

Action Group on Knowledge Systems and Indicators of Wellbeing



Meeting Overview

April 21-22, 2018

The American Museum of Natural History, New York City, USA

Acknowledgements: We wish to extend our sincerest appreciation to the funders and organizing partners who made this meeting possible



The Action Group on Knowledge Systems and Indicators of Wellbeing

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Executive Summary

The Action Group on Knowledge Systems and Indicators of Wellbeing (hereafter, ‘the Action Group’) meeting in New York City engaged nearly 100 participants in a cross-cutting exploration of knowledge and wellbeing themes in a forum that encouraged collective sharing and learning to build and support a community of practitioners. Meeting participants included Indigenous Peoples and local community (IPLC) members, policy makers, researchers, and conservation professionals representing diverse geographic areas including Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Europe, and the Americas.

Over the course of two days, the group covered a broad range of community, national, and global scale initiatives involving the multifaceted connections between people and place, nature and culture. Through a combination of interactive sessions and panel presentations, we learned about the diverse challenges and successes experienced in developing wellbeing indicators across regions and scales. Each case study shared during the Action Group meeting contributed important content to the group’s knowledge base, providing specific examples and experiences for practitioners to draw from to inform their respective work.

Emergent themes included:

- The importance of:
 - “Weaving knowledges” in decision making. Using culturally relevant concepts and terminology like “weaving” provides equal acknowledgement and respect for diverse knowledge systems, which might not be adequately addressed when using terms such as “integrating”.
 - Sharing stories and exchanging local experiences with monitoring and reporting tools to determine which tools are working, where they are working, which tools can be adjusted to better meet local needs, and how these experiences can inform best practices.
 - The critical role of consultation and free prior and informed consent to foster inclusion of Indigenous and local values and priorities in decision-making, including in policy and legislative spheres.
 - Collaboration across community, national, and global decision-making arenas to strengthen the impact of Indigenous Peoples and local community initiatives.
- While discussions on traditional knowledge often focus on knowledge transmission, it is also important to consider the place-based mechanisms and processes that contribute to an IPLC’s traditional knowledge system and allow it to remain a dynamic and integral part of the community.
- Connection to place and secure tenure to land served as indicators and as key enabling factors of the two-way flow of benefits across human and environmental wellbeing.
- Indicators encompassing food sovereignty were seen as central to Indigenous and local wellbeing. Examples included access to traditional food sources and access to sufficient quality and quantity of culturally important food resources.

Meeting participants shared and discussed indicators of wellbeing as experienced and understood by their communities and/or respective groups. Given that monitoring and reporting needs and preparedness varied substantially across groups, some individuals shared existing metrics in use by their programs while others shared broader reflections on the factors that contribute to wellbeing in their community. These indicators are described in detail within the body of the summary.

Moving forward, the Action Group is intended as a forum for sustained collaboration and as a community of practice by enabling participants to learn from and collaborate with the network of practitioners established at this meeting. Building upon existing efforts, the Action Group will continue to advance the development of products and deliverables including developing an online collection of tools and resources, examining national and global reporting processes, exploring local-level indicators, and facilitating an exploration of existing tools. We anticipate that the sub-group work, in particular the rate of progress towards specific deliverables, may vary depending on the degree of support available for coordination and product development. We welcome all Action Group participants and any other interested parties to identify other themes and products that might be of interest and we ask for your assistance leading and contributing to products and follow-up meetings as we continue to explore ways to maintain the momentum of the Action Group.

Background on the Action Group

Through a series of virtual and in-person meetings, the Action Group on Knowledge Systems and Indicators of Wellbeing aims to engage Indigenous peoples and local community (IPLC) representatives, and those who work with IPLCs to:

1. Build a community of practitioners

Exchange knowledge between and within Indigenous and local community groups, research, and policy communities who are using, or would like to use, indicators that emphasize the links between cultural and biological diversity; and

2. Represent local values and viewpoints in the international arena

Explore how to support efforts to better represent local values and viewpoints in international indicator arena—including ways to modify indicators or reporting on indicators to better capture cultural context.

The Action Group met virtually in January 2018 to outline the objectives of the group and set the course for an in-person meeting in New York City in April 2018. The January meeting defined a set of ‘sub-groups’ to steer the development of key products of the Action Group. The sub-groups included:

- Exploration of local-level indicators
- Navigating national and global reporting processes
- Developing a comprehensive list of existing materials and identify missing tools/gaps in resources
- Facilitating an in-depth exploration of a set of existing tools

The April 2018 Action Group meeting provided an important face-to-face opportunity to share experiences on knowledge and wellbeing themes across our diverse network of practitioners.

