

Forum: Legal Committee (GA6)

Issue: Establishing legal framework to protect intellectual property rights and cultural heritage of Indigenous people

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INTRODUCTION

Indigenous populations worldwide are endowed with abundant customary wisdom, artistic manifestations, and literary works transmitted over successive lineages. These priceless legacies encompass everything from agricultural techniques and knowledge of medicinal plants to artistic creations, music, and spiritual rites. However, the cultural heritage and intellectual property rights (IPR) of indigenous groups are subject to exploitation and abuse, in spite of their importance.

The necessity of preserving these rights and making sure that Indigenous people remain in control of their cultural and intellectual property is becoming ever more obvious in a world that is becoming more interconnected by every minute. This calls for the creation of a comprehensive legal framework that respects and takes into account the unique legal traditions and practices of indigenous peoples in addition to being in line with global standards regarding the protection of intellectual property rights.

A multitude of crucial issues need to be covered under this framework, including recognizing and upholding community ownership of traditional knowledge, creating special legal barriers suited to Indigenous environments, and guaranteeing fair sharing benefits from using traditional knowledge and cultural appearances. It must also include indigenous groups in the decision-making procedures, offer legal representation and conflict resolution procedures, and raise public awareness and educate the public on the significance of preserving these cultural treasures.

There is an urgent need for legislative changes and to take steps needed to create a fair and just system that respects and preserves the rich cultural legacy of Indigenous communities around the world by examining the complexities and difficulties involved in defending the intellectual property rights and cultural heritage of indigenous people.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Artistic Manifestations

The artistic manifestation are creative expressions that, through the use of diverse resources, allow people to show their ideas, emotions and the perception they have about the outside world. The artistic manifestation are creative expressions that, through the use of

diverse resources, allow people to show their ideas, emotions and the perception they have about the outside world.¹

Biopiracy

the act of taking living things, especially plants, from an area or taking the knowledge of local people about these living things, and using them or it to make money for a particular company or organization² It often involves the patenting of traditional medicinal plants, seeds, or genetic materials by corporations, depriving Indigenous people of their rights and benefits derived from their traditional knowledge.

Cultural Expression

Traditional cultural expressions (TCEs), also called "expressions of folklore", may include music, dance, art, designs, names, signs and symbols, performances, ceremonies, architectural forms, handicrafts and narratives, or many other artistic or cultural expressions.³

Intellectual Property Rights

The term intellectual property rights (IPR) refers to the legal rights given to the inventor or creator to protect his invention or creation⁴

Indigenous People

Indigenous Peoples are distinct social and cultural groups that share collective ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources where they live, occupy or from which they have been displaced.⁵

Sui Generis Protection

Custom-made legal systems designed specifically to protect traditional knowledge and cultural expressions that do not fit into conventional intellectual property rights categories.⁶ This form of protection recognizes the unique nature of Indigenous knowledge and provides tailored solutions to safeguard it against exploitation.

¹ "What are Artistic Manifestations? Featured Features and Types." *Life Persona*, https://www.lifepersona.com/what-are-artistic-manifestations-featured-features-and-types#google_vignette.

² "BIOPIRACY | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/biopiracy>.

³ "Traditional Cultural Expressions." *WIPO*,

⁴ "Intellectual property rights: An overview and implications in the pharmaceutical industry." *NCBI*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3217699/>.

⁵ "Indigenous Peoples Overview." *World Bank*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples>.

⁶ "Sui Generis Systems for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge." *International Institute for Environment and Development*, 31 October 2005, <https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/G02378.pdf>.

Traditional Knowledge

Traditional knowledge (TK) is knowledge, know-how, skills and practices that are developed, sustained, and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity.⁷

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical Context

Colonial Era (1492-1600s)

Large-scale involvement between European powers and indigenous people began during the colonial era. Following Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas in 1492, European immigrants deliberately stripped indigenous communities of their lands, resources, and traditions through the course of centuries-long colonialism. Native American rights to their own knowledge and ways of life were frequently ignored or explicitly opposed by laws and policies established by colonial powers. The Spanish crown, for instance, passed legislation in 1533 that essentially gave them authority over native territories and resources, including their knowledge and artifacts. The foundation for further exploitation and cultural erasure was built during this period.

