

# The Compas experiences and perspectives

## Report of International Compas workshop



The third international Compas workshop was held in Chennai India, and hosted by the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS). The objectives of the workshop were to exchange experiences, to plan future activities and share insights with other agencies in rural development. Next to extensive field visits, many issues were discussed, such as the implications of endogenous development, the mission statement of the Compas network, and the possibility of involving selected universities. The main output is agreement on a workplan for 2002–2006.

This issue of the Compas Magazine deals with experiences with 'endogenous development' and the need for dialogue between cultures. The present global situation of violent confrontation between cultures draws the attention to the importance of 'intercultural dialogue'. Fundamentalism and radicalism can be the fruit of frustration, which may result from poverty, domination and exploitation, perceived lack of respect for own values, and threats to social and cultural identity. Poor discussion possibilities within the cultures may further aggravate the tendency towards radicalism.

Therefore, efforts to understand the cultural dimensions of 'the other', and a dialogue based on respect, curiosity and the desire to establish relationships based on equity of all partners are of utmost importance. Mutual understanding and equitable distribution of wealth are prerequisites for lasting peace.

The Compas programme attaches great value to the dialogue between different cultures; understanding the practices, values, concepts and knowledge systems of the different cultures lies at the heart of the Compas concept. The dynamics of traditional knowledge about agriculture, health and nature, is enhanced by understanding the practices, sharing and comparing them, trying to appreciate the positive and the negative aspects, and by improving on them through experiments and trials. This can be considered as *in-situ* conservation and development of indigenous knowledge and practices.

### Compas network

Since 1997 Compas has functioned as a consortium of some 20 collaborating organisations in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe that carries out fieldwork to support endogenous development, or

'development from within'. The Compas programme started in 1995 with a preparatory and explorative phase. Through a series of international meetings, the Compas Magazine, and the website, the programme brings together the experiences and insights gained. This way, Compas wants make a contribution to the sustainable development of rural communities, and to dialogue and international understanding.

For the Compas partner organisations, dialogue includes the exchange and appreciation of an array of ideas and experiences during which differences of position, values and attitudes can be explored. It is also an opportunity to learn and look for ways to improve things. Values or concepts from other cultures are not rejected on the basis of a dominant value or knowledge system, nor are they romanticised or considered beyond criticism. The partners take their own culture and values serious, but at the same time are prepared to exchange them with others, to give them a critical look, and to search for improvement and synergy. As one can imagine, this process is not without difficulties. Both in the communities and in the society at large the approach of endogenous development has to overcome some of the conventional views and modalities.

### Similar concepts

The different cultures of the Southern countries involved in the Compas network are expressed in different ways, although they are based on similar concepts. For the Maya, Mapuche, Quechua and Aymara indigenous groups in Latin America, *Pacha Mama*, or 'Mother Earth' plays a dominant role. This concept is similar to *Mae Thon-ranee* for farmers in Thailand, for example (see article Van Willenswaard, this issue,

p.10). For the ethnic groups in Ghana, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Tanzania, the concept of 'Ancestral Spirits' is especially important. For the Asian cultures, like the tribal people in Southern India, Hindu groups in India and Nepal, the Buddhist and the Sjamanist people in Sri Lanka, and the population with a strong belief in the traditional '*Adat*' in Timor, a common determinant has been labelled 'Universal Awareness'.

For these three regions, each specific culture gives shape to their own worldview through a set of concepts, knowledge and practices. It has been found that in each of the situations the natural, the social and the spiritual worlds play an important role and are addressed in an integrated way. The approach of local communities to taking decisions about agriculture, health practices, and the management of their natural resources, are based on their worldviews.

### Mission statement

The Third International Compas Workshop was held in Chennai, India, from 17 to 30 September 2001. Participants were 46 persons, representing 19 partner organisations based in 14 different countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe. Since 1998, most of these organisations have been working in their field projects, sharing their experiences in the context of the Compas programme.

The workshop started a few days after the events of 11 September in the USA. International tensions were high when the workshop was being held and this gave extra motivation to the participants to work towards intercultural dialogue at different levels. It was widely felt that we did not want to become involved in an armed conflict between people. We rather want to look for ways to address the

causes that lie at the basis of these international tensions and conflict.

