

# Policy Brief

## Bio-enterprises, Endogenous Development and Well-being

Human well-being implies an overall sense of welfare of people. This holds true at the levels of an individual and of a social group. Recent reports have reiterated the vital relationship between biological resources, well-functioning ecosystems and economic development at multiple levels, particularly emphasizing the vulnerability of local communities (TEEB, 2008<sup>1</sup>). While ways of designing and implementing policies are still being explored, it is increasingly made visible that communities are taking proactive entrepreneurial measures to address their needs, rooted in sustainability concerns as well as cultural assets. This should be seen as a welcome step, and indicates that it is time for policymakers to examine such initiatives to build resilient ecosystems, production processes and vibrant communities.

### Local communities and well-being

At the local level rural people are usually organized into social groups on the basis of shared ethnicity, religion, interests and activities. Their livelihoods often depend on natural resources through primary production activities, indicating a high reliance on ecosystems and bio-cultural resources. Such local people-ecosystem ties have resulted in systems of stewardship, management and governance based on local principles, values and norms, but operate within legal frameworks of their countries. In a globalising economy, increasing pressures on natural resources generally lead to decreased access and benefit for local communities and hence to poverty (MA, 2005<sup>2</sup>). This often results in exploitative and unsustainable use of natural resources by communities, often jeopardizing their livelihood options.

However, there are instances where local communities are increasingly breaking with unsustainable use and are becoming more entrepreneurial with the use of resources. In doing so they are moving beyond sustainable use of environmental goods and services, including different components of biodiversity and ecosystems to business ventures (Suneetha and Pisupati, 2009<sup>3</sup>). In the process, they are reemphasising their rights under international, national and customary laws as well as negotiating and establishing norms that facilitate 'bottom-up' development.

### Exploring the links

The dependency of local communities on biological resources cannot be overemphasized. Biological resources and ecosystems are recognized as means and assets to achieving community well-being. There is a rich literature that demonstrates the many layers of the interdependency between humans and nature (Belair et al<sup>4</sup>, 2010). Subsequently, renewed interest in re-examining the socio-ecological interactions in bio-cultural environments (Verschuuren et al.<sup>5</sup>, 2010) has contributed to a better understanding of environmental, social and political benefits of fostering such interactions. Here, we focus on those ventures that depend on natural resources (bio-enterprises), are primarily community-driven and usually result from attempts at self-determination. This aspiration is cognizant of not just economic development but underpins augmentation of natural productive resources, social harmony and in some cases even spiritual fulfilment. These links need to be strengthened as treating them separately would jeopardise well-



*Kalavathi with daughter*

*Kalavathi, a farmer from Karnataka, India is conserving a popular, traditional rice variety called 'Rajmudi' and cultivates 'Rajmudi' certified organically. Sahaja Organics markets her rice and a wide range of products – twenty different varieties of rice, wheat, millets, pulses, fruits and vegetables, baby foods, processed foods like – pappads, health drink, multi grain flour, value-added products and ready to eat foods. Sahaja works with 140 individual farmers and 10 farmer groups and promotes only organic and traditional crops of rice, millets and pulses. A major success factor of this bio-enterprise relates to the civil society partnership of around 30 organisations engaged in direct marketing. Farmer groups, women groups and consumer groups work together to revive the dying farming culture and community in South India.*

**[www.sahajasamrudha.org](http://www.sahajasamrudha.org)**

*Source: Krishnaprasad, 2010: Sahaja Samrudha case study on bio-enterprise.*



UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY

UNU-IAS

Institute of Advanced Studies

## Policy Brief

being and hamper sustainable and equitable development. For instance, inequitable relationships between the community, state and commercial actors could affect resource access rights of community members and fair flow of benefits.

