

INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY NETWORK ON CULTURAL AND BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (IUNCBD)

The International University Network on Cultural and Biological Diversity is the main initiative developed under the Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation signed by the Sapienza University of Rome and the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio, 1992).

The "United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)", Cultural Diversity and Sustainable Development

In 1992, the largest-ever meeting of world leaders took place at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

World leaders agreed on a comprehensive strategy for "sustainable development meeting our needs while ensuring that we leave a healthy and viable world for future generations".

An historic set of agreements was signed at the "Earth Summit". One of the key binding agreements adopted at Rio was the Convention on Biological Diversity.

This pact among the vast majority of the world's governments sets out commitments for maintaining the world's ecological underpinnings as we go about the business of economic development.

The Convention establishes three main goals: the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources.

The sustainable use of nature is essential for the long-term success of development strategies.

Economic development is essential to meeting human needs and to eliminating the poverty that affects so many people around the world.

A major challenge for the 21st century will be making the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity a compelling basis for development policies, business decisions, and consumer desires.

Within this context cultural diversity is a fundamental element.

Local communities play a key role since they are the true "managers" of the ecosystems in which they live and, thus, have a major impact on them.

The indissoluble and complex linkage between biological diversity and cultural diversity has received international recognition and encompasses the co-evolution of nature and culture, that shapes worldviews, traditional knowledge, skills and experiences - an immense richness generated by the integration of human behaviours and diverse societies with the diversity of their natural surroundings.

The Convention has already accomplished a great deal on the road to sustainable development by transforming the international community's approach to biodiversity.

However, many challenges still lie ahead. Despite the promise of Rio, economic growth without adequate environmental safeguards is still the rule rather than the exception.

The transition to sustainable development requires a shift in public attitudes as to what is an acceptable use of nature. This can only happen if people have the right information, skills, and organizations for understanding and dealing with biodiversity issues. Governments and different stakeholders need to invest in staff and training, and they need to support organizations, including scientific bodies, that can deal with and advise on biological and cultural diversity issues and the linkages with social and economic development.

The Convention points out the need of a long-term process of public education to bring about changes in behaviour and lifestyles, and to prepare societies for the changes needed for sustainability. Better biodiversity education would meet one of the fundamental goals set out in the Convention.

Education is also of paramount importance since it plays a key role for capacity building and public awareness - which are the milestones for good governance and effective policy making. These objectives remain complex and unsolved challenges in the implementation of the CBD.

The philosophy of sustainable development, the ecosystem approach, and the emphasis on building partnerships are all helping to shape global action on biodiversity.

Background of the initiative

The International University Network on Cultural and Biological Diversity (IUNCBD), promoted and coordinated by the Sapienza University of Rome in accordance with the UN-CBD Secretariat is based on the international cooperation mission of Sapienza University of Rome, with a special focus on developing countries.

The International University Network on Cultural and Biological Diversity (IUNCBD) and the MoU & Cooperation Sapienza/CBD have the following background.

Due to the long-term participation in international environmental and development institutional/scientific meetings and debates, the Sapienza University of Rome – Research Centre of Development Studies (SPES) has acquired large experiences and specialized knowledge on the education/science/policy interface of the CBD and related Organizations/Conventions.

In the last three years, Sapienza SPES has conducted a research developing a social science analysis and methodology on the following issues:

- the institutional processes of the international institutions/conventions and the complex implementation of their policy agenda and programmes of work,
- the gap of communication and knowledge between international institutions/conventions and academic institutions,
- the gap between education and capacity building,
- the gap between academic institutions and local society,
- the very limited role universities play in disseminating and linking the CBD policy agenda and programmes of work - as well as other related programmes - to the local context to which they belong,
- the innovative strategy that can allow universities to bridge these gaps and play a fundamental role as local social drivers - inclusive institutions - opened to society, local/indigenous communities and experts,
- the transdisciplinary scientific contribution universities can offer through the internalization of the policy agenda and programmes of work of the CBD and complementary International Organizations and Conventions (among others, UNEP, UNESCO, FAO, WIPO, MEAs, ITPGRFA¹) in the academic system of studies,

The success of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) policies must ultimately be judged by the impact they have on the ground, but the "negotiation chain" and "implementation chain" remain a hard challenge in particular in developing countries.

Within this context education and research should be fundamental instruments for monitoring, analysing, systematizing, translating in implementation strategies and actions the policy agenda and programmes of work of the CBD and complementary International Organizations/Conventions (among others, UNEP, UNESCO, FAO, WIPO, MEAs, ITPGRFA).