The introduction of European illnesses, such as smallpox, measles, and influenza, against which Indigenous populations lacked immunity, was one of the most disastrous effects of colonization. Up to 90% of Native Americans may have died during the first century of contact due to these illnesses, which wiped out Indigenous tribes. This enormous death toll made European dominance and colonial authority easier to impose.

During this era India also saw the beginning of European colonization with the arrival of the Portuguese. In 1498, Vasco da Gama reached Calicut, establishing a direct sea route from Europe to India. This led to the Portuguese dominating the spice trade and setting up several coastal forts and trading posts in India.

Era of Exploitation and Marginalization (1700s-1800s)

Indigenous communities across the world experienced severe discrimination and exploitation during the 18th and 19th centuries. Indigenous populations continued to be displaced, with their lands taken from them, and their cultural identities denied as a result of European colonial expansion. During this time, laws were passed with the intention of forcing Indigenous peoples to fit into colonial society, which resulted in the loss of their native languages and habits.

The Royal Proclamation by King George the 3rd. of 1763 was intended to protect native territories in North America, but it was not effectively enforced, which allowed for additional colonization and displacement. There were concerted campaigns against indigenous peoples' traditional habits in the Americas, Australia, and other colonial territories. Without permission, settlers and scientists often obtained indigenous ideas and cultural ways of living, using them for financial and intellectual advantage.

⁷ "Traditional Knowledge." *WIPO*, <https://www.wipo.int/tk/en/tk/>.

The natural wealth that native tribes had protected for many years was also exploited. There were several widespread practices including biopiracy. This period established a habit of exploitation that has had a long-lasting effect on Indigenous peoples' cultural and intellectual heritage, emphasizing the necessity of modern legal frameworks to address these past injustices.

Early Twentieth Century (1900-1950)

The first attempts to preserve cultural legacy took place in the early 20th century, but they were frequently proved insufficient and Eurocentric. The United States Antiquities Act of 1906 attempted to save archeological sites, but it mostly ignored the sites' religious and cultural importance to Native Americans. Although explicit safeguards for indigenous peoples were still absent, the United Nations' 1948 approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set the foundation for the recognition of cultural rights on a global scale. The necessity for a more inclusive view of cultural and intellectual property rights was brought to light during this time. However, the specific rights of Indigenous peoples were not explicitly addressed, underscoring the need for continued advocacy and legal development in this area.

Growing Awareness and Activism (1960s-1970s)

Indigenous rights saw a turning point in the 1960s and 1970s with a rising recognition of the need of preserving Indigenous intellectual and cultural legacy. Indigenous communities all around the world started to organize at this time and demand the acknowledgment and preservation of their cultural traditions, which led to the birth of Indigenous activism. The American Indian Movement (AIM), which was established in 1968 in the US, promotes Indigenous rights, sovereignty, and the maintenance of traditional customs. Through its action, AIM brought attention to the struggles that Indigenous peoples confront, such as the exploitation of their intellectual and cultural property.