### In the CBD context

The CBD has brought concerns related to conservation of biological diversity and ecosystems within a utilitarian framework. While the primary focus is on conserving biodiversity, it clearly recognizes measures for sustainable and equitable use in the supply chain of a biological resource (Art 1, Art 15(7)). The CBD also acknowledges the need for respectful interactions with communities with respect to their resources, knowledge, practices and institutions (Art 8j and 10c). This implies that development paths can be charted to address various aspects of human well-being at the level of communities. Obviously, equitable development at the local levels contributes to benefits within other sections of the economy that local communities interact with. This would further prompt best practices in use of natural resources. However, there have been little coordinated efforts to

### The initiative on well-being assessment

Macro indicators on progress on parameters related to well-being tend to be generic and based on aggregate data. In order to ensure that these indicators reflect local visions of well-being from different worldviews, two methodological tools are being developed and employed in this initiative:

1. a framework operationalising the spiritual, material and social aspects of well being and addressing different needs of a community; basic, safety, belonging, self esteem and self actualization. The framework is currently being field tested by communities for its usefulness in their planning and monitoring activities, and how it relates to local contexts.
2. a scoring of success factors when developing bio-enterprises in different ecosystems with various sectoral interests (viz., forestry, agriculture, fishery). 'Success' is defined in terms of the bio-enterprise addressing community needs and well-being, and contributing to endogenous development.

definitions of what constitutes their well-being are often not taken into account. While we defined health security as "improved access to health facilities", some communities have highlighted that they are concerned about "preventive and promotive" aspects of health, and hence focus more on nutritional security in their activities. These insights have prompted them to undertake organic agriculture activities focusing on a diversity of species that are staple to the diet of the community members, and to immediate domestic markets. This results in the realization of better

definitions of well-being

- Synergistic policy planning processes that identify intersectoral benefits and cognizant of cultural, spiritual and religious realities,
- Encourage participatory planning processes and horizontal linkages of communities with local administration

### Autonomy, Equity

A starker example of differences in worldviews relates to the concepts of equity and autonomy in various community contexts. While equitable partnership with other external stakeholders is recognized as an important element of community well-being, intra-community equity in terms of gender parity or non-discrimination is not a uniformly defined concept. In many African cultures, for example, men and women play different roles that are accepted in the community as the norm. An outsider would see inequity because he or she is using

## Endogenous means 'growing from within'

synthesize the various socio-cultural-political and environmental implications of such localized initiatives. Further inquiry on how such local bio-enterprises can be fostered to allow several well-being nodes to flourish is needed.

In this context, UNU-IAS, UNEP, ETC COMPAS and Equator Initiative are working with local communities to bring out different angles of community well-being at the practitioners and policy levels. In an effort to integrate their networks and resources they examine in greater detail the links between biological resource utilization, bio-enterprise development, and community well-being in a process of endogenous development.

### Well-being and worldviews

While several indicators of relevance to policymaking find resonance in the community context, community

incomes, nutritional security and advancement of diversity of crops and related species in the landscape. While income augmentation is mostly a prime driver to establish an enterprise-related activity, it is usually linked to other objectives related to improving the quality of life of communities. The resources required, both in material and in terms of knowledge are available, and need be tapped in a strategic fashion.

### Key areas of policy concern

- Foster pedagogies that allow intercultural understanding of community





different lenses to view the gender relations. For example, traditional queens and their counterpart chiefs in Ghana have different but equally important roles. Whereas the chief is the most visible where it comes to political decision-making, the queen is most visible during king-making of the chief. An outsider with different worldview would immediately question why the chiefs and queens are not sitting side by side during political decision-making. Yet, worldviews are dynamic and can be influenced to address negative aspects, if approached from a culturally sensitive perspective. This is what is entailed in strengthening the endogenous development (ED) process in communities. Strengthening ED means facilitating cultural interfacing that could result in a new but acceptable worldview to the community.