The overarching objectives of the April 2018 meeting were to:

- Facilitate knowledge exchange on wellbeing indicators that embrace the links between biological and cultural diversity
- Build communities of practice to share experiences in developing and using indicators that emphasize cultural contexts
- Share how communities communicate amongst themselves and with others regarding how things are going and what planning needs to happen to meet needs
- Explore synergies and gaps between local and global indicator systems and identify ways to reinforce synergies and address gaps

Meeting Synopsis

Day 1

The first day of the meeting focused on interactive sessions on wellbeing and indicators of wellbeing in each of the participants' respective geographic areas, communities, and/or organizations. This included small-group sessions oriented around exchange, such as a morning participant introduction exercise and a knowledge and cultural exchange. Formal sessions included a panel on indicators of wellbeing, where panelists shared narratives and indicators from their place.

Day 1 panel presentations included brief introductions to indicators and factors of wellbeing used in local programs including:

- Australia's RIMReP Integrated Monitoring, Modeling, and Reporting Program – Indigenous Heritage Expert Group
- The Cook Islands' Marae Moana Marine Park

Presenters also shared broader reflections on community-level indicators of wellbeing in:

- Buryatia, Siberia
- Mongolia
- Guyana
- China (specifically Tibetan China)
- Bolivia (the Aymara Community)
- Russia (the Itelmen Community of Kamchatka)
- Kenya (the Masai Community)
- North America (The Blackfoot Nation)

Here we highlight several themes that emerged during Day 1 panel presentations and interactive sessions. A more complete list is included in Appendix B.

During the morning participant introduction exercise, we asked participants to introduce themselves to new colleagues focusing on a series of prompts including the question, "What does wellbeing look like in your place?" Responses included:

- Lona and Tyson Running-Wolf discussed the importance of bundles to Blackfoot peoples. Bundles, held by a designated carrier, are a set of sacred items that contribute to wellbeing. A society that has not been in existence for over 100 years—built around the buffalo—is coming back with the return of buffalo to the landscape. They also noted that repatriating bundles and belongings from Museum archives contribute to wellbeing.
- IPLC participants who had not met before discussed how crucial it is to ascertain their rights to land as Indigenous Peoples. Conservation outcomes were not the primary focus or goal. First, IPLCs have to legalize their right to land, and then conservation or other stewardship systems could follow.
- One main tool to improve wellbeing is exchange regarding knowledges and practices in place. Knowledges are grounded in the land, and knowledges could be transmitted only if taught/expressed on the land. Visits to other sites are rich opportunities for learning and sharing.



During the afternoon’s interactive Knowledge and Cultural Exchange, we asked participants to indicate things they heard or learned by writing their responses on a notecard and posting it on a central wall.

Responses included:

- Two-way indicators are about sharing not just knowledge but worldviews and ways of knowing and being between Indigenous and western systems
- Importance of taro across Africa/Pacific/Surinam geographies and the diversity of names in different countries/communities
- Indigenous ways of life may be determined by the behavior of one species and the loss of that species is devastating for that people, for example buffalo in Blackfoot Country (present-day Montana, North America)

Other themes discussed on Day 1 included:

- Indicators that do not resonate with communities might be considered “empty” indicators (e.g., poverty/financial wealth). What instead might be some of the “real” indicators?

Day 2

The second day of the meeting focused on the exploration of linked biological and cultural indicators in the context of national and global-level reporting. Day 2 included a panel on using wellbeing or other linked biological and cultural indicators in national and global reporting in addition to two interactive ‘World Cafe’ sessions—in-depth roundtable discussions on a variety of topics identified through a pre-meeting survey.

Day 2 panel presentations included overviews and general reflections on:

- The Local Biodiversity Outlook
- The Indigenous Navigator Tool
- Vanuatu Indigenous Land Defense Desk (VILDD) Pilot of the Melanesian Wellbeing Indicators
- Fiji National-level Indicators of Wellbeing
- Wellbeing Indicators of the Association of Indigenous Village Leaders (VIDS) of Suriname, South America
- Kyrgyzstan Happiness Criteria
- Wellbeing through Jyrgalism Movement in Kyrgyzstan, including the Happy Planet Index and World Rating of Charity
- The UNESCO/CBD Joint Programme on the Links Between Biological and Cultural Diversity
- The UN Convention on Biological Diversity Traditional Knowledge Program
- UNESCO’s Cultural Diversity Indicators



Here we highlight several themes that emerged on Day 2. A more complete list is included in Appendix C.

