

Pan-African Workshop on ABS and Forests

22nd – 25th June 2009

in partnership with UNEP Nairobi (host)



Background

Forests deserve special attention in the context of ABS capacity development for Africa: First, they harbour the large majority of Africa's terrestrial genetic resources. Forest governance is therefore relevant to ABS discussions, while debates on forest governance can in turn be brought forward by including ABS-related considerations. Second, forests (including agroforestry systems and even trees outside forests) fall into separate categories of land tenure, notably private, communal, open access, and state, resulting in different land tenure systems. Existing forest regulations address non-timber forest products (NTFPs) as commodities in trade and not as "ABS-eligible" genetic resources. Land tenure systems – defining different access rights to timber and NTFP – therefore require special consideration for designing appropriate and practical ABS schemes.

This workshop is part of the ABS Capacity Development Initiative for Africa. Background information about the Initiative and full documentation of previous workshops and events is provided on www.abs-africa.info. The website was launched to provide a platform for information exchange and it is envisaged to develop it further into an ABS Clearinghouse for Africa.

The ABS Initiative has so far convened three pan-African workshops, as well as a number of trainings and workshops with a regional or issue-based focus. Themes covered so far have included the certificate of origin, ABS and bio-trade, as well as communication, education and public awareness.

Objectives of the workshop

Against this background, the objectives of the workshop are to

- Identify aspects of national and international forest governance that may support ABS processes (strategies, methodologies, ...);
- Identify potential benefits of considering ABS for the sustainable governance of forests.
- Identify interfaces and linkages between forest governance and ABS at the national and international levels, with the aim of fostering the dialogue between relevant actors;

Programme overview

The workshop will consist of the following elements of work:

A. Ensuring complementarity of ABS policies and sustainable forest management

Forest governance on the one hand and ABS on the other hand have so far been two separate processes. Integrating them in a concerted approach will contribute to making African ABS policies and practices more effective. In this regard, governance related to the sustainable management of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) is of particular relevance. Participants will examine ABS related aspects such as access rights, valorisation, certification and trade, and identify ways in which these aspects can contribute to the implementation of ABS policies. At present, awareness and clarity regarding procedures and responsibilities for regulating ABS under the different land tenure system of forests is lacking - hindering both access and benefit sharing. Relevant stakeholders and actors at the national levels will be identified in order to foster dialogue among them.

B. Learning from National Forest Programmes: stakeholder involvement

National Forest Programmes are socio-political dialogue processes that involve all relevant stakeholders. As such, they can support the participatory development of national ABS regulations. Lessons can be drawn for the development of benefit-sharing clauses contained in Mutually Agreed Terms, which may involve multiple parties such as the government and indigenous and local communities.

Workshop participants will discuss how relevant stakeholders may be identified, what mechanisms may be applied for involving stakeholders in decision-making, and how conflicting interests may be dealt with. The concept of Traditional Forest Related Knowledge that comprises the rights and needs of indigenous people requires special attention with regard to integration in national ABS governance..

C. Regional processes to improve forest governance: lessons for the international ABS regime

Forest Law Enforcement and Governance and Trade (FLEGT) is high on the political agenda in many regional and international processes. Several African countries explore possibilities to better combat illegal harvest of timber in partnership with trading partners and within the agenda of their regional bodies such as the COMIFAC working group on governance. Some of the issues that can directly inform the ongoing negotiations on an international ABS regime include legality assurance systems, participatory approaches and the treatment of traditional forest related knowledge. These issues will be examined with the aim of further developing existing ideas in the context of the negotiations of the ABS regime.

Products of the workshop

- Recommendations on integrating ABS into forest governance in preparation of
 - the SSC Conference on Sustainable Forest Management (SCBD, Montreal 6-8 July);
 - the World Forest Congress (Buenos Aires 18-23 October).
- Recommendations for stakeholder involvement in ABS processes, drawing on African experiences of forest governance.
- Outline of responsibilities at the national level for linking ABS and forest processes, with the aim of creating coherent governance schemes.

Participants

Up to 50 participants including ABS Focal Points / experts and national forest administrators (preferably as national tandems), representatives of relevant regional and international (research) institutions, NGOs and indigenous and local communities.

Simultaneous interpretation English/French/English will be available for most of the workshop sessions.

Contact

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