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TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Note by the secretariat

By its decision 12/COP.5, the Conference of the Parties noted that the Government of Italy was in the process of establishing an international research centre on traditional knowledge in Matera, Italy, and also of setting up, as a pilot project, a network of institutions dealing with traditional knowledge. It invited the Government of Italy to revise its proposal for the realization of the pilot project, taking into account the comments and observations made by the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) on this matter at its fifth session.

The Government of Italy has revised the proposal, taking account of the comments and the observations made by the CST. The report, prepared by the Government of Italy, is contained herein and is transmitted by the secretariat for consideration by the CST without formal editing.

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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The subject of traditional knowledge has been object of discussion since the beginning of the UNCCD process. This new revised project proposal intends to take advantage of the long and fruitful debate on the subject and in particular of the output of the fifth session of the CST. At the same time, it intends also to obey to the necessity of finding out useful tools in the fighting against drought and desertification, optimizing efforts, adopting, wherever possible, a synergistic approach with other United Nations global conventions, in order to comply with public opinion's urges for more concrete action.

In fact, the UNCCD process is progressively entering its implementation phase, also thanks to the establishment of land degradation (desertification and deforestation) as a new focal area of the Global Environment Facility. For these reasons, it is opportune to focus expressly on traditional knowledge and practices which have a clear and evident value in combating desertification.

This project is intended as a proposal for the establishment of network on traditional knowledge within the regional (and, in some cases, also subregional) action programmes as a thematic programme network (TPN). The regional approach with the participation, where appropriate, of interested institutions external to the region seems to be the most viable approach for setting up of a network on traditional knowledge.

II. GENERAL GOALS

The project aims at setting up a network of institutions, bodies and experts on traditional knowledge (TK), hereinafter referred to as ITKnet (Innovative Traditional Knowledge Network). Such a global network will be implemented in successive steps. The goal will be reached by accomplishing pilot projects.

In the establishment of the ITKnet, the TPN on traditional knowledge shall identify:

- Procedures for the effective participation of local communities and linkage to local organizations;
- Linkage between organizations that handle the data and local societies that own the traditional knowledge;
- Ownership and rights over the TK;
- Connection of TK to biodiversity and genetic resources;
- Linkage with existing networks and ongoing initiatives;
- Appropriate methodologies to take into account oral traditions;
- Procedures of verification and validation of information collected;
- Selected areas to implement TK and its linkages with modern technologies;
- Methods to ensure the effective participation of local communities and linkage to local organizations in relation to local conditions and priorities.

III. PURPOSES OF THE PROJECT

Project proposal aims at both cognitive purposes and operative actions.

Cognitive purposes are:

1. To draw up an inventory on TK of pilot countries and their innovative use;
2. To study the possibilities to disseminate TK;
3. To study the parameters and the indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of TK and practices in combating drought and desertification. Linkages to biodiversity and genetic resources and, more generally, a synergistic approach with other United Nations global conventions (on biodiversity and climate change) will be also considered;
4. To select successful practices and to evaluate a system of incentives to implement and disseminate TK and innovative technology (hereinafter referred to as TKIT) within the framework of traditional know-how;
5. To examine any methods for the protection of rights on TK that can be implemented by subjects, local communities, disseminators and innovators of traditional techniques;
6. To evaluate the promotion of traditional technologies by the focal points of each country and give guidance to adopt nation-wide safeguard and dissemination strategies;
7. To explore linkages between organizations that handle available data and local communities that own the traditional knowledge and practices and to find out appropriate procedures for the effective participation of local communities and linkage to local organization.

Operative actions include:

1. Setting up of a pilot network in order to encourage and actively support partnership building in addition to the documentation and dissemination of traditional and local knowledge, know-how and practices;
2. Establishment of the conditions for the implementation of a network of experts and institutions between the Parties to the Convention which will draw up the inventory on TKIT, adopt and disseminate them;
3. Sharing of methodologies of research, study and classification of TKIT; training of the personnel of different countries to collect inventories, to disseminate the TKIT, and their innovative use for the combat against desertification;
4. Implementation of Internet stations wherever necessary in order to facilitate communication and to strengthen networking and exchanges among various organizations and regions;
5. Creation of a public multilingual internet database and accompanying CD ROM entitled 'Traditional Knowledge and its Innovative Use', to be distributed among experts from countries affected by drought and/or desertification, thus encouraging the transfer of appropriate and environmentally sound technologies and know-how while promoting the exchange of experiences;
6. Setting up of eligibility criteria for network members as well as their rights and duties. Setting up of criteria for establishing any operative structure;
7. Setting up of the implementation phases of the global network.

IV. CHARACTERISTICS AND WORK OF THE NETWORK

The network will be made up of institutions, research centres, bodies, focal points of affected countries. Consequently, all organizations, institutions and experts will be able to collaborate, to exchange information and interact in a synergistic way.

A Web-based multimedia database will enable the network to disseminate and share information, thus taking a bottom-up approach to the study of TK.

Dedicated levels of access for institutions, research centres, experts, focal points and users will be available. Multilingual information will be completed with explanatory graphs.

According to the different access levels new information and remarks could be entered and automatically forwarded to experts, discussion forums, bodies, focal points as well as to the interested countries.

Some research centres will focus on several topics by filtering, processing and validating the information. The number and the entity of these research centres could change according to the needs and proposals.

The database does not depend on a single centralized pole but on a series of nodes that will apply for each topic.