During the World Cafe sessions, participants were asked to discuss challenges surrounding their topic, opportunities for immediate, medium, and long-term action, and effective ways to move forward on the topic including identifying who can support these efforts. A more complete list is included in Appendix D and Appendix E.

Challenges

There are limited opportunities for sharing knowledge within and across community groups, as well as with governments and other organizations.

Lack of recognition of tenure rights and ownership by governments severs connections between people and place.

Biological and cultural diversity are often considered in isolation in international conventions.

It is difficult to balance qualitative and quantitative indicators in reporting.

How can one weave qualitative information, like the vivid descriptions of land as shared in community narratives, alongside quantitative indicators, like global targets for percent protected area coverage?

How does one express cultural elements that cannot be expressed verbally?

Need for simple, globally relevant (and useful for IPLC) indicators that are culturally sensitive and work at multiple scales.

Solutions

Require cultural and environmental government branches (e.g., ministries) to collaborate together in national-level reporting.

Create “awareness workshops”—provide trainings and other cultural activities to attract youth to traditional culture.

Semi-quantitative indicators could be an appropriate way to address the subjective and culture-dependent nature of wellbeing. For example, “Trends (positive or negative, slow or fast) in cultivation and use of traditional medicinal plants”.

Create opportunities for physical visits to other geographic areas including exchange-oriented meetings (e.g., recommendation for Central Asia Action Group meeting).

Who can support efforts to move forward

IPLCs can develop case studies with their own community-driven indicators.

National governments can organize workshops and side events to share community-level experiences with indicators.

Academic and research organizations can lend support by amplifying the importance of wellbeing and other linked biological and cultural indicators, in particular those developed by and for IPLCs.

Other themes discussed on Day 2 included:

- Biological and cultural diversity are inseparable and should be considered holistically in both institutional arrangements and in the operationalization and reporting on those arrangements. Indicators can lose meaning or relevance when compartmentalized as “biological”, “cultural”, or “economic”.
- Indicators at the national and global level can be perceived as a moving target for local communities because community members are required to shift and adjust their actions and priorities to meet new reporting requirements. Reoccurring review processes are necessary and indicators should be tested and evaluated at multiple scales before new ones are created.
- Groups using monitoring and reporting indicators should focus on the development and implementation of indicators besides/beyond ones that focus solely on material factors. One alternative is the moral indicators example from Kyrgyzstan.

Over the course of both days, a number of linked biological and cultural indicators emerged during conversations and presentations. Some were broader reflections on place-based wellbeing, which can be useful to inform subsequent monitoring and reporting, while others are currently being monitored by communities. A few examples are highlighted below; please see Appendix F for a longer list of indicators mentioned.

- People who *should* know, including youth, recognize and use traditional names, uses of plants/ animals, and follow traditional occupations
- Local values surrounding traditional practices are known and respected
- Degree to which national values acknowledge and respect local traditions
- Indigenous customary lands are able to provide for adequate resources for communities to support their cultural needs
- Place-based knowledge/practices are incorporated in educational curriculum



Next Steps

As one of the main products of the Action Group, the online directory (currently under development) will serve as a content hub for sharing existing materials on community-based and culturally relevant monitoring, assessment, and management of resources and wellbeing, with a specific focus on approaches that link biological and cultural indicators. Resources gathered to date include frameworks, guides, case studies, and practical tools that can be useful to communities as well as many of the national institutions, researchers, and organizations that work with communities. For example:

- *“Conceptualizing and operationalizing human wellbeing for ecosystem assessment and management” (Breslow et al. 2016)*—A conceptual framework of human wellbeing designed to guide the development of indicators for ecosystem-based management.
- *“An indigenous community-based monitoring system for assessing forest health in New Zealand” (Lyver, P.O.B., et al. 2017)*—Community-based indicators and metrics used by Maori in New Zealand to monitor forest health and community wellbeing.
- *“Indicators Relevant for Indigenous Peoples: A Resource Book” (Stankovitch, 2008)*—A guidebook to assist and encourage development of social and environmental indicators relevant to Indigenous Peoples, with more participation from Indigenous Peoples and organizations.
- *“Community Wellbeing in Biocultural Landscapes Are they Living well?” (Verschuuren, B., et al. 2014)*—Using case studies this book presents different approaches to wellbeing measurement and reflections on the applicability of these experiences. It shows how community wellbeing can be measured using indicators chosen by local people to reflect the worldviews of their culture.

