

**Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA):
Bridging Scales and Epistemologies: Linking Local Knowledge
with Global Science in Multi-Scale Assessments**

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**Knowledges and legal reform in the Sahel:
Linking traditional and modern natural resource
management legal regimes horizontally and
vertically through use of ICTs**

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Biographical summaries

Lars T. Soeftestad is Manager, Supras Consult, Norway. His main applied and research interests lies in the area of natural resource management, including coastal zone management, fisheries and rangeland management, and in knowledge management, networking, and ICTs and development. The role of institutions – existing and created ones – in bringing about co-management and decreasing conflict between natural resource management practices at local, national, and international levels is a key focus. He has worked for bilateral aid agencies (NORAD and Sida). Formerly a World Bank staff member, he now works for the World Bank as a consultant. He was trained as an anthropologist in Bangladesh, Norway, Switzerland, and USA, and is crazy about flyfishing.

Hans-Werner Wabnitz is Senior Counsel in the Legal Department's Africa Division, World Bank. He is in charge of Francophone countries in Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where he writes and negotiates credit- and grant agreements and manages legal and judicial reform projects. Earlier he served as advisor to the High Commissioner of the Senegal River Organization (OMVS) in Senegal. From 1987 to 1992 he served as project manager with the Saudi Industrial Development Fund (SIDF) in Saudi Arabia. Wabnitz holds a Doctor juris degree from Germany, a Comparative Law Degree from France, and a Master (LL.M) from USA.

Abstract

The paper describes a research-cum-action Initiative in Mauritania, Technology Fosters Tradition (TFT; www.cbnrm.net/webhosting/tft/), a radically new approach aimed at sustainable management of the Sahelian environment through empowering local people to transform the present exploitation of natural resources.

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The Sahelian region can be characterized as follows: (i) rapid degradation of the flora and fauna, (ii) the public sector is unsympathetic to effective environmental protection, (iii) legal systems are dysfunctional, and (iv) there are increased levels of conflict between ethnic groups and between pastoralists and farmers.

The Initiative takes the following as points of departure: (i) the economic and cultural survival of people in the Sahel depends upon protecting the environment, (ii) local people know the traditionally recognized land-use patterns, (iii) some behavior needs to be changed in light of recent environmental degradation, (iv) traditional management has been corrupted by government intervention, and (v) changes in culturally embedded behavior will be achieved only voluntarily.

TFT's approach to addressing and resolving these problems lies in identifying and addressing the needs of the local people. The Initiative starts with assessing local practices, tracing and fixing them on maps, and screening for environmental effects. Required changes in use patterns will be negotiated until a consensus agreeable to all parties is reached.

These negotiated behavioral rules will be consolidated in regulations which are: (i) formulated by local people, (ii) written in local dialects, (iii) clear, short and succinct, stating purpose and policy; (iv) simultaneously drafted in the official languages of the country, revised and edited in an itinerant process with the input of experts, and (v) conform to the objectives of international environmental conventions. The texts will be archived in the Official Gazette and on the Internet and also affixed on GIS-centered geographic maps. The process constitutes a legal reform that gives priority to customary law over transplanted law, thus establishing the basis for a convergence between the actual behavior of the population and the laws and regulations intended to govern such behavior.

Several partly new approaches and tools will be used. They include: (i) specific biotopes will be governed by specific regulations, (ii) GIS and the Internet will be used to record laws and constitute the foundation for a modern land-registry with traditional use-right descriptions, and (iii) community-driven and co-management policies at the communal level.

Located at the intersection of several legal regimes, including French civil law, Islamic law and traditional customary rules, the Initiative aims to systematize and integrate these legal regimes on the local, national and international levels. This will be facilitated through extensive use of modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The epistemological aspects of aligning different bodies of legal knowledge, across a spectrum of cultures and ethnic groups as located on different societal levels, by means of traditional and modern ICTs is a case of trial and errors, that will provide useful insights and lessons for the future of similar progressive legal reform efforts elsewhere in the Sahel and beyond.

The partners are: GLIN - The Global Legal Information Network (www.loc.gov/law/glin/), GTZ (www.gtz.de), NASA (www.nasa.gov), and World Bank (www.worldbank.org).