Some communities have gained from women-led initiatives or have realized rights to certain degrees of autonomy and self-determination within or independent of state governance

## Bioenterprises are defined as community-driven enterprises that depend on natural resources and result from attempts at self-determination.

systems. This generally involves some form of rights based movements that require the involvement or consent of all members in their community (Suneetha and Pisupati, *ibid*). Ensuring a balance between universal concepts of equity and local worldviews can be practically challenging. While communities would prefer to assert their rights of autonomy and governance over their resources and activities, countries seek to ensure that these are subsumed within national priorities. The degree of autonomy legally deployable by communities then plays out in terms of assertion of human rights, rights to resources, native lands and ecosystems and traditional knowledge and practices. Communities engaged in bio-enterprises identify easy access to biological resources, ecosystems, and knowledge as important factors in the establishment of an enterprise activity. Most communities further demonstrate a preference for balancing reciprocity relationships with non-



In a reciprocity economy, non-monetary exchange of goods is of vital importance

monetized economies, where practicable. An enabling policy would therefore need to involve communities in the management of natural resources and define their own development paths, reflecting their well-being needs. In some cases, communities may not acknowledge

- Encourage public/ community-civil society-community-private sector linkages and co-operative discussions.
- Enable appropriate market support and linkages while considering subsistence and alternative economies
- Clear policies and regulations for natural resource governance and management, that are cognizant of the culture and interest of the local communities tangible and intangible rights
- Invest in adequate awareness raising on policy support programmes for development of community-based bio-enterprises and related initiatives

policies supportive of community level activities due to poor implementation or inadequate efforts by the regulators to disseminate information. The role of the state in fostering development is therefore considered as necessary, but often also irrelevant by most communities. On the other hand, communities value collaborations with civil society and NGOs which may assist in enabling communities to clarify, communicate and develop their strengths and opportunities beyond their local contexts. This is of particular importance for scouting and developing linkages with markets and for signalling inputs and actors in the potential market chain of the enterprise.

### Key areas of policy concern

- Facilitate access rights to resources, natural and infrastructural.
- Ensure a process of endogenous development carried by the broader community

### *Social and spiritual indicators*

Customary values, beliefs and norms inform local peoples' well-being and the process of priority-setting in bio-enterprise development. Generally, all of them try to assert their cultural and spiritual mores. Even when the activities of local and indigenous peoples are inclusive of modern systems, processes and technologies, they generally are linked to the underlying principles behind such mores. Linkages with modern systems can be seen in production activities for profit, catering to external markets, use of inputs such as new seeds, or credit systems—all of which are usually considered exogenous to their contexts. However, these may well fit with the traditional ways of seed development, trade and subsistence economies that are cognizant of the spiritual and social values of a

community. This also indicates that while community actions and thinking in their quest for development are dynamic and constantly evolving, there is a strong sense of 'rootedness' that guides their actions. This 'rootedness' is steeped in cultural values and a sense of identity. For instance, the preferential maintenance of sacred areas over other land uses underlines the importance of these areas in determining local communities' relationships to their land and resources. Other examples such as the practice of traditional arts or crafts and similar also relate to this sense of identity. Appropriate recognition of this constitutes a major determining factor in communities' receptivity to decisions.

### Key areas of policy concern

- Acknowledgement of community institutions in the management of resources and their governance roles
- Integration of cultural rootedness and worldviews in formal and informal learning
- Study social and environmental benefits of an economy of reciprocity

### Reciprocity economy in Sipe Sipe, Bolivia

Each year, on the 7th Friday after Easter a special fair takes place in the small town of Sipe Sipe near Cochabamba, Bolivia. Farmers from different agricultural ecosystems exchange their recently harvested produce in three ways: *cambiacuy* – based on affinity with a strong spiritual and emotional dimension, in which the produce is handed over as a gift to satisfy and please the receiving family in the confidence that a gift will be given in return; *trueque* – barter, less spiritual than *cambiacuy* and the individuals concerned do not necessarily know each other; *purchase-sale* – exchange of goods in which elements of a market logic, especially money is included, though some indigenous Andean features such as 'liking each other' and 'bargaining' are present. Money allows farmers to buy items like sugar, cooking oil, radio batteries, pay for transport and buy *chicha*, the local corn beer. In the Andean culture, there are three levels of the reciprocity economy: direct social relations, e.g. joint community work or affiliation to a cooperative; symbolic reciprocity, e.g. seeking a balance between opposite realities: day and night, life and death, and has human values such as friendship, trust, justice and equality; expressions of commonality, e.g. poetry, song, dance, festivals and forms of art that stress the commonality. Sources: **AGRUCO case studies on Sipe Sipe**; Dominique Temple, 2003. **La Teoría de la Reciprocidad**. La Paz, Bolivia: Padep/GTZ.

