

Benefit Sharing in practice: Biocultural Dialogues



Benefit Sharing in Ethical BioTrade

Equitable sharing of benefits from biodiversity is at the core of Ethical BioTrade, which seeks to advance incentives at the local level for the sustainable use of biodiversity, as well as adequate recognition of the contributions of local actors. Principle 3 of the Ethical BioTrade standard deals with equitable benefit sharing, both in the sourcing activities and in biodiversity-based research and development. “Benefit Sharing in Practice” provides concrete examples of how members of the Union for Ethical BioTrade (UEBT) are working towards equitable sharing of benefits in their policies and practices linked to natural ingredients.

Importance of community reflection

The sourcing of biodiversity is often positioned in an interface of individual and collective rights, values, institutions and practices. In establishing and undertaking ethical sourcing practices, companies may find it valuable for collectors, producers and other suppliers at the local level to have such opportunities to consider and outline relevant rights and development objectives. By promoting internal reflection processes at the community level as part of establishing and improving sourcing activities, companies and other organizations can ensure clear, consistent and widely accepted rules for engagement and decision-making. In some cases, internal community reflection processes may prove the basis for further work by local communities to consolidate and communicate their approach to the management of biodiversity and associated knowledge. For example, the Indigenous Forestry Association in Madre de Dios (AFIMAD), which brings together eight indigenous communities and works with founding UEBT member Candela Peru (www.candelaperu.net), is building on a discussion of values, rights and objectives linked to specific biodiversity-based activities towards a more comprehensive biocultural community protocol. The aim of the AFIMAD biocultural community protocol will be to communicate its internal governance structure, values in relation to biodiversity and other resources, and rules of engagement with companies and other partners.

Empowering communities in Ethical BioTrade

In Ethical BioTrade, negotiations related to the sourcing of biodiversity need to be based on dialogue and trust. For example, the Ethical BioTrade standard requires companies working with the Union for Ethical BioTrade (UEBT) to ensure that negotiations empower local actors and take into account customary law. To fulfill ethical requirements on community engagement, UEBT is exploring different tools and methodologies, including biocultural dialogues.

Biocultural dialogues are approaches to community engagement that recognize the broader social and cultural context of biodiversity-based activities. These approaches build on experiences with biocultural community protocols, which have been used by indigenous and local communities to communicate the terms and conditions of their engagement with other parties regarding their land, resources and traditional knowledge. Biocultural community protocols entail consultative processes within indigenous and local communities that consider endogenous development objectives in the context of customary, national and international rights.



Engaging in a biocultural dialogue

Following an internal reflection process at the community level, discussions among companies and other organizations sourcing biodiversity, local suppliers and other stakeholders can take place on the basis of improved understanding and defined procedures. In addition, a biocultural dialogue involves defining shared values that govern the relationship between the company and the local suppliers, from references to the Ethical BioTrade standard to more general principles such as transparency, responsibility, and good faith. There may also be discussion of specific commitments or measures through which the various actors could enhance their working relationship in the context of Ethical BioTrade.

For example, in Madagascar, the biocultural dialogue between the Association Manara-Penitra, which brings together local communities collecting natural ingredients and distilling essential oils, and UEBT members Man and the Environment (www.madagascar-environnement.com), and Aroma Forest (www.huiles-essentielles-madagascar.com), included discussions of ways in which partners could improve their contribution in relation to different Ethical BioTrade principles and the criteria that measure the fulfillment of these principles. The dialogue also addressed next steps to put in practice these commitments, including new discussions and workshops to address pending questions or concerns. Outcomes of the dialogue, as well as follow up meetings, have been reflected in project and contractual documents.



Looking forward

On the basis of initial yet encouraging experiences with biocultural dialogues, UEBT will continue considering how biocultural dialogues may be utilized within Ethical BioTrade, and the operations and supply chains of UEBT members, as a tool for ethical sourcing of biodiversity. As part of its technical support for members, the UEBT Secretariat is developing a training package on biocultural dialogues.

The UEBT training package includes guidelines on why, when and how UEBT members may use biocultural dialogues to enhance community engagement and advance compliance with the Ethical BioTrade standard.



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