The Directory will be made available to the public on the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation (CBC) website, as a collaborative and dynamic platform that will continue to grow with time, and anyone will be able to submit additional resources. While the CBC is hosting the online collection of resources, other partners may wish to take the lead in developing additional functions that contribute to the objectives of the Action Group.

In addition to the directory, other sub-groups will continue to build out products in their thematic areas. For example, the national and global reporting process group are working on a ‘concept map’ of global indicators of wellbeing across selected institutions. This product is based on sub-group participant responses to the following prompts: What existing national/global reporting processes and indicators are currently in place for your institution related to Indigenous and local wellbeing? What are the gaps for including more attention to locally appropriate biocultural indicators of wellbeing?

Finally, some of the key insights that emerged from discussions during the Action Group meeting will be submitted to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as input on possible elements of a future programme of work on Article 8(j) (traditional knowledge, innovations, and practices) under the post-2020 biodiversity framework. These inputs, requested by the CBD Secretariat, will be compiled for consideration at the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to facilitate discussions on ways to achieve full integration of Article 8(j) and provisions related to IPLCs in the work of the CBD.

In closing, consistent with our meeting objectives, the April 2018 meeting provided an important opportunity for participants to engage in an informational exchange on knowledge systems and indicators of wellbeing. Through panel presentations and discussion-oriented sessions, we supported the development of a community of practice who share experiences in developing and using indicators that emphasize cultural contexts. There were a number of topics covered over two short days. While a few of the World Café discussions touched upon communication methods and preferences within and across communities, and comparing local and global indicators systems, these remain areas that could be further explored in the future through sub-group work or other related efforts. We, the organizers, look forward to the development of future products and future opportunities to collaborate with this network of practice.



Appendices

Appendix A: The CBC organizers would like to extend our sincerest appreciation to the funders and organizing partners who made this meeting possible:

The Christensen Fund

The Trust for Mutual Understanding

Nia Tero

UNESCO-CBD Joint Programme on the Links Between Biological and Cultural Diversity

Centre for Ecological Research, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Center for Support of Indigenous Peoples of the North

GEF Small Grants Program

Forest Peoples Programme

Indigenous Women and Biodiversity Network

Indigenous Peoples Major Group for Sustainable Development

International Indian Treaty Council

IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management Thematic Group on Cultural Practices and Ecosystem Management

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

SwedBio at Stockholm Resilience Centre

Te Kopu - Pacific Indigenous & Local Knowledge Centre of Distinction



Appendix B: Themes discussed over the course of Day 1 included:

Indigenous ways of life may be determined by the behavior of one species and the loss of that species is devastating for that people, for example buffalo in Blackfoot Country (present-day Montana, North America)

Land tenure assures local rights and is the first condition of wellbeing and conservation

Two-way indicators are about sharing not just knowledge but worldviews and ways of knowing and being between Indigenous and western systems

Scales of measurement: wellbeing will be defined differently according to how it's measured.

Indicators that do not resonate with communities might be considered “empty” indicators (e.g., poverty/financial wealth). What instead might be some of the “real” indicators?

Connections between people and place are central to wellbeing across the globe, but these connections are tricky to measure and report on.

Food and cultural sovereignty are key aspects of wellbeing at the community level, in particular a recognized responsibility for all food grown and the critical importance of culturally valued species.

Cooperation across local, national, and global scales is essential, especially when attempting to secure traditional systems.

Appendix C: Themes discussed during the various sessions of Day 2 included:

Biological and cultural diversity are inseparable and should be considered holistically in both institutional arrangements and in the operationalization and reporting on those arrangements. Indicators can lose meaning or relevance when compartmentalized as “biological”, “cultural”, or “economic”.

Indicators can be used for both strategic and tactical purposes – both to achieve an aim (e.g., improved measurement) and also to protect against any undesirable external drivers.

Indicators at the national and global level can be perceived as a moving target. Reoccurring review processes are necessary and indicators should be tested and evaluated at multiple scales before new ones are created.

Indicator processes must be community driven, contextual, and holistic.

IPLCs need greater visibility in national reporting arenas. Only 20% of the 196 CBD member states report on matters related to IPLCs, free prior informed consent, and traditional knowledge, and participation of IPLCs in the discussions relating to their livelihoods, lands, and culture.

Solutions that span different geographies, sectors, and scales are needed to identify how to link local experience with global indicators, while maintaining the richness and meaningful value of those indicators.

As the role of the global political arena is to inform national-level actions, it will be important to explore ways to have an internationally comparative indicator set, while maintaining the richness of Indigenous experiences.