### Forikrom Ecotourism bioenterprise, Ghana

Forikrom is a farming community situated in Ghana, governed by traditional authorities: chief, queen mother and the council of elders. The community has bio-cultural sites such as shrines, royal cemetery, holy mountains, holy caves and a bat sanctuary. Indigenous fruit trees and plants as well as wildlife such as monkeys, rabbits, birds, tortoise are found here. CIKOD, as part of the ETC COMPAS programme on endogenous development, facilitated a resource mapping in 2004, which also made the community and government agencies aware of the value of sacred sites. A group of organic farmers received support from UNDP-GEF to add value to the natural sites and make them attractive to tourists: creating paths, documenting the history and significance of the sites. The Holy caves were the most popular and received about four hundred visitors per month who come to hold prayer camps there. The community wanted to reclaim and revitalize their ancient ancestral caves and sacred sites as the legacy of the present generation for the generations yet unborn. The elders made by-laws to keep off encroachers; the youth and women provided manual labour and volunteered as tour guides. The spiritual leaders provided guidance on spiritual issues. The community now conserves their biocultural assets, safeguards their spiritual well-being and that of visitors before considering direct economic gains. Source: Guri, B. 2010. **The guardians of the sacred caves and sites of Forikrom** – enterprise development, benefit sharing and bio-cultural resource conservation. Case study for UNU-UNEP-ETC COMPAS well-being assessment.

Currently, several environmental policies to expand conservation activities (e.g., REDD, CDM, etc) are being designed and implemented with high cost projections. Community bio-enterprises could provide a viable and effective option to achieve these objectives. However, this would require a sensitive and clear policy approach that is mindful of local

priorities and aspirations.

### References

- <sup>1</sup>TEEB, 2008, The economics of ecosystems and biodiversity-An interim report, European Community
- <sup>2</sup>Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005. Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis. Island Press, Washington, DC.
- <sup>3</sup>Suneetha MS and Balakrishna Pisupati, 2009, Learning from the Practitioners: Benefit Sharing Perspectives from Enterprising Communities, UNEP and UNU-IAS.
- <sup>4</sup>Bélair C., Ichikawa K., Wong B.Y. L., and Mulongoy K.J. (Editors, 2010, Sustainable use of biological diversity in socio-ecological production landscapes. Background to the 'Satoyama Initiative for the benefit of biodiversity and human well-being.' Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal. Technical Series no. 52: 1-181
- <sup>5</sup>Verschuuren, B., R. Wild, J. McNeely, and G. Oviedo (eds.), 2010. Sacred Natural Sites, Conserving Culture and Nature. Earthscan, London.

*This policy brief is written by Suneetha M. Subramanian (subramanian@ias.unu.edu), Wim Hiemstra (w.hiemstra@etcnl.nl) and Bas Verschuuren (b.verschuuren@etcnl.nl). Valuable comments on earlier versions were received from Unnikrishnan P.M. (FRLHT), Balakrishna Pisupathi (UNEP) and Bern Guri (CIKOD). The policy brief reviews case studies on bioenterprises from NGOs, including 'PLANT', India, on fisheries; Sahaja Samrudha, India on direct marketing of organic products; SAEDP, Zimbabwe on market gardening; CIKOD, Ghana, on ecotourism; and COMPAS Sri Lanka on well-being assessment. This policy brief can be downloaded from the following websites: [www.compasnet.org](http://www.compasnet.org), [www.equatorinitiative.org](http://www.equatorinitiative.org), [www.ias.unu.edu](http://www.ias.unu.edu), [www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org)*