The outcomes of the workshop include a mission statement, an agreement on basic concepts and approach on endogenous development, and decisions on future activities at local, national, regional and international level. The partners are determined to continue their joint activities, and have committed themselves to another five years of cooperation. It was agreed that the central element of the Compas network is the fieldwork of the Compas partner organisations: working with rural communities. Together we formulated the following mission statement: Enhancing Endogenous Development has

**"The Compas Network aims at sustainable livelihood systems through endogenous development. Traditional livelihood systems are based on the social, spiritual and natural realities as expressed in the worldviews of the communities. To this end, the network will facilitate an enabling environment to enhance the dynamics of local knowledge and the decision making capacities of the local populations."**

been accepted as the core of the institutional and personal commitment of the Compas partners. Endogenous development is understood as: 'A development that builds on local resources, local knowledge, local culture and values, as well as local institutions and leadership'. External knowledge and resources are considered important to complement the local resources. (for more details on endogenous development, p.38 of this issue).

### Challenges for Compas

With the exception of one university, Compas partners are NGO's or farmers' organisations active in agriculture, forestry, animal production, natural resources, and/or health. In most cases several of these activities are combined, as the needs of the people require an integrated or holistic approach. The fieldwork

of the partners takes place in different economic and cultural contexts and different ecosystems, ranging from the mountains (Andes, Nepal, India) to semi-arid areas (Africa and Asia), and tropical lowlands (India).

As expressed in the mission statement, the first challenge for each of the member organisations of the Compas Network is to continue the fieldwork needed to support endogenous development at local level. Each of the partners have already established working relationships with a number of rural communities and have agreed to support the local development needs from their own perspective and culture. The major challenges of this work are listed below.

### Methodology development

It was agreed that the members of the Compas network will continue to give special attention to the design, application and assessment of their methodology towards endogenous development. This methodology includes establishing and maintaining supportive relationships within rural communities. This implies taking into account the different traditional leaders and social categories; learning about indigenous practices, values and cosmovision and strengthening cultural identity. It also means identifying strong and weak points of indigenous practices and trying to improve them by experiments based on indigenous criteria and organisation; training field staff in endogenous development methods, and participating in inter-cultural dialogues.

### Theory building

The Compas partner organisations have developed their capacity to build and maintain relationships with the rural communities, based on respect for local culture and complementarity in knowledge and skills. They have been accepted by the rural communities as partners in the process of enhancing the dynamics of the local knowledge systems and decision-making capacities.

Compas partner organisations acknowledge the scientific character of indigenous knowledge systems, based on their own culture-specific paradigms. The term 'scientific' refers to both non-western and western scientific paradigms. Compas challenges the idea that there is only one universal scientific paradigm and knowledge system. Rather, the Compas network recognises a diversity of knowledge systems, and the first objec-



Photo: CIKS

*Ethnoveterinary practitioner, field visit to IDEA*

tive is to overcome the limitations and enhance their potential. On that basis new 'systems of knowing' can be built, and intercultural scientific dialogues can be set up, in order to look for synergy and complementarity between different knowledge systems. This can then be included both in the fieldwork and in the university curriculums.

An additional capacity needs to be built in the future Compas programme, to support experiments on field level and to stimulate theory building of the IK concepts on which they are based. Contacts with UNESCO have lead to plans to form a consortium of 8 universities from the regions where Compas partners are working. This university consortium will have the goal of supporting the empowerment of the communities in their use of indigenous knowledge, and to develop appropriate models for research and education to enhance endogenous development.

Compas acknowledges the fact that cooperation with universities includes the risk of domination by the reductionist views, or that it may loose the community support focus. In order to minimize this risk it will collaborate with those universities that have experience and expertise with endogenous development and have established relations with Compas.

### Overcoming interdisciplinary limitations

Enhancing endogenous development presents a different challenge for each of the partners involved in the network. In the experience of the Compas partners the interests of the rural communities is generally not limited to one particular discipline. Therefore Compas partners take up development activities that emerge as relevant on the basis of the interaction between outsiders and rural people, irrespective of the professional specialisation



Photo: CIKS

*Testing traditional rice varieties, field visit to CIKS*

of the field staff involved.

Specific themes addressed by Compas partners organisations include markets and trade, poverty, gender, youth, securities, climate change, worldviews and cultural identities, indigenous methods, ecotourism, soil conservation, epistemologies, land rights, validation of IK, seeds, pest control, and indigenous communication.

