

LAUNCHING MEETING TO ESTABLISH THE REGIONAL THEMATIC PROGRAMME NETWORK ON TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE (TPN5) IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

(Bogotá, Colombia, 23-25 May 2007)

I. Abstract

Agenda 21 and the Convention to Combat Desertification, among others, promote sustainable activities at the level of the ecosystems and facilitate stakeholders to adopt appropriate practices for the rehabilitation, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. The need for sustainable practices is critical in agricultural and forest ecosystems where intensification of farming and wood production and the expansion of related activities in marginal areas is increasing. There is evidence that some ecosystems' productive capacity has been severely affected posing risks to the future generations.

Issues of trade liberalization and production for exports are very much on the international negotiating tables. Sustainable agricultural practices, food security and traditional crops are frequently being replaced by export-oriented crops. Migration is an effect of these dynamics.

There is the need to guarantee promotion in an effective and participative manner of long-term strategies that focus on both traditional and modern appropriate practices and knowledge. This currently happens in a fragmental way for instance, in the field of organic agriculture, agroforestry, integrated pest management and sustainable forest approaches. For significant impacts, those knowledge and practices need to be applied from households to farms and on small and big areas, since ecosystems are interconnected and the dynamics in one ecosystem inevitably influences and are influenced by the dynamics of other ecosystems

The conservation of the productive potential of physical and biological resources' on which agricultural and forest production systems rely, requires the formulation and application of plans, indicators and networks to reorient ecosystem management in a sustainable manner.

There is an enormous heritage in terms of sustainable traditional knowledge and sound experiences all around the world that need to be recovered and shared among people in a more systematic way. This could be done through the promotion of initiatives and projects aimed at addressing desertification and drought phenomena while reducing poverty in the most affected/vulnerable areas. There are also calls for political and educational strategies that start at the local level but progressively reach national and also the international community levels as well as NGOs, and other organizations.

The persistence of common problems in the LAC region as well as the innovative and original answers generated in the region through participative and engaged work of local people, can facilitate to target at improving the environment with the use of TK. Poverty however is a serious risk that prevents local communities and entities to fully act locally and reverse land degradation due to extreme pressure and mismanagement of resources, especially when prioritizing basic needs with the consequence of compromising capacities of present and future generations.

The UNCCD secretariat, attending LAC countries demands, has been fostering the development of a network on traditional knowledge in the region with the creation of the Thematic Programme Networks, subject of this proposal.

Cultural, environmental and social impacts of sustainable land management through the recognition of opportunities existing in the region, not only for the rescue, but for the sustainable use of traditional practices on land and drought management.

The value and relevance of TK and local technology, knowledge, know-how and practices is central in the framework of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as indicated, among other articles, in numbers 16, 17, 18, 19 and regional annexes of its constitutional text. Those provisions recognize TK as part of the range of technologies and techniques that could allow managing dryland ecosystem in a more sustainable way. The benefits of such TK relate to identification of useful farm practices (conducive to poverty reduction), plant and animal species (for conservation and biodiversity), and forms of social organisation (encouraging community empowerment).

II. Objectives of the TPN 5 on best practices and traditional knowledge

1. To respond to demands of countries on the need to address TK and sustainable practices of relevance to the priorities of the Convention, with effective instruments and mechanisms that could help implement the UNCCD, involving local and indigenous communities and their knowledge while carrying out the priorities identified in the respective NAPs. This knowledge is “traditional” because of the linkages with the community, with its values, its cultural heritage and vision of the world.
2. Accordingly, the desired criteria to achieve the end results of the TPN on best practices are based in the attainment of local objectives on combating desertification and drought and in their inclusion within the government’s strategies. Recognising and understanding the importance of this mainstreaming is essential for implementing initiatives at the local level with traditional technologies. To this aim, the issues to be taken into consideration are the following:

III. Methodological approach

At the level of local communities and other stakeholders:

- Bottom – up and fully participatory approach;
- Assurance of sustainable economic livelihoods;
- Resilience to social, economic and environmental issues and adaptive capacity;
- Sustainable natural resource use;
- Equitable and fair participation in negotiations related to their own interests;
- Enabling information exchange among stakeholders;
- Education and training issues.

At the national level:

- Maintenance of cultural values and environmental quality;
- Identification and adoption of sustainable technologies and practices that raise the social and economic quality of life;
- Maintenance of soil productivity potential;
- Enhancement of water availability, quality and access;
- Reduction of social economic and environmental vulnerability;
- Increase in output of agricultural, forestry and agro-industrial products.

The regional meetings and the issues of best practices and TK

Several decisions have been adopted at the regional level on the issue, as follows:

- ❑ Decision 4/V LAC RM (Peru, 1999): calls for the adoption of the document on the collection of TK presented at that meeting.
- ❑ Decision 14/VI LAC RM (El Salvador, 2000): addresses the issue of training on TK.
- ❑ Decisions 4 and 18/VII LAC RM (Chile, 2001): call for further development and application of traditional practices under the framework of the National Action Programmes (NAP), with the involvement of local and indigenous communities, as well as for the organisation of a workshop on these issues. A number of recommendations are also made.
- ❑ Decision on CRIC 1/VIII LAC RM (Barbados, 2002): includes the Declaration on Traditional Technologies, calling for the rescue of traditional sustainable systems and technologies developed by local communities and indigenous people, as well as for providing these activities with the appropriate relevance and priority.
- ❑ Decision 2/IX LAC RM (Colombia, 2003): calls for the creation of six Thematic Programme Networks (TPNs) within the Regional Action Programme, the fifth of which is on Best Practices, Traditional Knowledge and Technologies.

