

Safeguarding Traditional Knowledge

How to better recognise and
include traditional knowledge in
biodiversity conservation

Policy brief

UN 

environment
programme

WCMC

Summary

Traditional knowledge and Indigenous peoples and local communities' way of life play a key role in protecting and maintaining both biological and cultural diversity. By recognising and including traditional knowledge in decision making for national biodiversity policy and protected area management a number of benefits are gained: 1) using a rights-based participatory approach leads to better and more cost-effective conservation outcomes; 2) supporting the use of traditional knowledge helps to safeguard this unique knowledge system and communities' cultural heritage and 3) progress on a number of global biodiversity and development goals are achieved when all knowledge systems are respected and included in the evidence-base.

This brief describes a new multimethod approach and how it can be used to support Governments, Civil Society as well as Indigenous peoples and local communities to advance the safeguarding of traditional knowledge and achieve progress on global biodiversity and development goals.

Key Messages to decision makers and traditional knowledge holders

- Effective assessment of the status of traditional knowledge and its level of recognition in policy and management is crucial for safeguarding this unique knowledge system and for protecting biological and cultural diversity.
- A new methodological approach allows the extent of traditional knowledge and Indigenous peoples' rights recognition and inclusion in national policy to be assessed. This assessment can be used to establish a baseline for the extent of traditional knowledge inclusion, which Government agencies can use to monitor and report on progress on global biodiversity and development goals.
- The 'Community viability framework' approach helps traditional knowledge holders and decision makers to understand the current state of traditional knowledge at a local level and the challenges Indigenous peoples and local communities face, as well as identify points of intervention, i.e. 'Community owned solutions'. This can help to safeguard the communities' way of life and traditional knowledge.
- Advancing fairness in the context of protected area and natural resource management requires the building of trusting, transparent and accountable relationships. Achieving this requires innovative and longer-term approaches, such as the 'video-mediated dialogue' approach. Using participatory video can help to overcome the inherent unequal power dynamics and enable a dialogue and knowledge-sharing between Indigenous peoples and local communities, with decision makers.

Introduction

Sustaining the Earth depends to a great extent on the traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples and local communities. International instruments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (hereafter, CBD), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals and the soon to be adopted post-2020 global biodiversity framework recognize the critical role of traditional knowledge for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Despite this recognition of the importance of traditional knowledge for conserving biological and cultural diversity, there are still few examples of national policies that explicitly consider and effectively include traditional knowledge. Further, processes of colonisation and rapidly changing socio-environmental conditions are leading to a decrease in traditional knowledge worldwide.

To date, there has been insufficient focus on the development and use of participatory, transparent and evidence-based methods and tools to address these challenges. In response, a multimethod approach was developed and trialled in Guyana during the past four years to facilitate how traditional knowledge can be better recognised, safeguarded and included in policymaking.

Traditional knowledge in the international arena

Almost 30 years ago, the CBD recognized the inextricable link that Indigenous peoples and local communities have with biological resources, and the value that their traditional knowledge has for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Article 8(j) of the CBD requires governments to take actions not only to respect, preserve and maintain such knowledge, but also to promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of knowledge holders.

Following the adoption of the CBD, other international instruments also highlight the preservation of traditional knowledge and their consideration on the development of biodiversity policies, including the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Nagoya Protocol to the CBD on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization and the Fourth Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention.

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets under the CBD included Indigenous peoples and local communities, and their traditional knowledge among its priorities. Aichi Target 18 set an ambitious global goal to have traditional knowledge respected and fully integrated and reflected in the implementation of the Strategic Plan by 2020. Yet, the Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 showed that progress was insufficient to reach Aichi Target 18.¹

The most recent national reports to the CBD indicate that only 16% of countries are meeting or exceeding their national traditional knowledge targets, with 66% not reporting on this target at all.² Of the 112 national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) with national targets related to Aichi Target 18, only a fifth (21%) are similar to the scope and ambition set out in Aichi Target 18.³

National reports to the CBD draw attention to the lack of capacities and resources to take action to safeguard and include traditional knowledge. Further, they highlight that communication between Indigenous peoples and local communities, governments, scientists, and other national stakeholders – a core requirement for the achievement of Aichi Target 18 - is difficult and, therefore, limited.⁴ An analysis of national reports reflects that many countries identify the lack of participatory, transparent and evidence-based methods and capacity building as key barriers for progress.