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UNEP: United Nations Environmental Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

WIPO: World Intellectual Property Organization

MEAs: Multilateral Environmental Agreements

ITPGRFA: International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

These objectives can be achieved only through an innovative approach that opens universities to the local context, and integrates and links theoretical, methodological, applied studies and field research activities to the updated CBD - MEAs and related Organizations policies and programmes.

Education is a fundamental element in the value chain of the CBD implementation. Universities are the only institutions: (1) time by time present at local level, (2) with a long lasting and very appropriate mission – education and research, (3) with the largest and most suitable human resources and target – researchers, teachers, students, young people who represent the future of a country.

Universities are of paramount importance because they play a key role for capacity building and public awareness – which are the milestones for good governance and effective policy making.

The MoU Cooperation and the International University Network on Cultural and Biological Diversity (IUNCBD) have been developed on the base of this social science analysis in order to introduce a new paradigm of relationships between international conventions and universities and give an operative contribution to the CBD Secretariat.

Within this context, that includes CEPA (Communication, Education and Public Awareness Programme) objectives, we have established the International University Network on Cultural and Biological Diversity (IUNCBD) as the main initiative planned in accordance with the CBD Secretariat.

The International University Network on Cultural and Biological Diversity (IUNCBD) is based on the provisions and agreements of the MoU Cooperation Sapienza/CBD that wants "*to promote a strong educational, scientific and technical partnership between the Convention processes and Sapienza University, in support of the enhanced phase of implementation of the objectives, policy agenda and programmes of work of the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol, bridging the gap of information and dialogue between academia and international conventions, in particular in developing countries where Sapienza University will play a crucial role in disseminating the issues and programmes of the Convention.*"

"The Signatories of the MoU Cooperation will:

1. Develop mechanisms for the sharing of educational, scientific and technical information and advice of relevance to the objectives, policy agenda and programmes of work of the Convention, its Cartagena Protocol, and, as appropriate, UNESCO and other concerned national and international institutions including:

- the promotion of research activities and projects and the organization of presentations, seminar series or other academic and training initiatives for addressing issues of relevance to the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol,"*

3. Provide advice on training materials and modules aimed at enhancing the implementation of the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol, particularly in developing countries, and contribute, where appropriate, to training programmes developed under the Convention,"

In particular the MoU Cooperation defines the strategy of these actions as follows:

"The Signatories of the MoU Cooperation will:

4. Promote initiatives for the spread and implementation of the Programme of Work on CEPA aimed, inter alia, at

- *designing and disseminating k-university curricula and focused educational/capacity building and scientific programmes,*
- *developing pilot projects and long terms activities,*
- *establishing and coordinating partnerships and networks among universities, centres of excellence in teaching, national and international institutions, local/indigenous communities and other stakeholders,*

5. *Provide educational institutions and stakeholders focused inputs and a forum of dialogue for raising awareness, collecting feedback and developing initiatives to address and better engage:*

- *the integration of education with capacity building in issues of relevance to the Convention,*
- *the establishment of a constructive dialogue between science, policy and society"*

The CBD Secretariat recognizes *"the crucial role of Sapienza University and the Centro di Ricerca de 'La Sapienza' in Studi per lo Sviluppo 'SPES' (Development Studies Research Centre) in developing analytical framework and strategy for the design and successful implementation of the Memorandum of Cooperation," and "designates University of Rome 'Sapienza' as a 'University Focal Point' of the Convention for implementing, disseminating and main-streaming the objectives, policy agenda and programme of work of the CBD, in particular in developing countries, promoting international initiatives and cooperation activities, establishing and coordinating networks with other universities and concerned national and international institutions."*

"Sapienza University and the CBD Secretariat designate the Centro di Ricerca de "La Sapienza" in Studi per lo Sviluppo "SPES" (Development Studies Research Centre) as "Sapienza University Focal Point and Coordinator" for advancing the objectives of this Memorandum and mutually agreed activities, and for facilitating the exchange of information on all issues of relevance of this MoU."

