



World Agroforestry Centre
TRANSFORMING LIVES AND LANDSCAPES

ICRAF Policy Guidelines Series

Indigenous or Traditional Knowledge

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World Agroforestry Centre

Policy Guidelines on indigenous or traditional knowledge

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ICRAF's mission and indigenous or traditional knowledge

ICRAF's mission is to advance the science and practice of agroforestry, and in so doing to transform landscapes and the lives of the rural poor in developing countries. The pursuit of this mission requires carrying out research and development with rural communities, which interacts with the indigenous or traditional knowledge (ITK) held by those communities. The interaction may be incidental or planned. An example of the latter is a project that seeks to integrate traditional and scientific knowledge in solving local problems. Unlike other some other organisations, ICRAF does not seek traditional or indigenous knowledge that can be exploited to develop commercial products. However we do see indigenous knowledge of plants as an important source of information in the domestication of agroforestry tree species.

Scope and purpose

The aim of this guideline is to describe ICRAF's policy on working with Indigenous and traditional knowledge, and the steps taken to ensure best practices are followed.

For these purposes ITK is information that people in a given community have developed over time, based on experience and adaptation to the local environment and culture. Often this is knowledge about plants and animals. However it also covers other areas, such as knowledge about management of soil and water. Describing knowledge as ITK does not imply it is 'old' or 'non-technical'. It describes the way the knowledge is created, preserved and disseminated.

This guideline applies to all work on ITK that ICRAF staff are involved with, whether on their own or in partnership with other institutions, and whether leading the activities or not.

Intellectual property rights and aspects of ITK can be complex. Like most other organisations doing field work in this area, ICRAF cannot expect to have technical IPR and legal experts on the ground in each location. We therefore rely on:

1. Authoritative guides of which there are many are available, but we will use Hansen and VanFleet (2003)¹ as the starting point.

¹ Hansen, S.A. and VanFleet, J.W. (2003) *Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property: A Handbook on Issues and Options for Traditional Knowledge Holders in Protecting their Intellectual Property and Maintaining Biological Diversity*. Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science. 85pp

2. Experts with relevant experience from inside ICRAF
3. The CAS of the CGIAR
4. Experts within collaborating institutions.

Principles

1. ICRAF will abide by relevant international conventions and treaties with regard to ITK (Hansen and VanFleet, 2003 p vii).
2. Where there is relevant national legislation, we will also abide by that.
3. ICRAF will endeavour to follow current best practice in all aspects of ITK in its work.
4. Our work involving ITK will, like all other work, be consistent with ICRAF's Intellectual Property (IP) Policy as outlined in the Board approved guideline on IP. This states 'ICRAF will endeavour to safeguard the intellectual property rights of others, whether these are determined by legal means or by commonly accepted standards'.
5. ICRAF's work involving ITK will be consistent with our germplasm policy as outlined in the Board approved guidelines on Genetic Resources.
6. ICRAF endeavours to apply the same principles and standards to all ITK as that embodied in treaties and legislation relating to germplasm.

Implications for our work

1. The first requirement is for all staff working with ITK for be aware of and understand
 - this statement
 - the implications of international treaties and agreements
 - the implication of national legislation
 - current issues and best practice related to ITK.

We will put in place strategies to achieve this, and based on procedures outlined in Hansen and VanFleet (2003). These include practical use of worksheets and templates for staff to evaluate circumstances for clarifying ITK issues and ensuring adherence to the ICRAF policy.

2. ICRAF will emphasize three specific provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity that require particular attention:
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- a. A general requirement is to ‘... respect, preserve and maintain traditional knowledge’. This requires specific, planned actions.
- b. A requirement to obtain prior informed consent before collecting ITK from communities and individuals
- c. Informing communities of, and helping them understand their rights, obligations and possibilities regarding ITK.

Again these are items on which staff needs guidance and information.

3. Most of our field projects are undertaken with partner organisations. We therefore will ensure that the partner organisation follows the same guidelines on ITK. We will not undertake work with organisations or individuals that do not follow the same principles. Hence, agreement to these principles will be a condition of agreement to work on joint projects involving ITK. The same applies to other relevant ICRAF policies, such as Germplasm, IP and Research Ethics.