Looking ahead, the post-2020 global biodiversity framework is expected to be agreed, and –

1 Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2020) Global Biodiversity Outlook 5. Montreal. P.112.

2 CBD (2019). Aichi Target 18. URL: <https://www.cbd.int/aichi-targets/target/18>

3 CBD (2020). Analysis of the contribution of targets established by parties and progress towards the Aichi biodiversity targets. CBD/SBI/3/2/Add.2. URL: www.cbd.int/doc/sbi-03-02-add2-en

4 Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2020) Global Biodiversity Outlook 5. Montreal. P.112-114.

based on the current draft– will very likely include targets on the use of traditional knowledge in decision-making.⁵

An innovative solution for a historical challenge

To support the realization of the global biodiversity and development goals presented above, the Darwin Initiative funded project '*Integrating Traditional Knowledge into National Policy and Practice in Guyana*' developed a multimethod approach to **safeguard traditional knowledge** and **ensure its inclusion in policymaking** at the national level. Developed in Guyana with Indigenous peoples, the approach responds to some of the main gaps identified by countries in their efforts to report on progress towards Aichi Target 18.

The multimethod approach utilises a variety of innovative tools to address three main areas:

1. **A policy review** to assess and monitor the extent of traditional knowledge inclusion in national policies, establishing a baseline for monitoring future progress.
2. **A community viability framework** provides a structure for Indigenous Peoples and local communities to assess the status of their traditional knowledge, existing challenges and identify community owned solutions to safeguard it.
3. **Video-mediated dialogues** to aid communication between Indigenous peoples and local communities and national decision-makers to help ensure the inclusion of traditional knowledge in national policies.

Area 1: Traditional knowledge in national policy: How to assess and monitor the extent of traditional knowledge inclusion

Assessing and documenting progress is key to achieving full respect and inclusion of traditional knowledge in policy.

The methodological approach is a cost-effective policy review that analyses the extent of inclusion of traditional knowledge in policy according to a traffic-light evaluation system at three levels:

- **Conceptual inclusion**; where documents underpinning sectoral policies (e.g. strategies) explicitly or implicitly take traditional knowledge / Indigenous peoples and local communities' rights into account.
- **Operational inclusion**; where specific measures or instruments are identified and committed to address traditional knowledge / Indigenous peoples and local communities' rights related objectives within policy sectors.
- **Implementation inclusion**; where concrete measures achieve inclusion on the ground in actual policy- and decision-making situations.

This establishes a baseline for the level of inclusion of traditional knowledge and where progress of each policy and sector can be achieved and monitored. Figure 1 demonstrates the results from Guyana, where the approach was developed and trialled since 2017, and how the initial matrix baseline can be presented.

⁵ Target 19 of the Update Zero Draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (CBD/POST2020/PREP/2/1) states: "By 2030, ensure that quality information, including traditional knowledge, is available to decision makers and public for the effective management of biodiversity through promoting awareness, education and research".

Level of Integration	Policy Sectors										
	Agriculture	Climate Change	Conservation		Development		Extractive		Forestry	Human Rights	
			Protected Areas	Biodiversity	Culture	Land use	Mining	Petroleum		Indigenous People	Land Rights
Conceptual											
Operational											
Implementation											

Figure 1: Result of policy review to establish baseline for traditional knowledge inclusion in eleven policy sectors in Guyana ('green' – explicit and comprehensive inclusion, yellow – explicit and some inclusion, amber – implicit inclusion, red – no inclusion).

Area 2: Safeguarding traditional knowledge: How to assess the state of traditional knowledge

A 'community viability framework' (see Figure 2) has been developed and trialled in Guyana since 2012. By using this framework, Indigenous peoples and local communities can explore how traditional knowledge contributes to the diversity of strategies their community need to maximise their long-term viability or 'survival'. It allows people to assess the state of their traditional knowledge (from excellent to extinct) and identify potential solutions to address challenges. It helps to monitor progress of use and maintenance of traditional knowledge.

