

COOK ISLAND PROJECT FACTSHEET

Strengthening the Implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit Sharing in the Cook Islands



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AT A GLANCE

Project title: Strengthening the Implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit Sharing in the Cook Islands

Project Timeframe: 2015 - 2018

Total Budget: USD \$930,137

Beneficiaries/villages: House of Ariki, Koutu Nui

Funding Source: Global Environment Facility (GEF)

Implementing Partner: National Environment Service (NES)

Implementing Agency: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Parallel Co-financing: NES, MMR, OPM, Ministry of Cultural Development, Natural Heritage Trust, MFEM-DCD, Island Councils, Aronga Mana, Te Ipukarea Society, CIMTECH, Mathesons, Crown Law

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND

The Pacific nation of the Cook Islands is made up of 15 islands located within a 2 million km² of EEZ in the Southern Pacific Ocean. The Cook Islands have extremely limited land resources, with 99.99% of the area within its EEZ consisting of marine areas. Of its approximate 240 km² of land, 26.2 % is makatea land (lime and rock), and only 4.3% is used for agricultural purposes. Approximately 70% of the land consists of steep sloping lands, wetlands, fernlands and escarpments.

The Cook Island people are mostly of Maori descent. Preliminary results from the 2011 census suggest that the total population of the country is 17,791, of which 13,097 live on the island of Rarotonga. The level of subsistence living in the Cook Islands (particularly in the outer islands) is also high, with an estimated 64% of all households engaged in subsistence farming and fishing activities. Most land in the Cook Islands is held under customary tenure. Cook Islanders have for centuries been using natural plant-based remedies to 'doctor' common ailments. The modern day health care system in the Cook Islands is a combination of neo-traditional ways and Western medicine. The use of traditional medicine is still widely used, with traditional healers using a variety of herbal medicines and traditional practices to treat people.

The Cook Islands' biodiversity has been considered globally important. The Cook Islands sees great potential in sustainably utilising its vast wealth of genetic resources by enabling the fair and equitable sharing of benefits through access to genetic resources, part of which in turn is ploughed back into its conservation to sustain conservation initiatives in the country.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The objective of Nagoya Protocol is the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies, taking into account all rights over those resources and to technologies, and by appropriate funding, thereby contributing to the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components.

This project will develop and implement the legal framework for implementation of the Nagoya Protocol and build national capacities in the Cook Islands for access and benefit-sharing (ABS), as well as support development of an ABS Agreement based on traditional knowledge and a Public-Private Partnership. This project takes advantage of the potential use of the 'Au' tree, *Hibiscus tiliaceus*, abundant in the Cook Islands, to apply Nagoya Protocol provisions. The tree contains bioactive compounds used in traditional medical practices for accelerated bone healing and cartilage repair.

The project will aim to have a derivative of this genetic resource be commercialized and benefit the Cook Islands, local communities and contribute to the implementation of customary biodiversity and sustainable use practices, known as ra'ui.

This project has three main components;

1. Strengthened National Regulatory and Institutional Framework on ABS;
2. Capacity Building and Awareness Raising for the Implementation of the National ABS Framework;
3. Bio-discovery and Benefit-sharing based on the Traditional Knowledge on Bone and Cartilage Regeneration

Linkages with Related Initiatives, Policies, and Frameworks

The project contributes to the fulfillment of the commitments undertaken in the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and will achieve ratification and implementation of the Nagoya Protocol.

The project activities are also in line with the Cook Islands policies as outlined above, on the Protection of Cook Islands Biological diversity and Economic Development strategic objectives, provisions of the Traditional Knowledge Act 2013 and on Access and Benefit Sharing as outlined in the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan 2010 – 2015, and will meet Aichi Target Objective 16 and the inclusion of biological diversity in the process of poverty reduction.

Internal and External Collaboration

The National Environment Service will be the primary agency responsible for coordination and management of the project and particularly on implementation of activities related to terrestrial biodiversity conservation and ABS. It will also facilitate the linkages with other related project initiatives both internationally and nationally. It will work closely with the Crown Law Office in the development of legislative and regulatory frameworks that will allow this project to be governed to high level of environmental and quality assurance, and to implement the environmental and conservation benefits of this project.

Given the strong traditional knowledge focus of the project the House of Ariki will be consulted and capacitated in their role of providing traditional leadership advice to the parliament. Their support to the ABS Act is paramount in its passing in Parliament. The Te Koutu Nui is a major shareholder of CIMTECH and will be involved in all components of the projects. The Te Koutu Nui will also take a lead role in ensuring the investment of financial benefits in the management of Ra'ui.

The National Project Steering Committee (PSC) will be chaired by the National Environment Service, and will serve as the project's coordination and technical advisory body. The PSC will include representation of all the key project stakeholders. They will meet not less than once in 6 months, to review project progress and advice on technical matters concerning the project.

KEY PROJECT COMPONENTS and EXPECTED RESULTS			
KEY PROJECT COMPONENTS	Strengthened National Regulatory and Institutional Framework for ABS	Capacity building and awareness raising for the implementation of the National ABS Framework	Bio-discovery and benefit-sharing based on the Traditional Knowledge on Bone and Cartilage Regeneration
EXPECTED RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagoya Protocol ratified by Parliament. • Strengthened National Regulatory and Institutional Framework on ABS • ABS Rules and Procedures developed. • Existing AS Agreements aligned to NP and ABS National Legislation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgraded facilities and staff skills for bio-prospecting and TK documentation • Improved technical capacity for implementing ABS activities • Increased aw Upgraded facilities and staff skills for bio-prospecting and TK documentation • Awareness of ABS and associated national regulatory and institutional framework among a wide range of stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Stronger CIMTECH and Te Koutu Nui ABS Agreement regarding Cartilage and Bone Regeneration. • Application of improved extraction techniques to 'Au' (<i>Hibiscus tiliaceus</i>) to meet international standards. • Scale up production and undertake staff training to ensure analytical and laboratory capacities necessary to ensure consistent quality of the biologically active extract. • Sustainable management plan for collection of <i>Hibiscus tiliaceus</i> and improved conservation of its waterway habitats