The research centres that have already been involved in the initiative in a preliminary phase are the following:

- Arid Regions Institute (Institut des Regions Arides) - Medenine, Tunisia
- Centro de Investigación, Formación y Experimentación sobre Arquitectura de Tierra, Energías Renovables, Desarrollo Sostenible y Tranferencia Tecnológica a Paises en Via de Desarrollo - Madrid, Spain
- Institute of Water Resources Management - Karlsruhe University, Germany
- IPOGEA, Traditional Knowledge Centre - Matera, Italy
- Minia University, Egypt
- United Nations agencies: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO)

In the preliminary phase, the focal points of the Parties will select other research centres and will facilitate the involvement of experts from the UNCCD roster of independent experts.

The information technology system supporting ITKnet shall:

1. Be accessible on the Internet by means of common Web browsers.
2. Deal with multilingual information. The documents will be translated outside the system but, after choosing the language, the interface of the user and the documents will share the same language.

3. Be updated on-line by privileged accesses (editors) controlled by the username and the password. The user can choose not to make the changes immediately available since they could be subject to the check and validation by authorized users and nodes (gatekeepers) guaranteeing the quality of data in the relative specialization fields.
4. Provide community services such as seminars, mailing lists and subscriptions to specific areas of the system to foster the collaboration and the synergy between the users and the bodies involved.
5. Notify via email one or more users (supervisors) and the nodes monitoring the system evolution on the changes saved.
6. Handle multimedia information supporting and completing the main information on local and traditional knowledge such as glossaries, pictures, bibliographies etc. Editors and gatekeepers will be able to link such information in order to complete the main information forms using a simple grammar to be consulted upon request by means of hypertexts.
7. Manage the on-line drawing up of presentations (slide shows) by means of pictures and other resources of the system.
8. Enable the distribution of the documents extracted from the system on multiplatform CD ROM (Macintosh and Windows).
9. Handle the collection of profiles (curricula vitae and description of the specialization fields) regarding experts, research centres, bodies, institutions according to the topics dealt with by ITKnet so that the users interested can set up a collaboration relationship with them.
10. Keep the graphs (banners) and customized references of the information received by each individual or body.
11. Easily fit the needs of ITKnet that could change according to the evolution of the activity.

The system could be localized anywhere on the Internet in compliance with cost optimization and access speed.

Therefore, it shall be possible to remotely administrate the server from all the qualified nodes of the network. To this end, such nodes will be equipped with a quick Internet access, at least with an ISDN line, preferably with an ADSL or higher, according to the availability of these lines within the area.

V. WORK PROGRAMME

First year

Goals

Cognitive goal: to continue the drawing up of the inventory on TK and their innovative use.
Operative goal: to highlight the physical network of the centres involved.

Activities

1. Census-taking of the main bodies, research centres and institutions dealing with TK.
2. Collaboration with bodies, research centres and institutions dealing with TK.
3. Organization of a workshop on the pilot project involving the countries where the workshop is organized, focal points, a representative of each regional group, annexes, bodies, research centres and institutions leading a key role in the initiative.

The workshop will focus on two topics of the project:

- a) Analysis of the progress made on cognitive purposes
- b) Operative actions to set up the organization structure

As for the former, the following issues will be dealt with:

- Drawing up of an inventory on TK of pilot countries and their innovative use;
- Study of the parameters and indicators on the loss of TK and the analysis of the possible ways to avoid such a loss.

Therefore, a form to draw up an inventory on TK will be approved.

As far as the latter is concerned, the following issues will be dealt with:

- The evaluation of the eligibility criteria of the network members, of their rights and duties as well as the evaluation of the opportunity to set up a body that could take part in the network;
- The evaluation of the needs of each country (training, technical equipment etc.);
- The evaluation of the further phases to implement the global network.

Therefore, the information on the needs of each country to implement the capabilities of participation in the network will be collected.

4. Organization of a stage, training courses and thematic workshops in the countries needing to implement their own capabilities.
5. Implementation of nodes of a dedicated network on TKIT at the institutions implementing the project.

6. Creation of Internet stations wherever necessary and formulation of a first hypothesis of qualification of database nodes.

Second year

Goals

Cognitive purpose: Database dissemination

Organizational purpose: Network implementation

Activities

1. Questionnaire administration
2. Data collection and processing
3. Realization of graphs on TK and their innovative use
4. Organization of the information to create the database on the basis of the results of the survey
5. Development of the database software and organization of the server
6. Organization of an e-mail conference to evaluate the working of the database
7. Organization of a workshop focusing on:

Cognitive purpose: Work programme for the successive phases aiming to:

- study the parameters and the indicators on the loss of TK and to analyse the ways to fight against such a loss;
- choose the successful practices and to assess a system of incentives to adopt and disseminate the TKIT within the framework of traditional know-how;
- examine any methods for the protection of rights on TK that subjects, communities, disseminators and innovators of traditional techniques can implement;
- evaluate the promotion of traditional technologies by the focal points of each country and give indications to carry out nation-wide safeguard and dissemination strategies.

Operative actions:

- To assign competences and roles to the network;
- To set out the further phases concerning the widening of the process for the implementation of the global network.

VI. COSTS

Since every regional action programme relies on different financial instruments for its implementation, this proposal aims to present, as an example, an assessment of the activities and of the associated costs for the implementation of a TPN on traditional knowledge in the Northern Mediterranean region, also including the participation of experts and institutions from other regions. The opportunity of involving international organizations and United Nations agencies in TPN should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

The costs are contained in document ICCD/COP(5)/CST/2.