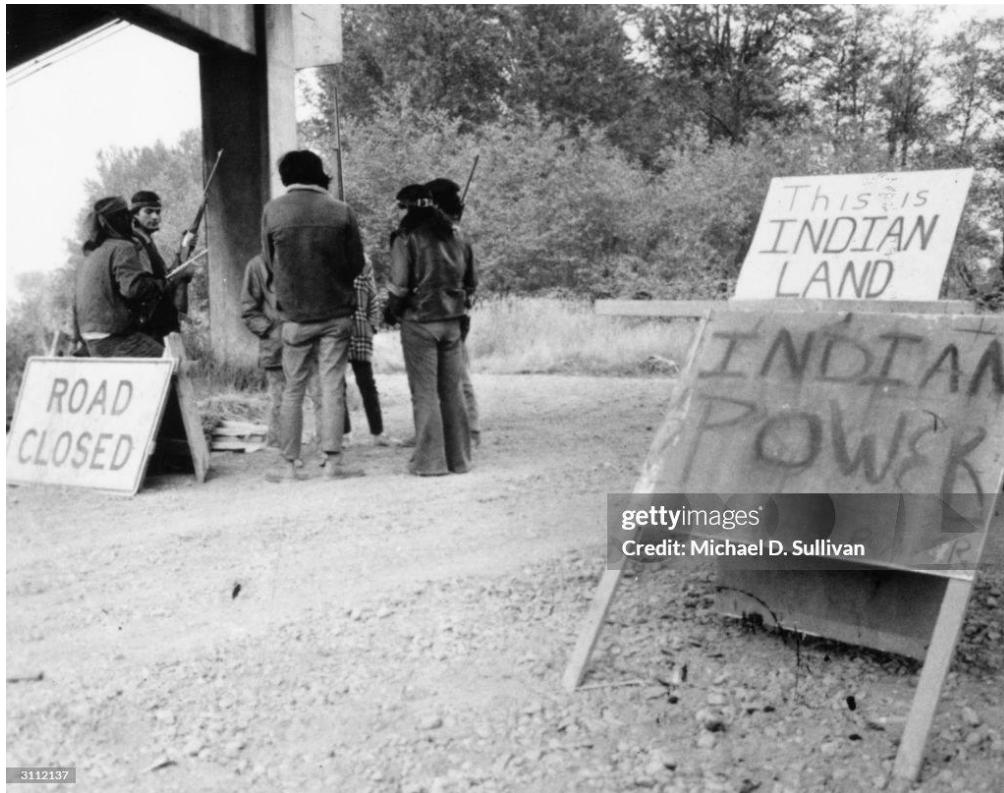


Figure 1: A group of Native Americans protesting about violations of tribal rights along the Columbia River near Seattle

With the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971, Indigenous land claims in the US were finally acknowledged, but with certain restrictions. Although the ANCSA allowed for the land to be transferred to Native Alaskans, it did not address the general problems of cultural heritage or intellectual property, which means that these important locations remain vulnerable.

Globally, the 1970s witnessed the founding of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) in 1975, which rose to prominence as a principal voice in support of Indigenous rights worldwide. By bringing Indigenous concerns to the attention of international organizations, the WCIP was crucial in setting the foundation for later legal frameworks that would acknowledge and safeguard indigenous cultural and intellectual property.

Indigenous peoples' expanding presence in international fora, including the United Nations, was another indicator of this age of growing consciousness and activity. The outcome of these initiatives was the inclusion of Indigenous rights in the discourse around human rights and cultural conservation, paving the way for future decades of more extensive legal safeguards.

International Recognition (1980s-1990s)

Significant progress was made in the late 20th century towards the worldwide acknowledgment of indigenous rights. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) took a major step in addressing the particular requirements of indigenous people when it started organizing talks on the safeguarding of folklore and cultural heritage in 1981. The

International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169, which was adopted in 1989, acknowledged indigenous and tribal peoples' cultural rights and emphasized the necessity of providing legal protection for their customs and traditions.

In 1992 the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) further emphasized the role that traditional knowledge plays in the preservation of biodiversity. The CBD placed a strong emphasis on the necessity of fair benefit-sharing and the inclusion of Indigenous groups in the procedures by which decisions about the use of their traditional knowledge are made. These advancements established the framework for better legal protection of Indigenous communities

Establishing Legal Frameworks (2000-2010)

Significant progress was also made in the early 21st century in creating laws to protect indigenous cultural heritage and intellectual property rights. To address these concerns in a targeted and methodical way, WIPO formed the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge, and Folklore (IGC) in 2000. Since then the committee has played a crucial role in creating draft articles and recommendations to safeguard cultural expressions and traditional knowledge. Additionally, the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 marked a significant milestone. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to Maintain, Control, Protect, and Develop Their Cultural Heritage, Traditional Knowledge, and Traditional Cultural Expressions is also widely acknowledged in the extensive provisions of the UNDRIP for the conservation of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage. The statement indicates an important recognition of Indigenous people's right.

