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Grassroots leaders gather at UN drylands convention to call for investment in community to community learning

Windhoek, Namibia 18 September 2013 -- An assembly of grassroots leaders has gathered in Namibia at a meeting of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification to request that the international donor community prioritize community to community exchange and invest more heavily in community-led learning.

The call comes from a dialogue being convened by the World Indigenous Network (WIN), a recently-launched initiative to connect local and indigenous communities working on the front lines of sustainable development.

“We would like to see greater investment in ‘empowerment learning’,” said Gladman Chibememe, a WIN dialogue participant from Zimbabwe. “Communities learn best and fastest from each other, and any efforts to get sustainable development right on-the-ground need to prioritize peer-to-peer learning.”

Sixteen organizations from fourteen countries (including Namibia) are represented at the inaugural WIN dialogue. At a conference focused on global and national-level strategies to manage dryland ecosystems, WIN dialogue participants are arguing for an alternative approach.

“Community-based approaches are often on the cutting edge of effective responses to environmental and economic challenges,” said Ally Coe from the Wiradjuri Condoblin Corporation of Australia. “These successes need not happen in isolation. We can teach each other, but we need support through initiatives like the World Indigenous Network.”

The idea for the World Indigenous Network was launched by the Government of Australia at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012, and its next phase of development will be overseen by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Equator Initiative.

The Equator Initiative is a partnership that works to recognize and advance local sustainable development solutions for people, nature and resilient communities. The partnership has more than a decade of experience organizing community dialogues and facilitating community-to-community learning.

“It has been our experience at UNDP,” said Eileen de Ravin, Manager of the Equator Initiative “that community to community learning reduces the amount of time needed to replicate success and that is can be an effective way to speed the transfer of sustainable development solutions.”

The vision of the World Indigenous Network is a global network of indigenous and local community land and sea managers connected not only virtually, but through an ongoing series

of learning exchanges and site visits that will be designed to help spread local best practices in ecosystem management, the protection of nature, and sustainable livelihoods.

“We are seeing too much success in isolation. And that is a shame. Communities need support to share with each other and spread good practice” said Ms. De Ravin

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For more information on the WIN: www.worldindigenousnetwork.net

For information on the Equator Initiative: www.equatorinitiative.org

Earth Negotiations Bulletin coverage of the WIN events at UNCCD COP 11 can be found at:

www.iisd.ca/desert/cop11/pavilion

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