



PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release:

Stopping Biocultural Appropriation

New WIPO Treaty Supports Disclosure of Traditional Knowledge

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) [has announced an important new Treaty](#) regarding intellectual property, genetic resources, and traditional knowledge – the first time WIPO will include provisions in a Treaty specifically for Indigenous communities.

The Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge will establish a disclosure requirement for new patent applications that are based upon genetic resources that come from or are related to Indigenous Peoples or local communities. The requirement is also tied to traditional knowledge associated with those genetic resources.

The Treaty agreement includes requirements for patent applicants to disclose the source of genetic resources and/or the country of origin. If the patent is based on associated traditional knowledge, then they must also acknowledge the Indigenous or local community.

“Indigenous communities have always been intimately connected with their own genetic resources and those they steward in their environments,” said Local Contexts Founding Executive Director Stephany RunningHawk Johnson (Oglala Lakota Nation). “This includes ‘specimens’ that are no longer in their territories or that are represented digitally. Researchers and institutions working in the sciences must recognize Indigenous interests, authority, and rights to these resources.”

This is a significant step in addressing concerns that Indigenous Peoples have been taking to WIPO for over 25 years about biocultural appropriation. The Treaty addresses the need for all parties that create patents that could lead to commercial products based on resources derived from Indigenous lands and waters and/or traditional knowledge associated with those resources, to properly disclose those Indigenous rights and interests.

This will be especially important in present day biocultural collaborations with Indigenous communities, but also for herbariums and seed-banks that hold genetic resources taken from Indigenous lands historically.

“In addition to new work being done, we need to place historical botanical and seed collections in this same context,” said RunningHawk Johnson. “Our film [E Kore Au E Ngaro | The Connection Remains](#) is a good example of facilitating ethical relationships that enable collaboration with stewards of Indigenous collections.”

Local Contexts provides tools for all parties to make transparent and visible such disclosures well before a patent application. Researchers can use the Local Contexts Disclosure and Engagement Notices to identify Indigenous rights and interests in genetic resources, and reinforce relationship building and consent with Indigenous communities into the future.

Indigenous communities can use the Local Contexts Traditional Knowledge and Biocultural Labels to assert control, authority, and consent over how collections of genetic resources are managed, accessed, and used in the future. The Labels add clear community authority for genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge.

“Local Contexts is exactly what institutions need right now,” said RunningHawk Johnson. “Part of the Local Contexts mission is to create effective and recognized pathways for implementing and maintaining Indigenous rights. We look forward to working with institutions to meet their obligations to Indigenous Peoples.”

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About Local Contexts: Local Contexts is a non-profit organization that supports Indigenous communities with tools that can reassert cultural authority in heritage collections and data. The primary objectives of Local Contexts are to enhance and legitimize locally based decision-making and Indigenous governance frameworks for determining ownership, access, and culturally appropriate conditions for sharing historical, contemporary, and future collections of cultural heritage and Indigenous data. The Local Contexts Hub began development in 2019 as a way to enable the customization of Labels and the application of Notices directly to Indigenous data and collections. The Hub works in tandem with already existing information/collections management systems and tools. The Hub generates Labels and Notices (with permanent identifiers) so these can be added to already existing catalog and collections management systems. For more information, please visit <https://localcontexts.org/>.