Challenges faced by Indigenous People

Historical Injustices and Land Rights

The loss of homeland is one of the biggest problems affecting Indigenous communities. Indigenous people have been often displaced throughout history as a result of colonization, forced relocation, and government policy. These areas have great spiritual and cultural significance in addition to being essential to their economic survival. Indigenous groups still face prolonged court fights and various push backs from governments in their efforts to get their land rights recognized officially. Indigenous people face threats to their traditional ways of life from resource extraction, exploitation, and environmental degradation if they have no secure land possession.

Socio- Economic Inequalities

Indigenous populations have long endured institutional prejudice and historical marginalization, which have contributed to their socioeconomic struggles. Policies that neglect to consider the particular requirements of Indigenous communities frequently make the gaps in health, education, and unemployment rates worse. For instance, decreased educational success and disengagement among Indigenous students are caused by curriculum that do not represent Indigenous traditions or languages. Furthermore, culturally competent services are frequently absent from healthcare systems, which breeds mistrust and results in underuse of the resources that are available. Many Indigenous communities are located in distant areas, which makes it more difficult for them to obtain chances for employment and other necessities. These socioeconomic disparities are a product of larger social institutions that support the marginalization of Indigenous peoples rather than being the exclusive outcome of individual

causes. In order to address these inequities, specific interventions in the areas of employment, healthcare, and education are necessary, but it also takes a basic rethinking of how to make these institutions fairer and more inclusive for Indigenous communities.

Political Representation and Self Determination

For Indigenous peoples, the right to self-determination and political representation poses critical concerns. Indigenous populations have historically been shut out of local, national, and international political processes and decision-making. Decisions and policies that do not uphold their rights or represent their interests have resulted in their exclusion. Although major obstacles still exist, there has been a rising acknowledgement in recent years of the significance of including Indigenous peoples in government. Numerous Indigenous groups are still fighting for increased self-governance and authority over what they do, which includes managing the natural resources that are located on their grounds. The dismantling of colonial systems and the empowerment of Indigenous communities to make decisions about their future are necessary steps towards achieving true independence.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Australia

Australia has made great progress in acknowledging and defending the Indigenous peoples' cultural heritage and intellectual property rights. The nation has passed a number of laws and regulations with the goal of preserving Indigenous traditional knowledge and art. Guidelines for the protection of Indigenous knowledge and culture are provided by the Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights framework, and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is a resource for study. Furthermore, Australia has tried to implement the UNDRIP's principles into national legislation and was a pioneering proponent of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Canada

Indigenous peoples' rights, particularly those related to their cultural heritage and intellectual property, are fully protected by Canadian law. The nation has put in place a wide range of laws and initiatives aimed at protecting and advancing Indigenous traditions. The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission has emphasized how critical it is to acknowledge and safeguard Indigenous cultural heritage. Through programs like the Indigenous Guardians Program, Canada also fosters the integration of Indigenous knowledge into environmental and resource management. Furthermore, with a focus on safeguarding traditional knowledge and cultural manifestations, Canada is actively seeking to incorporate the UNDRIP principles into its national legislation.

New Zealand

The foundation of New Zealand's stance on Indigenous rights is the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, which was signed by Māori leaders and the British Crown. Notwithstanding disagreements about translation, the Treaty guaranteed the protection of Māori rights and lands. But after the Treaty, huge swathes of Māori land were wrongfully taken or bought, creating enormous social and economic divides. The Waitangi Tribunal's creation in 1975 was essential to redressing these past wrongs. The Tribunal looks into Treaty violations and has helped to broker agreements that give Māori iwi (tribes) back their land, resources, and money. The revival of the Māori cultural and economic life has been greatly aided by these settlements. In 1987, Te

Reo Māori was designated as an official language, signifying the legal acknowledgment of Māori language and culture. Māori representation in governance is ensured through designated Māori electorates in Parliament and consultation frameworks within government agencies. Although there are still obstacles to overcome in order to completely fulfill Treaty duties and guarantee fair benefits from settlements, the Treaty of Waitangi remains a fundamental document for Māori rights, impacting contemporary policies and guaranteeing that Māori viewpoints are central to New Zealand's government.

