

Creativity, culture and biodiversity

We are pleased that this second issue of the Compas Newsletter on bio-cultural diversity is now in your hands. We hope it will give you as much joy and insight while reading through it, as we have had while making it. This appears to be a time when people are looking back in history to search for security and to prepare for the challenges of the new millennium. In the contacts we had with the Compas partners and other friends when preparing this newsletter, it was striking to see the strength and resilience of many traditional cultures. Decades of interaction with modernisation processes have not been able to cut the heart out of these cultures, though most of them are under strong influence of globalisation.



Creativity is at the heart of all cultures. It's the identity of a people - how they sing their songs, dance to their music, paint their visions and hopes, design their ceremonies, festivals, rituals, agricultural systems - their life. In many traditional societies these cultural expressions have a clear link to the surrounding nature.

In this newsletter we have tried to present our understanding of the links between culture and biodiversity. We have also tried to give room to cultural expressions by showing how people make art and use music to communicate with their ancestors; how they paint totem symbols on their houses to express their connection with nature and its spirits.

Many indigenous peoples and rural communities are reviving their traditional ceremonies in relation to biodiversity, and are adding an element of reflection to its meaning. In that way they hope to be able to meet the challenges of the next millennium. The growing group of Compas partners are learning with

them and want to keep you informed through this newsletter. In that process your creativity, views and experiences are most welcome.

COMPAS Newsletter 3 will focus on:

Vitality, health and disease

What are the visions and practices on health and disease in nature, soils, plants, animals and humans? Little is known about the way peoples from different cultures perceive pests, disease and health according to their worldview and cosmivision. The way in which traditional leaders influence the learning processes, how they experiment and transfer knowledge on these issues are also poorly understood.

In development programmes the services are often offered independent of traditional practices, under the assumption that the latter are ineffective and should be substituted by modern services. These programmes specialise in protecting either nature, plants, animals or humans and the lack of health is generally considered the result of a narrowly defined cause. Rural peoples' practices in different cultures in the world show us, however, that traditional visions on health and disease in the domains of environments, soils, plants, animals and humans are based on a more holistic knowledge system. A balanced natural, social and spiritual environment is often seen as the basis for vitality. Vitality, or the energy to sustain life is called *Ch'i* in China and *Prana* in India. Experiences to inte-

grate this knowledge in development have been built up by people like ethno-veterinarians, healers and users of botanical pesticides. For the next newsletter we would like to have contributions of individuals and organisations that have accumulated insights related to vitality in ecosystems, plants, animals or humans in different cultures. We are looking for experiences and reflections on the following topics:

- Worldview and practices of rural peoples related to health and disease
- Relation between quality of food, nutrition and health
- Advantages, limitations and risks of traditional practices and their relation with modern practices
- Traditional healers, their practices as well as functions in the communities
- Description of field-based activities that document and build on traditional health practices carried out by rural people, possibly in co-operation with outside agents
- Suggestions for activities to enhance the dynamics of traditional pest and health management practices