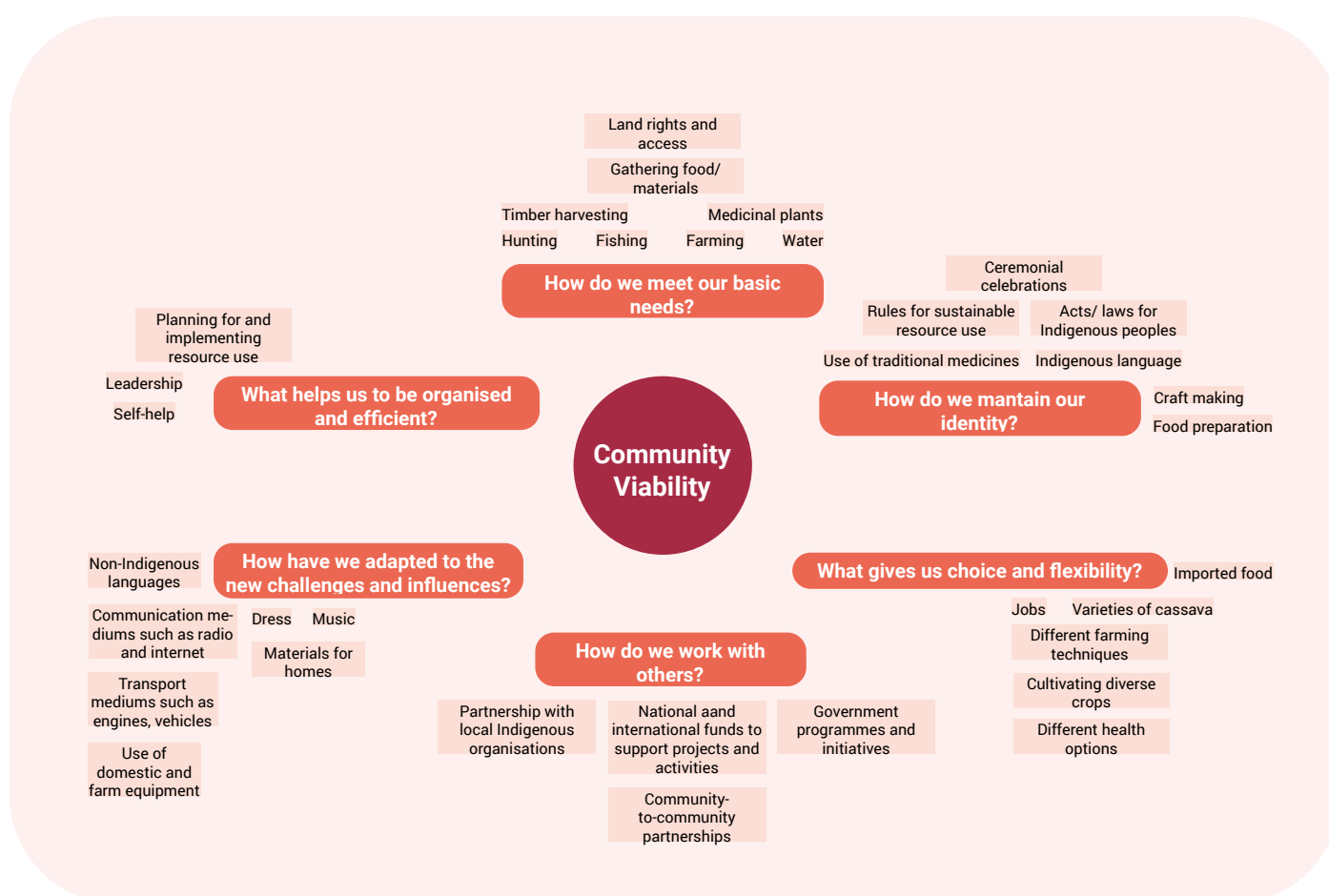


Figure 2: Community viability framework that was developed with Indigenous communities across the Guiana Shield region of South America.

In Guyana, the result of applying the approach shows that the perceived level of traditional knowledge is at a relatively low but 'stable' state (see Figure 3). By establishing the state of traditional knowledge, and by identifying the challenges to improving the level of knowledge, this

approach empowers and enables Indigenous peoples and local communities to work on ensuring that traditional knowledge is used, maintained and safeguarded. It facilitates communication with decision makers on where actions or support is needed from government agencies or civil society organisations.