III. Activities

The TPN5 is to be launched through a three-phase country-driven process, two of which have been already completed:

PHASE 1 (completed): Identification of practices and sustainable knowledge in LAC countries instrumental to the combat against desertification, the mitigation of the effects of drought and poverty eradication - From March to May 2006, the UNCCD Secretariat organised an electronic forum with the aim to provide a space of debate and exchange of information on challenges, concrete experiences and lessons learned among stakeholders dealing with land degradation and TK in LAC. The first part of the e-forum explored opportunities, bottlenecks and expectations of creating the network as well as the challenges ahead to foster the application of sound practices, appropriate technologies and sustainable TK to address desertification and drought phenomena while eradicating poverty among people living in affected ecosystems. The second part of the e-forum promoted the exchange of information and experiences on specific topics, such as water management and control of soil erosion, agroforestry and local communities/indigenous participation. More than 200 participants, mainly in representation of civil society organisations and research institutions, entered the e-forum to exchange views and perspectives on TK and land degradation-related issues.

PHASE 2 (completed): Formulation of a proposal on mechanisms, tools and resources to be used to promote best practices, TK and sustainable technologies relevant to the Convention - Following the mandate received by the IV LAC regional meeting (1998), a first proposal on the set up, development and launching of the TPN within the UNCCD context at the regional level was formulated by Peru in mid-2006. The network would represent a useful and effective mechanism of cooperation among its members to address land degradation and drought phenomena in a timely and efficient manner in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid ecosystems, establishing synergies while avoiding overlapping.

PHASE 3: TPN launching meeting to be held in Bogotá (Colombia) during 23-25 of May 2007 with the participation of interested country Parties and organisations of the region –

On the basis of the existing proposal and the results of the e-forum, the meeting is aimed at discussing more in detail the characteristics and parameters of the network, its objectives and programme of work, identifying members and clearly establishing their responsibilities and tasks. Institutional, technical and financial aspects related to the network will be also tackled and final recommendations made to allow the effective launching of the network. The TPN5 shall be an international coordination mechanism in charge of leading the collection and dissemination of traditional practices and sustainable knowledge relevant to the Convention while facilitating strategic partnerships and bottom-up approaches, supporting the exchange and use of reliable information and improving the regional/national decision-making process on issues UNCCD-related. During the launching meeting there will be a discussion about the possibility of merging the TPN 4 and 5 since the TPN 4 on agroforestry has strong links with traditional knowledge. In general terms, all the traditional agricultural systems, which include agroforestry systems, are part of the traditional knowledge that have been transmitted from one generation to the other in the affected communities. During the meeting a discussion about the possibility of unifying the two thematic programs will be promoted with the purpose of creating synergies among them.

IV. Expected results of the launching meeting

1. An appropriate institutional framework and arrangement for setting up the network, in accordance to the proposal submitted to the countries is agreed upon;
2. The time frame for operating the network is set;
3. The network membership criteria considering, among others, the capacity of individual actors to participate and contribute to the TPN in terms of information, experience and expertise are established;
4. The role of focal point institutions as well as the members of the network is detailed;
5. The programme of work of the network for the biennium 2007-2008 is established in accordance with the selected and agreed priority programme areas and activities as well as their expected costs;
6. The detailed time schedule for activities of the TPN5 in 2007 and 2008 is developed;
7. Practical modalities for collaboration among network's focal points, members and partners in implementing the programme of work at the local, national, subregional and regional levels are defined.
8. A decision regarding the unification of the TPN 4 and 5 and the necessary mechanisms for the integration of the same.

V. Participation

The UNCCD Secretariat and the Government of Colombia will organise jointly a 3-day meeting that will be held in Bogotá during 23-25 of May 2007. Representatives from selected countries of the region, specialised actors and relevant stakeholders in the thematic area will attend it. Representatives of international organisation involved in the UNCCD implementation as well as development cooperation partners that have been supporting the UNCCD process will also be invited to participate.

VI. Logistical arrangements

In the framework of the TPN5 launching meeting, the Government of Colombia shall provide the following:

1. Qualified personnel acting as focal points in the organisation of the event and which names will be duly communicate to the UNCCD Secretariat;

2. A plenary meeting room of appropriate size to accommodate around 30 people during the all length of the event, and conference equipment for the use of transparencies and power point presentations (computer, projector, screen, microphones, lauders);
3. A professional secretary to handle the typing of documents and related papers of the meeting as well as other administrative issues, including the assistance to participants;
4. One office for the UNCCD Staff members equipped with 1 personal computers with electronic mail facility and access to Internet, one printer, fax and telephone with international line for official communications with the UNCCD Offices in Bonn, New York and Mexico City;
5. A photocopy machine for the reproduction of documents resulting from the meeting, including the final report;
6. Two computers with connection to the Internet for use by delegates to the meeting.