Mission and objectives of the IUNCBD Network

The International University Network on Cultural and Biological Diversity (IUNCBD) wants to promote an innovative approach and initiatives aimed at:

1. *introducing a new paradigm of relationships between International Conventions/Organizations and universities, giving an operative contribution to the CBD Secretariat and other complementary International Bodies,*
2. *allowing universities to bridge the gap of communication and knowledge between the university system of studies and the International Conventions/Organizations – among them the CBD, reduce the gap between education and capacity building, enhance the role universities play in disseminating and linking the policy agenda and programmes of work of the CBD and complementary International Organizations and Conventions (among others, UNEP, UNESCO, FAO, WIPO, MEAs, ITPGRFA) to the local context to which they belong,*
3. *allowing universities to play a dynamic role as local social drivers opened to society, local/indigenous communities, experts, policy makers,*
4. *disseminating and introducing the policy agenda and programmes of work of the CBD and complementary International Organizations and Conventions in the academic system of studies, bridging the gap between academic and institutional policy perspectives,*

5. 'translating' the CBD and complementary policy agenda and programmes of work in new contains for courses and academic programmes taking into account the vision and involvement of representatives of local and indigenous communities and experts,
6. integrating theoretical and applied natural science and social science studies,
7. designing innovative curricula/ initiatives taking into account the local context and the multiscale policy implementation,
8. institutionalizing these contains and programmes in the academic system of studies, as well as enriching and highlighting the activities already developed, even beyond the logics of the short term projects,
9. offering a coordinated international platform of information, knowledge, research questions and research/teaching programmes in order to develop and reply transdisciplinary academic studies, initiatives and curricula linked to the ongoing CBD and complementary policy agenda and programmes of work,
10. developing joint research/teaching/capacity building initiatives, pilot projects and events in order to strengthen local capacities, exchange and compare local experiences and case studies at international/national multi-scale level, achieve high standards of advanced studies, link universities to the local implementation of the CBD and complementary policy agenda and programmes of work, provide tools to grow a critical mass of experts, offering a transdisciplinary scientific contribution to the international multiscale policy debate,
11. supporting the organization of a South-South cooperation forum on biodiversity for development,
12. establishing a constructive platform of dialogue between education, science, policy and society.

These objectives are linked to the following Priorities Activities of the Programme of Work on CEPA - Communication, Education and Public Awareness and its implementation:

- *support for a global network,*
- *provide links to established learning institutions and centres of excellence,*
- *facilitate communication between partner organizations and Parties on best practices in Communication, Education and Public Awareness,*
- *work actively to interconnect national and regional educational networks to share resources and expertise,*
- *promote and encourage the development of open learning and distance education programmes by establishing partnerships among universities, centres of excellence in teaching, Governments and other stakeholders,*
- *strengthen formal and informal education on biodiversity,*
- *identify best practices in biodiversity education, including those initiated by indigenous and local communities, and seek to disseminate these for further adoption,*
- *include in the CEPA activities local and traditional knowledge*
- *encourage partnerships among Parties, Governments and stakeholders for the development of generic K-university biodiversity-related curricula for use at the national and regional levels,*

The launching of the IUNCBD Network and ongoing activities

In accordance with the CBD Secretariat the Sapienza University of Rome launched the initiative in the event "Innovative Strategy for CEPA - Communication, Education, Public Awareness : The International University Network on Cultural and Biological Diversity" at the COP10 - Conference of the Parties to the Convention - in Nagoya (October 2010), presenting the innovative strategy designed for addressing communication, education, public awareness and capacity building challenges.

The panellists represented different perspectives and geographical areas - CBD Secretariat, Academia, NGOs, Indigenous People, from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America - and discussed how Universities can become a space of dialogue for the meeting of different cultural and scientific systems that integrate and enrich the outcomes of many disciplines - from natural science to anthropology, law and economics - and link the academic programmes to the current CBD and related organizations policy agenda.

In the first year the IUNCBD Network has developed significant initiatives, among others:

- Before and after the launch of the IUNCBD Network we have presented the initiative to universities and International Organizations through numerous missions, meetings and seminars in Africa, Latin America and Asia.
- Two pilot cases have been already developed at the University of Antananarivo in Madagascar and at the Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia. Activities already carried on include Research/Teaching Programmes in different faculties, with the involvement of local NGOs, intensive modules in courses, series of seminars, research action activities, field studies.
- The MOI University, Kenya, is studying modalities to establish a MOI University-IUNCBD Network Research Centre on Biodiversity, Culture and Science-Policy Interface.
- Initiatives carried on for the 2012 CBD Conference of Parties - COP11:
in January and April 2011 we have presented the IUNCBD Network in India (Andhra Pradesh), shared our conceptual framework and proposed several activities - among them the proposal of the First International University Conference of the IUNCBD Network (3 days) "*Biodiversity 2020: Linking Policy to Education, Science and Society*", to be held few days before the CBD Conference of the Parties (COP11, Hyderabad, October 2012) in a University of Hyderabad, and a Summer School on specific thematic areas of the IUNCBD Network.
Indian institutions - Andhra Pradesh Forest Academy, State Biodiversity Board members and universities - have enthusiastically reacted and have established the *Indian Network on Cultural and Biological Diversity* (INCBD) and the *Network of Indian Universities on Cultural and Biological Diversity*, both promoted by, and linked directly to, the IUNCBD Network (IUNCBD).
- The Sapienza University - SPES Research Centre has been conducting the Research Project "*Identifying the Potential Monetary and Non-monetary Benefits Arising from the Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources under the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*", the project is being carried in partnership with institutes and

international organizations, including the Secretariat of the Treaty, Bioversity International, Lancaster University, Reading University.