### **Intercultural dialogue**

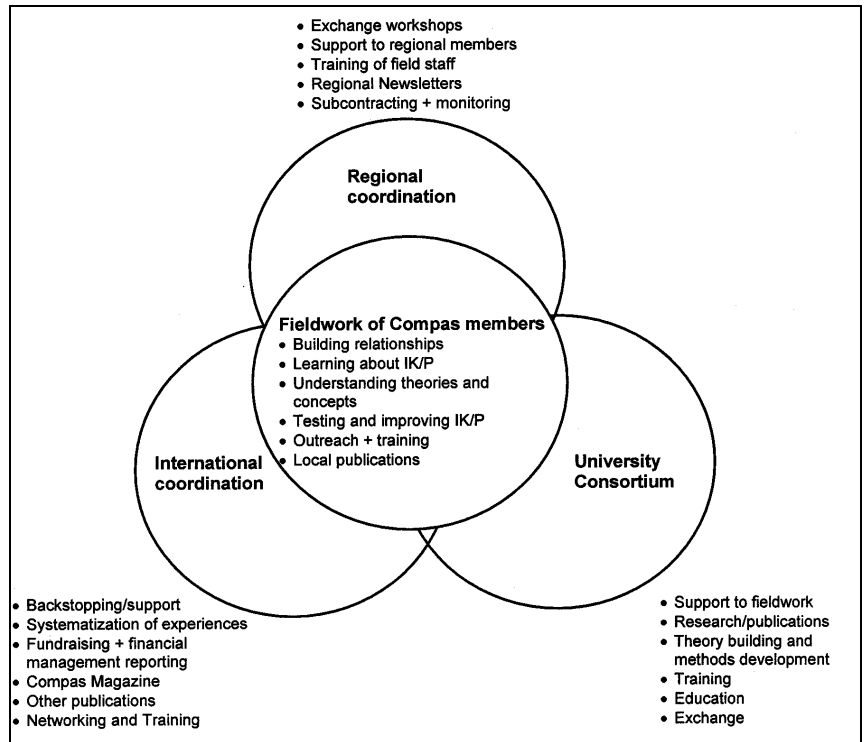
Enhancing the intercultural dialogue, both within the Compas network and with outside agencies, is another major challenge of the Compas programme. Learning experiences can be exchanged, corrected and consolidated, which can be the basis of the formulation of new ways to promote endogenous development at local, national and international levels. Through intercultural dialogue it is possible to identify the critical issues related to the conventional development approach. Compas provides a platform for critical reflection on the experiences with endogenous development and to formulate recommendations for research, development and policy. Moreover, Compas aims to foster changes in the Northern society with inspiring examples from the South, and to enter actively into the policy discussions in the context of development organisations.

The Compas Magazine will continue to be produced and will be more widely distributed, and the web site will be in operation. By documenting innovative development experiences, which highlight the role of culture, spirituality and traditional institutions, the quality of the development programmes of other organisations may be enhanced. The objectives for the Compas Magazine for 2002-2006 are to continue to feed the intercultural dialogue between actors in rural development on basis of the presentation of experiences, critical reflections and discussions of both partner organisations and organisations with similar interests.

Regional and local issues of the Compas Magazine will be produced in local languages by the different regional coordinators and individual partner organisations. Presently the numbers of copies distributed in English are 6000, and 4000 in Spanish. The Asian Compas Magazine, called 'Clarion' is produced by CIKS in India. The University consortium will meet regularly and publish the results of their work in different media.

### **Regional Compas networks**

The present Compas programme was initiated with a fairly centralised set up. In the course of the four years of the present programme, regional coordinators have emerged in Latin America, Southern and West Africa, and Asia. Further sub-regions in Central America and possibly other parts of Asia are under consideration. Therefore, in the coming years the pro-



*Schematic representation of Compas workplan 2002-2006*

gramme management will gradually be taken over by a new international management team, in which the regional coordinators play an important role.

The regional coordinators will subcontract Compas partners in the regions and provide them with the necessary support. The support activities will consist of regional exchange through workshops, meetings, regional newsletters, visits between rural leaders and field staff, and training of field staff in methods of endogenous development. The differences in regional conditions will result in a differentiation of the regional initiatives.

### **The way forward**

It is evident that these plans can only be implemented if the necessary funding is obtained. We are optimistic about the possibilities, but of course we can only get started once we have formal agreements. However, the Compas idea cannot be stopped now. It will develop some way or

other. As one of our Compas partners put it: "If I can go by plane, I will reach my destination very quickly. If I have a car I will get there quickly. Without a motor vehicle I can still use my bicycle, my horse or even my legs. The most important thing is not the means, but the motivation and the right direction."

### **Your engagement**

Subscribers of the Compas Magazine are invited to continue to share their views on and experiences with endogenous development. We are particularly interested to gather your reflections on the following issues: the Compas approach and the experiences of the Compas partners; examples of endogenous development; theories and validation processes of indigenous knowledge systems; and the political implications of working with indigenous knowledge and traditional leaders. We hope to hear from you soon!

*The editors*