Cultural Survival

Cultural Survival is a global Non-Governmental Organization that advocates for the rights of Indigenous peoples. It focuses on supporting Indigenous communities in their efforts to protect their lands, languages, cultures, and livelihoods. Cultural Survival works through partnerships with Indigenous communities, providing grants, technical assistance, and advocacy support. The organization also produces the Cultural Survival Quarterly, which highlights issues related to Indigenous rights and cultural heritage. Cultural Survival's programs emphasize the importance of Indigenous-led solutions and the protection of traditional knowledge and intellectual property.

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) started talking about folklore and traditional knowledge protection in the latter half of the 20th century. The goal of the establishment of the WIPO Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) was to provide legal frameworks for these safeguards. Recognizing the unique nature of Indigenous knowledge, WIPO has developed specific initiatives to safeguard traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, and genetic resources. These include facilitating international negotiations to create legal instruments that provide Indigenous communities with the rights to control and benefit from their cultural heritage. WIPO also promotes capacity-building programs, helping Indigenous peoples understand and navigate the IP system to protect their traditional knowledge and cultural expressions from misappropriation.⁸By working closely with Indigenous groups, governments, and other stakeholders, WIPO aims to ensure that the legal frameworks are both respectful of Indigenous rights and effective in preventing the exploitation of their cultural and intellectual assets. This effort is essential for preserving the cultural diversity and heritage of Indigenous communities worldwide.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

⁸ WIPO - *World Intellectual Property Organization*. (n.d.). WIPO - World Intellectual Property Organization. <https://www.wipo.int/portal/en/index.html>

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
3 August 1492	Christopher Columbus sets sail from Spain, leading to European colonization of the Americas.
20 June 1512	The Laws of Burgos are enacted by the Spanish Crown, establishing the rights and duties of Spanish settlers in relation to Indigenous peoples in the Americas.
7 October 1763	The Royal Proclamation of 1763 is issued by King George III, recognizing Indigenous land rights but ultimately limited in protecting Indigenous cultural practices.
8 June 1906	The Antiquities Act is signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt in the United States, primarily protecting archaeological sites without fully considering Indigenous cultural significance.
10 December 1948	Adopted by the UN, laying groundwork for cultural rights recognition but lacking specific protections for indigenous peoples.
1960s-1970s	Global movements advocating for the recognition and protection of indigenous cultural and intellectual heritage gain momentum.
16 November 1972	The World Heritage Convention is adopted, later evolving to include Indigenous participation in site management.
27 June 1989	ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples is adopted by the International Labour Organization.
5 June 1992	The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is opened for signature at the Rio Earth Summit, recognizing the importance of traditional knowledge in biodiversity conservation.
1998-99	WIPO initiates discussions on the protection of traditional knowledge and folklore.

September 2000	WIPO establishes the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge, and Folklore (IGC). ⁹
13 September 2007	UN General Assembly adopts the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including provisions for protecting traditional knowledge. ¹⁰
29 October 2010	The Nagoya Protocol is adopted under the CBD, providing a framework for access to genetic resources and equitable sharing of benefits. ¹¹

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007)¹²

The UN General Assembly approved an international declaration known as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007. Indigenous peoples have rights to culture, identity, language, work, health care, and education, among other things, which are outlined in the UNDRIP. These rights are both collective and individual. Regarding intellectual property rights and cultural heritage, especially Articles 11 and 31 are of significant importance. The right of indigenous peoples to exercise and preserve their cultural traditions and practices, including the preservation of historical and archeological sites and artifacts, is acknowledged in Article 11. Their right to preserve, govern, safeguard, and advance their traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, and cultural heritage—as well as the products of their sciences, technologies, and cultures—is affirmed in Article 31. UNDRIP requires nations to offer efficient mechanisms to protect Indigenous people and ensure their intellectual property rights.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1992)¹³

⁹ *Intergovernmental Committee (IGC)*. (n.d.). <https://www.wipo.int/tk/en/igc/>

¹⁰ *General Assembly Adopts Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples; ‘Major Step Forward’ towards Human Rights for All, Says President | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*. (2007, September 13). <https://press.un.org/en/2007/ga10612.doc.htm>

¹¹ *The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing*. (n.d.). <https://www.cbd.int/abs/default.shtml>

¹²“United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” *the United Nations*, https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf . Accessed 1 August 2024.

