



LEGAL MECHANISMS FOR PROMOTING THE USE AND SAFEGUARDING OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Globally, there are serious concerns about the rapid loss of traditional knowledge, practices and customs within Indigenous communities. Noted too has been the misappropriation of traditional knowledge with little or no benefits to communities. There is an urgent need to address such matters at the national level in support of recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples and safeguarding their traditional knowledge. As a reminder, traditional knowledge is an integral aspect of the way of life of Indigenous communities in Guyana. It has played and continues to play a critical role in not only their identity and culture, but also their health, education, food security and the way they manage their land and resources. They are stewards of biodiversity that is beneficial to us all.

Within the draft Traditional Knowledge National Action Plan (TKNAP) for Guyana, actions being proposed under a second objective aims to strengthen local laws, governance and mechanisms to help address the concerns mentioned above. There are existing laws, policies and mechanisms in Guyana intended to support the rights of Amerindians and safeguard their traditional knowledge, such as the Amerindian Act of 2006. The Act provides for the establishment of Village Councils who represent the collective interest of the village. They take the lead in providing strategic direction and representing the interest of their Village with regards to, but not limited to, managing and regulating the use and occupation of Village lands, promoting the sustainable use, protection and conservation of Village lands and the resources on those lands, and encouraging the preservation of their traditional practices.

The Amerindian Act of 2006 called for the establishment of the National Toshias' Council (NTC) whose work entails, for example, the preparation of strategies and plans for the protection, conservation and sustainable development of Villages. The NTC also provides advice to the Minister with regards to the protection of the cultural heritage and traditional practices of Amerindians in Guyana. Notwithstanding, recommendations have been made for the revision of the current Amerindian Act of 2006 in efforts to address gaps that have been identified over the years.

In efforts to ensure that Indigenous rights are recognized and to promote greater opportunity for traditional knowledge to be incorporated into national policy and practices, what more can be done in regards to legislation? In the initial drafting or revision of national legislation and policies, greater efforts can be made to ensure that Indigenous rights and traditional knowledge is appropriately captured. Notably, it would be important to place attention during implementing and monitoring of such legislations and policies on how Indigenous rights and traditional knowledge is addressed in practice.

Also of importance is the strengthening of a nationally agreed standard for a Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process, where all Indigenous communities are knowledgeable of the steps involved and have the support of relevant authorities to ensure that such a process is followed. A FPIC process helps to ensure that communities have as much information needed before making a decision about an issue, process or activity. In the case of signing formal agreements, they can ensure that there are Mutually Agreed Terms (MAT) which ensure each party knows exactly what

they are expected to receive and/or provide within the agreement. This is important in protecting the collective right of a community to their traditional knowledge, for example knowledge of medicinal plants.

In next week's article, we will continue to share with you information based on a drafted Traditional Knowledge Action Plan (TKNAP) for Guyana. If you would like to learn more about some of the work that has been done in communities by the project please visit the following website: <https://cobracollective.org/tag/darwin/>. Also, how do you feel about traditional knowledge and the role it plays in conservation? What do you think about a Traditional Knowledge National Action Plan for Guyana? Please share your thoughts via 592 650 6632 (WhatsApp or SMS only).

You can share your ideas and questions by sending letters to: “Our Earth, Our Environment”, C/O ECEA Programme, Environmental Protection Agency, Ganges Street, Sophia, GEORGETOWN, or email us at: eit.epaguyana@gmail.com. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram and subscribe to our YouTube channel.