

NAPTEK

NAPTEK - A national programme on local and traditional knowledge concerning the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity

Traditional knowledge and article 8(j): the Swedish approach

In December 2005 the Swedish government decided to launch a national programme on local and traditional knowledge concerning the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. This was a direct result of the ongoing discussions concerning art. 8(j) in the Convention on biological diversity (CBD). The national programme will in its first phase run for six years with the aim to safeguard relevant traditional knowledge, innovations and practices according to art. 8(j).

Sweden is one of the few EU countries to have indigenous people, the Saami. In addition to the Saami, Sweden also has many tradition holders represented in small-scale use of the biological resources. Reindeer husbandry, small-scale farming, forestry, hunting, and artisanal fishery all depend on traditional knowledge. Artisanal fishermen are still dependent on knowledge of the seasonal behaviour of the fish, weather conditions and wind directions to make their catches. Fish, both fresh and smoked, is sold directly by the fishermen locally to tourists and summer guests. Farm dairies produce traditional cheese made from cows and goats that graze in forest that have been grazed for centuries. Traditional knowledge and local traditional products still play an important role in rural development even in a highly industrialized country like Sweden.

In this context we also wish to point out that a “local community” does not necessarily constitute a geographical unit, but a “traditional knowledge system community” with geographically scattered members, but linked together by their knowledge. There is still a rich treasure of traditional knowledge upheld by tradition holders in most western countries. The conservation of this knowledge is not only a question of biological diversity, but also an important element of our cultural identity.

The national work will be coordinated from Swedish Biodiversity Centre, that itself is a result of the signing of the CBD, in direct collaboration with the Swedish Saami Council when it comes to issues concerning the Saami traditions. Also other relevant tradition holders/ stakeholders will be involved in the process. The purpose of the national programme is to:

- document traditional knowledge
- maintain and preserve local and traditional knowledge
- work as a link between tradition holders and national authorities
- initiate research concerning traditional knowledge

Since 1997 an ethnobiological research project has been carried out at the Swedish Biodiversity Centre to promote interest in the conservation of biodiversity and traditional knowledge. The project has resulted in fifteen reports, six national symposia and two volumes of a planned three volume encyclopaedia describing traditional use of

biodiversity in Sweden. When the third volume was released in December 2007 we have an encyclopaedia, covering 1 500 pages giving a popular introduction to the historical, present, and possibly also some of the future use of our biodiversity. The project has also resulted in Swedish university courses in ethnobiology and thus increased interest in the conservation of biological diversity as well as documentation of traditional knowledge.

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