- The Sapienza University - SPES Research Centre and the IUNCBD Network are active members of the UNEP Global Universities Partnership on Environment and Sustainability (GUPES) and have participated in:
 - UNEP GUPES First Consultative Meeting, UNEP Headquarters, Nairobi, Kenya 18-19 November 2010,
 - UNEP Global University Partnerships on Environment for Sustainability - GUPES Consultative, Sharing and Learning Meeting for University Leaders on Environment for Sustainability, Santiago, Chile, 5 - 6 September 2011,
- To carry on its mission the Sapienza University - SPES Research Centre and the IUNCBD Network monitor and study policy agenda, negotiations, programmes of work and implementation processes of the CBD and complementary International Conventions/Organizations and participate in international institutional and scientific meetings and conferences. Included among them are the following in 2010/2011:
 - UNESCO IYB Biodiversity Science Policy Conference , Paris, 25-29 January 2010.
 - CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing, Ninth meeting, Cali, 18-24 March 2010.
 - WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), 16th Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, Geneva, 3-7 May 2010.
 - CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) Fourteenth meeting Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), Nairobi, 13-27 May 2010.
 - CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) Ad Hoc Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention, Nairobi, 24-28 May 2010.
 - CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) Resumed Ninth meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing, Montreal, 10-16 July 2010.
 - WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), First Inter-sessional Working Group (IWG) of the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, Geneva, 16-23 July 2010.
 - CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) Interregional Negotiating Group (ING) of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing, Montreal, 18-21 September 2010.
 - CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) – COP-MOP5 Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity serving as the meeting of the parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, Nagoya, 11-15 October 2010.
 - CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) – COP10 Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Nagoya, 18-29 October 2010.
 - WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), 17^h Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, Geneva, 6-10 December 2010.
 - 13th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Studies of Commons (IASC), Hyderabad, 10-14 January 2011.
 - WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), Second Inter-sessional Working Group (IWG) of the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, Geneva, 21-25 February 2011.

- WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), Third Inter-sessional Working Group (IWG) of the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, Geneva, 28 February / 4 March 2011.
- ITPGRFA-FAO Fourth Session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, Bali, 14-18 March 2011.
- WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), 18th Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, Geneva, 9-13 May 2011.
- CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) – Meeting on Article 10 (Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity) with a focus on Article 10(c) (Customary Use of Biological Diversity), Montreal, 31 May / 3 June 2011.
- CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) – Capacity Building Workshop on the Nagoya Protocol, Montreal, 4-5 June 2011.
- CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) – Open-ended ad hoc Intergovernmental Committee for the Nagoya Protocol on ABS - Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization - ICNP, First Meeting, Montreal, 6-10 June 2011.
- FAO – CGRFA Thirteenth Regular Session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, Rome, 18-22 July 2011.
- UNEP Intergovernmental Science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services IPBES, Plenary, First Session, Nairobi, 3-7 October 2011.
- UNEP Workshop on Valuation of Ecosystem Services in Practice: Lessons Learned from Africa and Asia, Nairobi, 10-11 October 2011.
- Finally we work on designing curricula for post-degree teaching/research programmes and initiatives that are at the core of the strategy planned with the CBD Secretariat.

The Way forward

We are entering a crucial new era. Environment-development debate is deeply evolving. 2012 will mark this trend with an exceptional puzzle of high level arenas that will catalyse and multiply extraordinary interest and attention worldwide: after (1) the Declaration of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity vis-à-vis with the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2012 will be the year of (2) the RIO+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, that will address the "Green Economy" and change the planet visions and strategies beyond the environmental arena, (3) the International Union for Conservation of Nature IUCN Congress, (4) the key-sessions of the plenaries for the establishment of the United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - IPBES - that will represent the reply of the IPCC - the UN Platform on Climate Change, (5) finally the CBD-COP11 Conference of Parties in Hyderabad, India.

In the years to come the challenges will be rapidly multiplied.
The opportunities for universities are boundless and exciting.

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