge. A policy to deal the rights of ILC has been sent to congress. Unfortunately, the CHM of Brazil does not work with the ILCs and so special efforts have to be made to rectify this.

Columbia

Columbia has an ongoing project conducted by the Ministry of Environment aimed at the protection of traditional knowledge (done in two parts to represent activities in the local and indigenous communities). The rationale behind this project is the fact that no research has been previously conducted in this regard, therefore a basic study has to be conducted to provide a baseline for capacity building. The project emphasizes the equal and full participation of all groups, this will ensure its success and also the prevention of the duplication of effort. So far, 5 workshops have been conducted incorporating 180 individuals. These individuals were equipped to collect the necessary information and share information on the CBD with the ILCs demonstrating the benefits of the CBD to ILCs. This incorporated the use of various communicational tools that were sensitive to the unique culture of each community visited. These tools were utilized in the form of a CD and in cases where the CD would be useless, the information was printed. A third presentation was conducted to demonstrate the activity of the CHM as it relates to article 8(j).

An indigenous representative highlighted the traditional ways and practices of Columbia has been integrated with technology. This activity was very important however this was to be done without the loss sense of self which is dangerous in relation to the youths of these communities. This loss of self was highlighted and expressed as reasons of great concern of the many other

ILCs present as the youths of these communities to maintain the sustainability of their traditional knowledge.

Peru - Ecuador

DarwinNet is a partnership between Peru and Ecuador to preserve the Dry forest of southwest of Ecuador and the northwest of Peru. This project is framed under the CBD (both countries are signatories) as well as under the National Strategies on Biodiversity of both countries, and in the Regional Strategy of Biodiversity of the Andean Community of Nations (CAN). The activities of the DarwinNet project are endorsed by the CHMs of both countries. This organization serves to interconnect people, raise awareness on the importance of biodiversity, facilitate access to information and allow for the better use of economic resources. It has a multi-sector structure and funding is obtained from a variety of institutions in the region as well as from the USA, Canada and the United Kingdom. The project utilizes GIS technology and produces an array of maps, provides updates on the status of protected areas. Other activities include capacity building and information on Important Bird Area (Birdlife is a financial support of the project). Future activities plan to bring about sustainable use of resources, enlarge the communication network, share with NGO activities of best practice and develop South-South cooperation. (darwinnet.org)

Ecuador

The Ibero American Science and Technology Education Consortium (ISTEC) is a non-governmental organization in Ecuador that is a cooperation of educational, research, industrial, and multilateral organizations throughout the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula. The vision of this consortium is the respect of the dignity and rights of indigenous people, nations and tribes. It aims to support, to preserve and promote the rights of indigenous people and encourage cultural diversity. It seeks to do this with the aid of technology by the interconnectivity of communication therefore allowing the sharing of information via digital technology by providing a communication platform as economically as possible. This will allow for communication between academia and government and encourage international cooperation. It was pointed out that the use of technology and the sharing of information will allow for the network to evolve and at the same time preserve fundamental identity. (www.istec.org)

NETWORKING & INFORMATION EXCHANGE PRESENTATION BY OLIVIER DE MUNCK

The workshop was also to allow for comments to be received from the participants on the latest development of the SCHM which was a Traditional Knowledge (TK) portal from the CDB's website. This presentation focused on the features of the home page, user accounts and menu, information needs of the ILC, Blog¹, what is RSS², community directory, discussion forum which was currently in three languages (English, French and Spanish), photo gallery, TK Portal Demo and the ability to set up user accounts. The demo site can be accessed at www.biodiv.org/tk.

Some of the participants from the indigenous and local communities were concerned with the traditional knowledge that would be placed on the website, in terms of control of what is placed on it. John Scott indicated that the CBD secretariat would not be responsible for the content of this information but they would be hosting the portal through the CHM. This service was a response to a request from the indigenous people and the local communities of the LAC.

¹ Blog - web log

² RSS - Really Simple Syndication (symbol) which up as an orange button on the toolbar on the computer in the new explore programme

The presentation allowed for group consultation to answer two questions:-

- (1) How to improve the portal? and
- (2) What is the role of the portal?

Each group was then allowed to present the outcomes of their consultation. The Central American presentation was done by Panama, the Caribbean presentation was done by Antigua & Barbuda, South America group 2 was done by Argentina while South America Group 1 presentation was done by Colombia, in that sequence.

Our Latin American counterparts misunderstood the intentions and the use of the CHM TK Portal and what was requested of them to present on. Mixed feelings were expressed pertaining to the CHM TK Portal. The main reason that was given was that they did not want their information to be accessed by the general public. They were assured that each community would be responsible for the information that is placed on their individual portal as well as granting access to individuals. This would be the case as user accounts would have to be set up and access granted by the administrators of the website. The CBD would only be responsible for hosting the webpage but not the content of the pages. The Caribbean group liked the portal but did not see much use of it in the Caribbean. It was therefore suggested that a different portal be developed specifically for the Caribbean which would be customized to the issues of the islands as well as a definition of ILC more suited to the reality of the Caribbean and its people.

Day 3

This was a discussion session of the issues presented at the workshop which would then be submitted to the working group. The main problems with the recommendations were in terms of wording. It was important that the recommendations make specific mention of women when it was not obvious that they were to benefit from the activity especially as women are usually the ones who possess TK as well the fact that historically this group has been suppressed.

They also had a problem with the constant changes in focal points and in most instances they were unaware of who the focal points were as well as the fact that by the time they have become comfortable with a particular individual, they are changed.

There were also recommendations to strengthen the links between the CHM and ILC as well as the identification of financial resources which would be useful to ILCs. It was also suggested that TK should be infused into the school's curriculum; however this was rejected as currently there is no protection of TK. One very important recommendation was the stipulation that consent be given by the owners of a particular TK prior to its use, as there have been very bad experiences of exploitation in the past.

All recommendations had to be agreed upon by the parties present before they could be presented to the working group. Further suggestions can be made to the SCBD as there was sufficient amount of time available to incorporate these into the document that would be presented to the working group.



Photograph 6: Group picture on the final day of the workshop

Conclusion

The workshop was fruitful as it gave the participants a forum to express their plight and allowed the CHM of their respective countries to become aware. The members of the LAC were able to share their experiences with each other and the SCBD. Jamaica was able to influence the recommendations proposed so that Jamaica and the Caribbean can benefit from future activities. Networking was expanded within the region and well as ties strengthened with the SCBD.

My recommendation is Jamaica can learn from the activities carried out by Caribbean counter parts (Antigua and Barbuda and St. Lucia) by initiating some of the activities presented which would serve to increase public awareness. In many instances, the festival and media coverage had served to introduce patrons to an area (community) or product. The television programs (competition among school and communities) were very successful in Antigua & Barbuda as the majority of the population was involved in the competition as they were to vote for their favorite contestants. Therefore thought should be given to producing a nation wide activities that would introduce the population to our traditions which are been lost by the infusion of other cultures. We need to address these issues as it is an immediate treat which is evident by the support our cultural activates are given. It was made clear at the workshop that Caribbean people respond to visual campaigns and festivals. Therefore, a food festival which can highlight our traditional ways will capture the attention of the population and hence be well supported. The idea of environmental cadets should be adopted at a community level and credit be given academically as 'community service' to encourage the youths of the society to take an active role in the preservation of our environment and culture.