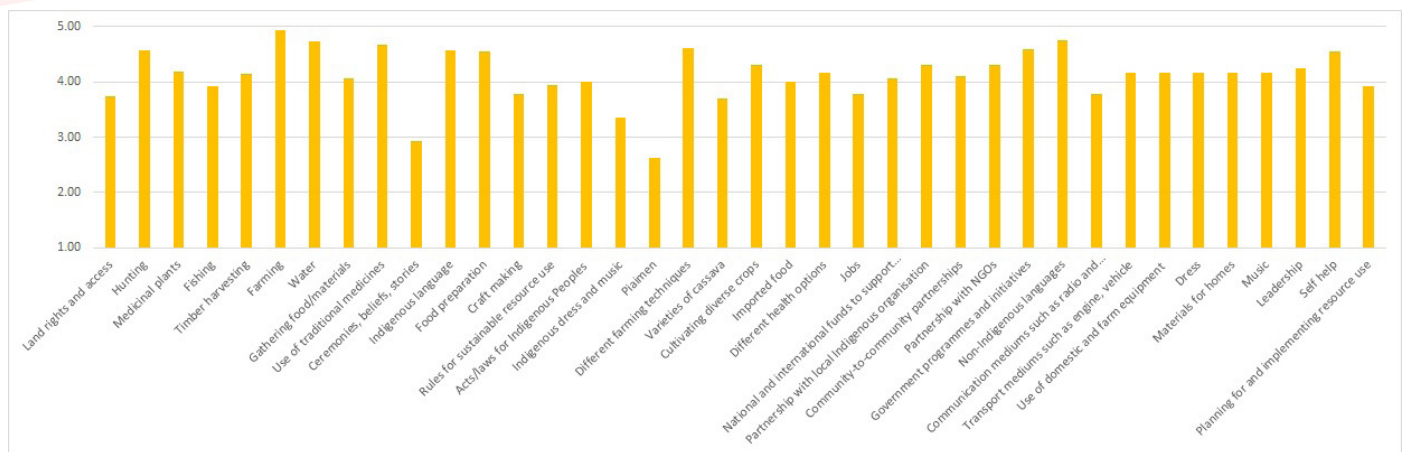


Figure 3. Median traditional knowledge values for all communities sampled (n=24), where 1 = extinct, 2 = very bad, 3 = bad, 4 = stable, 5 = good, 6 = very good and 7 = excellent.

Area 3. Inclusion of traditional knowledge: How to develop video-mediated dialogue between communities and decision makers

Improving fairness in the context of conservation and development cannot be achieved in situations where people have vastly different capabilities to participate. Building trustworthy, transparent and accountable relationships is a fundamental prerequisite for respecting and including traditional knowledge. Participatory video has the potential to uncover hidden perspectives and worldviews, as well as building fairer relationships between Indigenous peoples and external agencies. A video-mediated dialogue process (see Figure 4) was used to facilitate communication between Indigenous peoples and protected areas managers in Guyana and provide a mechanism for the inclusion of multiple perspectives, knowledge sharing and conflict resolution.

