



# Indigenous People and Traditional Knowledge

Indigenous communities around the world are constantly struggling to maintain their rights, their traditions and their knowledge. They face the challenge of living in two worlds, the indigenous and the non-indigenous one, in constant tension with each other, with the latter having more power in shaping the former. For centuries, indigenous populations have suffered from invasion and oppression, and oftentimes they have seen their knowledge eclipsed by western knowledge, imposed on them through western institutions. Yet, indigenous populations have managed to survive for centuries adapting in many different ways to adverse climate conditions and managing to create sustainable livelihood systems. Their diverse forms of knowledge, deeply rooted in their relationships with the environment as well as in cultural cohesion, have allowed many of these communities to maintain a sustainable use and management of natural resources, to protect their environment and to enhance their resilience; their ability to observe, adapt and mitigate has helped many indigenous communities face new and complex circumstances that have often severely impacted their way of living and their territories.

## What is traditional knowledge?

Traditional or local knowledge refers to the knowledge and know-how unique to a given society or culture, which encompasses “the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and worldviews of local people” including specific beliefs, rules and taboos that are part of the customary law of a specific group. Indigenous knowledge is therefore vital for the survival of the historical and cultural heritage of a particular group as it “forms its backbone of social, economic, scientific and technological identity”.

## Promoting the integration of TK at the national level

‘Integrating Traditional Knowledge into National Policies and Practices’ is a project that is currently being implemented in Guyana. It is a Darwin Initiative project which commenced in 2017 and runs to March 2021. The EPA, being a partner from the inception, is especially supportive of the work being undertaken since it aligns directly with goals/targets associated with the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD), to which Guyana is a signatory and the Agency is the focal point. The project specifically addresses the CBD’s Aichi Biodiversity Target 18 which speaks to the need for traditional knowledge to be better respected through national policy. The project promotes the effective participation of Indigenous peoples in

decision making. Other partners include the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, North Rupununi District Development Board, Protected Areas Commission, Kanuku Mountains Community Representative Group and South-Central Peoples Development Association. Through this project, activities are being executed that pilot a model which promotes increased and effective dialogue between indigenous peoples and decision makers through the use of participatory video techniques. Additionally, activities also focus on building institutional capacity to encourage and promote the integration of traditional knowledge and perhaps more significantly, the development a Traditional Knowledge National Action Plan (TKNAP) for Guyana. From the very inception, the project has been engaging several indigenous communities (associated with protected areas) to facilitate discussions; for example, around the value of traditional knowledge to Protected Areas Management, the challenges associated with changes to the use of certain traditional knowledge/ practices, and identifying key areas that need urgent attention as it relates to its preservation. Stakeholder engagement has also included government agencies to assess their level of awareness of traditional knowledge and to determine the current level of integration based on a review of their regulations and policies. These discussions and analysis have contributed significantly to the TKNAP drafting process.

More information on the project visit <https://cobracollective.org/news/community-engagement-in-the-north-rupununi-guyana/>

#### References

<https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/conservation-and-indigenous-peoples>

<https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/being-indigenous-21st-century>

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