CASE STUDY 9

Community involvement in the documentation of traditional knowledge in the Philippines

Between 2003 and 2004 the Subanen community in Zamboanga Peninsula (Western Mindanao) in the Philippines documented their indigenous knowledge about local plants considered valuable for medicinal, agricultural, economic and religious reasons.

Plant diversity in the region is declining due to population pressure and climatic change. Elders in the community recognized that as plant diversity dwindles, knowledge about plants also declines. They realized that indigenous knowledge was no longer being passed on and could eventually disappear forever.

The Subanen leaders therefore sought assistance from specialized organizations to provide them with the skills to document this indigenous knowledge themselves, with external experts acting as facilitators. Community elders provided information that was documented by younger, literate community members.

The resulting documentation was packaged into a multimedia format and other popular educational materials in English with Subanen translations. These materials were formally registered with the government copyright office, in order to guarantee the community’s intellectual property rights. The community’s education programme now uses them to teach school children about their culture; they are also used as curriculum material for adults who want to learn to read and write in their ancestral language.

For further information:

* http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00261
* http://www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/pub/documents/Indigeknowledge.pdf