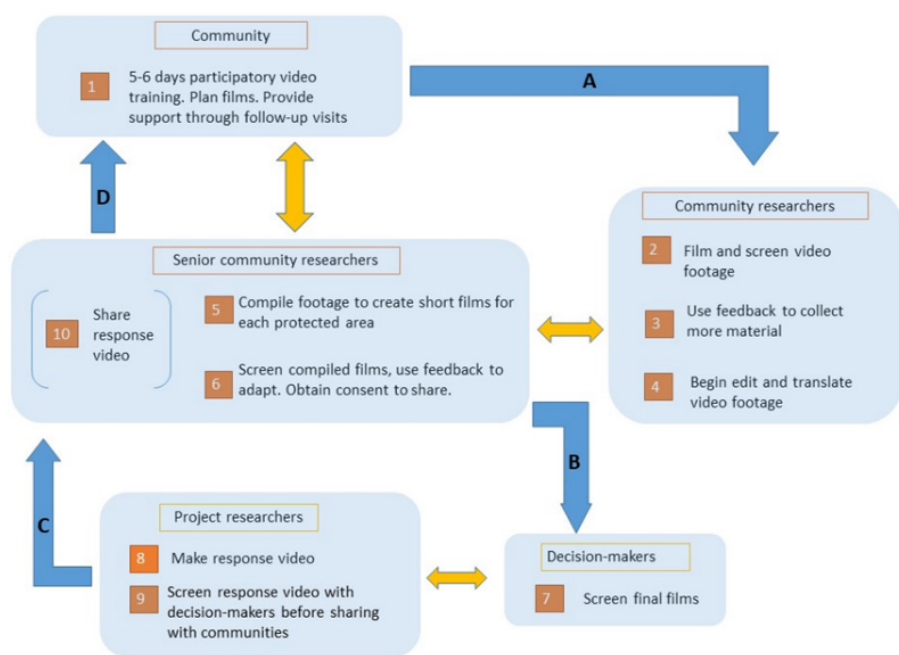


Figure 4: The video-mediated dialogue process in Guyana. This is based on participatory videos produced by communities, which are screened to decision makers. The decision makers then record a response video, which is subsequently taken back to communities for feedback (which could initiate another round of filming, screening and feedback). (Numbers 1-10 indicate the different stages, blue arrows labelled A-D show the phases, and yellow arrows indicate multiple two-way interactions).

The video-mediated process provided a rich and contextualised understanding of equity issues. It enabled recognition and respect for traditional knowledge, Indigenous values and peoples' lived experiences in the management of protected areas. For Indigenous peoples, the participatory video process builds confidence and critical reflection on their own activities and responsibilities while allowing them to challenge decision makers on issues of transparency, communication and accountability.

Policy Recommendations

According to Global Biodiversity Outlook 5, there are still few examples of national policies which take into consideration and effectively include traditional knowledge. Many countries identified the lack of participatory, transparent and evidence-based methods and capacity building as key barriers for progress on traditional knowledge. In response to this pressing need, the Darwin Initiative funded project '*Integrating Traditional Knowledge into National Policy and Practice in Guyana*' developed a new multi-methodological approach.

To better safeguard and include traditional knowledge, and so contribute to national action towards related global biodiversity and development goals, **Government agencies**, civil society as well as Indigenous peoples and local communities, can:

- 1. Establish a baseline of the extent of traditional knowledge in national policies using this new methodological approach.** The baseline can then serve to identify policy sectors that need to improve the extent of traditional knowledge inclusion. This also enables the establishment of a monitoring programme, which can document progress on the inclusion of traditional knowledge. This documentation will support countries in their reporting on relevant global biodiversity and development goals.
- 2. Adopt participatory and transparent methods to assess the state of traditional knowledge at the local level and identify solutions to maintain and protect traditional knowledge in relevant policies.** The 'Community viability framework' approach is one of these methodologies that will help to safeguard traditional knowledge once adopted in relevant policies and implemented.
- 3. Adopt an approach like 'video-mediated dialogue' to enable communication and knowledge sharing between Indigenous peoples and local communities and decision makers.** Participatory videos enable a unique dialogue and the inclusion of multiple perspectives, knowledge sharing and conflict resolution. This can help to improve the respect and inclusion of traditional knowledge and the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities in biodiversity policy and management.

Conclusion

Implementing the multimethod approach described in this brief allows for valuable data to be collated and assessed. In the case of Guyana, this data was used to develop a Traditional Knowledge National Action Plan to support the work of safeguarding and including traditional knowledge both at a community and at a national level.

The Traditional Knowledge National Action Plan is valuable for capturing the data and the suggested actions and solutions the new multimethod approach generates. It is also useful for Governments to demonstrate accountability and progress on the work of safeguarding and inclusion of traditional knowledge and Indigenous Peoples' rights relevant for several global biodiversity and development indicators and goals.

Resource Box

Area 1: The '*Traditional knowledge integration in national policy*' report describes in detail how to undertake the methodological approach for assessing the extent of traditional knowledge inclusion. The report can be found on the project's website: <https://cobracollective.org/resources/>

Area 2 and 3: A training guide titled '*Traditional knowledge and community owned solutions in conservation and development*' on how to undertake the community viability framework and how to establish the video-mediated dialogues from applying the participatory video approach can also be found on the project's website: <https://cobracollective.org/resources/>

Other capacity building resources useful for strengthening the awareness about traditional knowledge is a free e-module titled '*Traditional knowledge: its importance and relevance for conservation and development*' found at: <https://traditionalknowledge.unep-wcmc.org/> and <https://cobracollective.org/resources/>

For more information or questions about the project, its findings and capacity building resources please contact:

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