¹³“Convention on Biological Diversity – CBD.” *IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, enb.iisd.org/negotiations/convention-biological-diversity-cbd#:~:text=The%201992%20Convention%20on%20Biological.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is a landmark international treaty that aims to conserve biological diversity, ensure the sustainable use of its components, and promote the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. The CBD recognizes the significant role of Indigenous peoples and local communities in biodiversity conservation and the importance of their traditional knowledge. Article 8(j) specifically addresses the need to respect, preserve, and maintain the knowledge, innovations, and practices of indigenous and local communities, as well as to encourage the equitable sharing of benefits derived from their utilization. The CBD underscores the necessity of obtaining prior informed consent from Indigenous peoples before accessing their traditional knowledge and genetic resources.

The 206 Indigenous Peoples' Forum on World Heritage

To make sure that the rights and viewpoints of indigenous peoples are considered when designing, maintaining, and managing World Heritage sites, the Indigenous Peoples' Forum on World Heritage was established. This forum acknowledges the importance of indigenous peoples in protecting cultural and biological diversity as well as the role they play in preserving heritage sites. The statement advocates for the involvement of indigenous groups in heritage conservation decision-making processes and underscores the need to honor and safeguard their customary knowledge and cultural traditions.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

US Antiquities Acts of 1916

There have been efforts made in a range of legal, social, and political sectors to safeguard Indigenous intellectual property rights and cultural heritage, but this is still an issue that is always evolving. Legislative initiatives from the early 20th century, including the US Antiquities Act of 1916, attempted to save archaeological sites but frequently disregarded the cultural value they had for native Americans. This is also the main reason why these actions by governments failed. They didn't take under consideration the values of indigenous people.

International Labour Organization (ILO) agreements Convention 169 (1989)

The recognition of cultural rights in ILO Convention No. 169 (1989) was a landmark achievement, affirming the importance of preserving the cultural identities, traditions, and institutions of indigenous and tribal peoples. This convention explicitly acknowledges their right to self-determination and to maintain their cultural heritage. Despite this significant advancement, implementation has been inconsistent, with many countries struggling to fully integrate these principles into national policies and practices.

The Nagoya Protocol (2010)

The Nagoya Protocol, adopted in 2010, aims to ensure fair sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources, promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. It succeeded in creating a legal framework for access and benefit-sharing, encouraging global cooperation. However, its implementation has faced challenges due to varying national laws and lack of awareness among stakeholders, limiting its overall effectiveness.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Strengthening Legal Frameworks

Developing and implementing binding international treaties specifically designed to protect indigenous intellectual property rights and cultural heritage is a vital step. These treaties should be enforceable and include mechanisms for monitoring and compliance. It is also important to strengthen the implementation of existing treaties such as UNDRIP, the CBD, and the Nagoya Protocol, ensuring that they are more rigorously enforced and that states are held accountable.

Promoting Community Participation and Empowerment

Ensuring that Indigenous communities are actively involved in decision-making processes that affect their cultural heritage and intellectual property is vital. This includes obtaining their prior informed consent for any use of their traditional knowledge. Investing in capacity-building programs for Indigenous communities to help them understand and navigate intellectual property rights and related legal frameworks. This can empower them to protect and manage their cultural heritage more effectively while Supporting community-based management of cultural heritage sites and traditional knowledge systems, which will allow Indigenous communities to have direct control and authority over their cultural resources.

Enhancing Benefit-Sharing Mechanisms

Establishing fair and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms to ensure that Indigenous communities receive appropriate compensation for the use of their traditional knowledge and cultural expressions could be a crucial step. Developing economic opportunities for indigenous communities through sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, and other cultural enterprises that allow them to benefit financially from their cultural heritage. This will be achieved through partnership between the indigenous communities and the governments to create frameworks that ensure fair compensation and enhance the benefit sharing mechanisms.

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WIPO - World Intellectual Property Organization. (n.d.). WIPO - World Intellectual Property Organization. <https://www.wipo.int/portal/en/index.html>