The importance of supporting and enabling “boundary spanners” – Indigenous Peoples and local community members who go to different forums to raise their community’s goals and priorities, and then return home to report back.

"Happy is not he who is rich, but rich is he who is happy!"

Appendix D: Challenges encountered around the topic of monitoring and reporting using indicators of wellbeing or other linked biological and cultural indicator (as described in World Cafe sessions) included:

Biological and cultural diversity are often considered in isolation in international conventions

It is difficult to balance qualitative and quantitative indicators in reporting.

- How can one integrate the voice of communities alongside the value of quantitative data?
- How does one express the oral elements that cannot be expressed verbally?

Land-use priorities and corruption remain a challenge across several regions.

Limited recognition of traditional authorities and their role: when governments do not recognize tenure rights and ownership, connections between people and place are severed.

Economic benefits can result in tradeoffs including urban drift, separation of values across generations, and negative impacts on cultural identity and environmental quality.

Disconnection from place disrupts cultural transmission across generation including knowledge of sacred sites as well as opportunities to see and engage in traditional practices, cultural events and festivals, and other cultural gatherings.

There are limited opportunities for sharing knowledge within and across community groups, as well as with governments and other organizations.

It is difficult to find and establish good faith between parties.

The SDGs are still being operationalized at country levels and might be a good opportunity for including local indicators

Indicators for important values and concepts to IPLCs, like spirituality, are difficult to define. It is important to work from values first and then define the indicators.

There are examples of use of biocultural indicators that are successful, including the Arctic Council which has added indicators to their Human Development Index surveys, including self-determination, extent of food from traditional sources, a cultural vitality index, and a community wellbeing index.

Appendix E: Solutions to these challenges (also as described in the World Cafe sessions) included:

Create “awareness workshops”: provide trainings and other cultural activities to attract youth to traditional culture.

Secure land rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Identify/evaluate models of development that take into account culture, ancestral values, and traditions.

NGO/Donor interventions should incorporate metrics for success based on indicators of wellbeing that address linked biological and cultural elements.

Support immediate and tight knit support systems including opportunities for elders to teach about language and culture, cultural immersion in schools, and formal and informal networking in communities.

Use media, websites (or other online platforms) to exchange knowledge about diverse cultural values, priorities, and needs.

Use legislation as a means to protect the rights of Indigenous groups, culture, and biodiversity.

Move away from a hierarchical approach with weak connections between layers and move towards a multi-layered “round table” format with all stakeholders sitting around the table and Indigenous Peoples, values, and knowledge at the core of this mechanism.

Require cultural and environmental government branches (e.g., ministries) to collaborate in national-level reporting.

Share local experiences to influence global frameworks.

Ensure that resulting products respect and work with the community, including implementing cultural protocols on free prior and informed consent, consultation, and establishing partnerships

Include cultural indicators in reporting processes, also taking into consideration how they achieve SDGs.

Create opportunities for physical visits to other geographic areas including exchange-oriented meetings (e.g., recommendation for Central Asia Action Group meeting).

Require some use of local indicators by researchers wanting to do surveys with IPLCs (as required in Vanuatu for research permissions)

Community-based monitoring of indicators can open up partnerships between IPLCs and governments

Appendix F: Example indicators of place-based wellbeing shared throughout Day 1 and Day 2 included:

Traditional species return to their traditional lands

Community wellbeing (and happiness) in pastoral communities is exemplified when children sing songs to their favorite cow and/or when self-sufficiency is not just one cow per family but a thousand

Traditional societal roles return

Children can learn how to swim the way previous generations have learned

Local values surrounding traditional practices are known and respected

Fabric for traditional clothing is shared across the community (tied closely to maintenance of oral history)

Visually-oriented indicators: map of pastoral lands, image of traditional harvest/preparation methods

People who should know, including youth, recognize and use traditional names, uses of plants/ animals, and follow traditional occupations

Knowledge of seasonal linkages between plants and harvest times

Number of traditions/connections being rebuilt/reconnected, number of sacred sites, number of native speakers, number of traditional practices (or threats to practices)

Degree to which national values acknowledge and respect local traditions

Indigenous customary land can provide for adequate resources for communities to support their cultural needs

Place-based knowledge/practices are incorporated in educational curriculum

Participation of women in decision making, especially with transfers of knowledge to young people

Communities are able to use resources in a way that sustains them, demonstrating independence from a cash economy

Time spent (ca. %) in environments that are suitable for learning traditional knowledge (discussed in the context of nature, fields, pastures, garden, traditional indoor places, but NOT: industrial places, city centers, abroad).