

Case Study

Raika Bio-cultural Protocol

COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

- The Raika are an indigenous pastoral community living in Rajasthan, India.
- They have developed and grazed several breeds of camel, sheep, goat, and cattle for over 700 years on communal lands and in forests.
- Their traditional culture, values and livelihoods are inextricably linked with their animals and surrounding ecosystems.
- The Raika developed a bio-cultural community protocol in June 2009, the details of which are set out below.

KEY ISSUES

A. Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity

- Through customary laws such as temporal and spatial rotation, the Raika's livestock are integral to the healthy functioning of the forest and rangeland ecosystems through fertilization, control of dry grasses and invasive species, and predator-prey dynamics.

B. Traditional Knowledge and Animal and Plant Genetic Resources

- The Raika have traditional knowledge of medicinal plants and veterinary practices.
- Traditional practices such as bull rotation ensure that livestock breeds are genetically robust and well-adapted to the local environment.

C. Prior Informed Consent and Benefit Sharing

- The Raika collectively own their genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, innovations and practices.
- Customary laws and decision-making norms are ensured through local governance systems known as *samaj panchayats*.
- *Samaj panchayats* must be approached for any issues regarding their access rights to grazing areas and outsiders' access to genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge.
- If the Raika decide to grant access to their genetic resources or traditional knowledge, they have the right to negotiate a benefit-sharing agreement that includes mutually agreed terms.

D. Challenges

- Communal grazing lands are being converted to other uses and the Raika's rights of access to the forests have been revoked without consultation or compensation.
- This is resulting in increasing forest fires, invasive pests, and human-wildlife conflict, decreasing livestock populations, genetic resilience and associated traditional knowledge, and the decreasing viability of the very way of life that was integral to biodiversity conservation.

RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

A. The Raika's Rights under National Indian Law

- The right to access and use traditional grazing lands and forests (The Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006).
- The right to conservation and sustainable use of their animals breeds (The Biological Diversity Act, 2002).

- The right to give free, prior and informed consent, to negotiate mutually agreed terms to access genetic resources and traditional knowledge, and to receive fair and equitable benefits arising from their use (The Biological Diversity Act, 2002).
- The right to continue their traditional ways of life, knowledge, innovations, and practices that contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity (The Biological Diversity Act, 2002, and The Biological Diversity Rules, 2004).

B. Additional Community Demands

- The establishment of Biodiversity Management Committees to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of livestock breeds and associated traditional knowledge.
- The securing of the Raika's customary grazing rights to enable the continuance of their traditional ways of life and roles as environmental stewards.

C. Community Commitment

- To uphold their roles as custodians of the forests and grazing lands through the continued use and development of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices that ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and genetic resources.