



Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples (IKAP) Information Sheet

Indigenous communities have the knowledge and capacity to manage our natural resources and adapt to changing conditions. This is demonstrated by our long-term (over hundreds of years) occupancy of our lands. Indigenous Knowledge is an expression of cultural diversity and part of the world's cultural heritage, and is worth preserving for future generations, both as an expression of indigenous identity and as indigenous peoples' contribution to more effective and ethical development. Indigenous Knowledge is a valuable resource which is resilient and adaptable in facing present and future challenges.

Who are Indigenous Peoples in MMSEA?

We are people, communities, and nations who claim a historical continuity and cultural affinity with the pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies which developed on our original territories, and therefore consider ourselves distinct from societies of the majority culture(s) that have contested our cultural sovereignty and right to self-determination. We have historically formed and still currently form the minority/non-dominant sectors within majority-culture societies. We intend to continue preserving, reviving, and enhancing the efficacy, cohesion, and uniqueness of our traditional social values and customary ties alongside making a conscious effort to transmit this knowledge to future generations.

Who is the Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples (IKAP) network?

Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples (IKAP) is a regional network of Indigenous communities throughout Mainland Montane Southeast Asia (MMSEA). Our primary goal is to **protect, promote** and **enhance** the practice of Indigenous Knowledge in our varied communities. We do this by providing multi-faceted leadership and capacity development trainings; by creating space for exchange and the sharing of Indigenous Knowledge; and by promoting the self-definition of Indigenous identity and positive representations of Indigenous peoples (IPs). IKAP has national networks in six countries: Burma, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Southwest China, Thailand and Vietnam.

IKAP's vision is for indigenous communities to have self-determined development based on their own knowledge and identities; and for indigenous communities in the region to benefit from an increased level of mutual understanding and support, among ethnic groups and between indigenous peoples and national governments, as well as the public. To achieve our vision, IKAP's mission is to promote the preservation and protection of bio-cultural diversity, and the recognition of the value and effectiveness of Indigenous knowledge and community-based sustainable development in MMSEA.

What is Indigenous Knowledge?

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) can be broadly defined as the knowledge that an indigenous (local) community accumulates over generations of living in a particular environment. This definition encompasses all forms of knowledge – technologies, know-how, skills, practices and beliefs – that enable the community to achieve stable livelihoods in their environment. A number of terms are used interchangeably to refer to the concept of IK, including Traditional Knowledge (TK), Indigenous Technical Knowledge (ITK), Local Knowledge (LK) and Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS). IK includes the knowledge, skills, cultural practices, etc. used by people in dealing with all aspects of life, especially food/income production and continuation of cultural identity. It is a process of ongoing negotiation involving multiple actors and complex power relations and needs to be understood in terms of its affirmation of ethnic identity and dynamic in its response to a changing environment.

The IKAP network joins together with indigenous communities to create their own space for self-definition of their identities and valuing of indigenous knowledge. IKAP's approaches are based on IPs' knowledge and wisdom, our ways of life, values, spirituality and cosmology in everyday practice in order to find solutions to the challenges we face and to represent ourselves from our own perspectives. IKAP currently organizes IK into the following topic groups: Arts and Handicrafts, Herbal Medicine and Healers, Indigenous Children and Youth, Music and Dance, Rotational Farming, and Indigenous Language and Scripts.



IKAP's INDIGENOUS EDUCATION (IE) PROJECT

The promotion and development of Indigenous Education is a growing priority for Indigenous communities in MMSEA (Mainland Montane Southeast Asia). In present times, being an Indigenous person means living in multiple worlds. Our children need a strong understanding of who they are and where they come from to be able to participate in larger society without losing themselves to it. Our knowledge and traditions have been passed down from generation to generation through our traditional teaching-learning processes which are based on various skills of indigenous livelihood embedded in our cultural practices and daily lives. Our ability to continue this education is being eroded by a variety of political, social and economic forces. The history of discrimination and exclusion perpetrated and sustained by the colonizers and/or dominant societies has left us on the margins of the economies, societies, and nation-states we now find ourselves in.

GOAL: To protect, promote and enhance Indigenous knowledge (IK) throughout communities in MMSEA by means of varied Indigenous Education (IE) approaches. IE is the inter-generational transfer of indigenous knowledge which often combines both traditional teaching and learning processes grounded in the local cultural context with “new” knowledge systems (such as schooling). The integration of multiple epistemologies provides indigenous people of all ages the knowledge and skills to exist and flourish both within and beyond the communities, societies and countries in which they find themselves.

What are examples of Indigenous Education in the IKAP network in MMSEA?

IE is concerned with both the content (WHAT) and the process (HOW) of Indigenous Knowledge transmission. IK transmission is highly personal and embedded in close relationships, local contexts and cultural spaces. Examples of some current IE practices in the IKAP network are: the development of Tai language scripts & dictionaries with instruction (Vietnam); Karen music and dancing teaching in refugee camps (Burma); weaving courses in Rathanakiri province (Cambodia); Herbal Medicine documentation and text production (Laos); local curriculum development and IK inclusion in schools (Thailand); and much more.

Where does Indigenous Education Happen?

IE takes place in a number of contexts and settings and can involve entire indigenous communities as teachers and learners. Although Indigenous Education has great value for Elders and parents, it is the children and young people in IP communities who are both most at risk of losing Indigenous Knowledge and have the most to gain from (and greatest capacity to) preserve and develop IK for the future. Therefore, Indigenous Youth are a primary focus in many Indigenous Education programs, whether *Traditional*, *Formal*, or *Non-Formal* in nature or a combination of these..

Traditional, Indigenous education involves the transfer of Indigenous Knowledge between community members, often from Elders to younger generations through personal interactions, during ceremonies and other community gatherings. However, the traditional transfer of Indigenous Knowledge can happen as a part of all aspects of daily life such as in farming, home building, weaving, hunting, cooking and of course speaking in Indigenous languages. Such knowledge is often passed down from Elders to community youth, but also from parents and other adults to children.

Although *formal* schooling often has colonial origins and has historically ignored, if not denigrated Indigenous Knowledge, IK education can also occur in formal settings such as in schools, often combined with mainstream curriculum. Teachers may focus on or include IK in their lessons, or bring IK experts, such as Elders into schools to teach students directly.

Non-Formal education, often through training workshops, is another way in which IK is shared, and is a key area in which IKAP has been working with IPs. Through local, national and regional workshops IKAP and its network partners have been able to effectively promote the exchange of IK in and between different IP communities. Although this non-formal approach to indigenous education has sometimes involved bringing IK experts from different communities together to share their knowledge, it has also focused on tapping into local expertise within IP communities to help ensure that local knowledge is kept and maintained for the future.

