

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE ON INTELLECTUAL
PROPERTY AND GENETIC RESOURCES TRADITIONAL
KNOWLEDGE AND FOLKLORE**

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**WIPO INDIGENOUS PANEL ON THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC DOMAIN CONCEPT:
EXPERIENCES IN THE FIELDS OF GENETIC RESOURCES, TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE
AND TRADITIONAL CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS: EXPERIENCES FROM NIGERIA**

Document prepared by

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It is a great privilege to be counted worthy to do this brief presentation to this December body and gathering of the seventeenth session of the inter-governmental committee on genetic resources, Traditional knowledge/Traditional cultural expressions and Folklore.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

My community, the Edo people are among the one hundred and fifty-seven communities with collective population of over seven million, in which the West Africa Coalition for Indigenous Peoples' Rights WACIPR executes its mandate.

The communities are indigenous with peculiarities and have vast and rich repositories of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions. The different communities have peculiar languages and dialects, and cultural practices. There are many heritage sites, virgin forests and ancient landmarks.

GENETIC RESOURCES

Our indigenous communities have abundant vascular plants, and produce in-situ in the virgin forests which are exploited and abused through bio-piracy by prospectors. There are plants which have efficacious applications in medical conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, malaria, impotency, sickle-cell anaemia, pre and post natal complications, asthma, mental problem etc.

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE/TRADITIONAL CULTURAL EXPRESSION

Traditional knowledge in the communities has been transmitted from generation to generation through the various family households and lineages, and is expressed in different forms. For example, among the Edo people, there are guilds of bronze casters, wood carvers/sculptors and blacksmiths. These guilds are largely family households who inherited the art and skills from their forbears for centuries. You will recall the ancient Benin Mask adopted as the symbol of the World Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977 otherwise known as FESTAC 77. The mask, a centuries-old ancient relic was carted away to England during the British punitive expedition to the ancient Benin kingdom in 1897.

In our communities, traditional knowledge has intangible and material expressions. Bronze casting was and is still used to keep records of significant events by etching such events in bronze for future generations. Carving was and is also still used to depict big festivals.

To my people, culture in addition to being the means of survival, and communal continuity, it also presents economic opportunity for sustainability. Traditional knowledge is applied in herbal preparations, cultivation of some indigenous crops, art and craft which have market value.

FOLKLORE

Communally owned folklore in our indigenous communities includes material folk ideas manifested in our way of building and through traditional cottage enterprises. There are also festivals marking various occasions, performing arts, dances, folk songs, oral literature like recitations, music etc.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Our indigenous communities have access to traditional knowledge that are communally owned and documented. The access is however subject to established community protocols and conventions in custody of the council of elders.

Purpose or reason for access is often required while contribution to the common-wealth is also a condition.

Bio-cultural protocols are being evolved to check bio-piracy by unauthorised prospectors.

Traditional knowledge for public domain is on mutually agreed terms and must be authenticated.

SOME ACTIVITIES OF WACIPR

- (1) Authentication;
- (2) Drafting Cultural Protocols – Legal protection to prevent abuse of the rich cultural heritage of the indigenous people;
- (3) Protecting Communal Ownership – collective agreement and consent to access TK and folklore;
- (4) Non Expropriation; and
- (5) Poverty Alleviation

The West Africa Coalition for Indigenous Peoples' Rights WACIPR is also currently involved in the following among others;

- (i) Compilation of Traditional Pharmacopoeia based of Traditional Knowledge;
- (ii) Documentation of endangered items of cultural heritage; and
- (iii) Preservation of TK most precious to the indigenous communities.

I wish to again appreciate the privilege accorded me and by extension the West Africa Coalition for Indigenous Peoples' Rights WACIPR to be a member of the indigenous panel.

Thank you.

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