

CHAPTER 15

Other Biodiversity-Related Conventions

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INTRODUCTION

Apart from the Convention on Biological Diversity, there are numerous other conventions and treaties which have been in existence. They preceded the CBD but this should not mean that they should be ignored. Those that are of particular significance for Africa are:

- African Convention on Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (the "African Convention");
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the "Ramsar Convention");
- Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (the "World Heritage Convention");
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES);
- Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (the "Bonn Convention");
- International Tropical Timber Agreement ("ITTA").

Two cases are elaborated upon below. For those with particular interest in the other conventions, please consult the book by Lyster (1985).

THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

Also known as the "Wetland Convention", the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat was named after the Iranian City of Ramsar where the text was adopted in 1971. This was an early attempt by governments to conserve and make wise use of wetland biodiversity.

--- *Policy Issues on Biodiversity* ---

Wetlands are defined as:

"areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres".

Countries which become Contracting Parties accept three principal obligations:

1. To designate at least one wetland in their territory for the Ramsar "List of Wetlands of International Importance" and to maintain its ecological character.
2. To make "wise use" of all wetlands in their territory, whether or not they are designated for the List.
3. To develop international co-operation over shared species, shared sites and development assistance related to wetlands.

In 1992, there were 17 African signatories to the convention.

The major benefits of Ramsar membership are:

- International solidarity. Membership of the major global conventions indicates solidarity with the international principles they represent.
- The possibility to influence world thinking on wetlands. Relatively few African countries have so far joined Ramsar; if Africa's point of view is to have its full weight in the world wetland outlook, more African countries need to join.
- Publicity and prestige for those wetlands included in the Ramsar List.
- Access to international information and advice on wetland matters, and in particular to the Ramsar "Monitoring Procedure", under which specialist missions visit sites where difficulties have arisen, and provide recommendations and advice.
- Access to the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Fund. The 1990 Montreux Conference established this fund, under which governments of developing countries may seek financial support for small projects (Ramsar 1990). The current ceiling is 40,000 Swiss francs, or about US\$ 30,000.

THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was adopted at the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972 and came into force in 1975. It resulted from the realisation that some natural or man-made features are so spectacular or outstanding that they are more than the heritage of just one state; they constitute the heritage of humankind.

The World Heritage Convention provides a framework for efforts by various organisations to conserve important natural habitats. There is a World Heritage Committee which is responsible for selecting such cultural or natural sites of outstanding universal value so that they are included on the World Heritage List. Also, there is a World Heritage Fund that could be accessed to help protect sites which are on the list.

The World Heritage list provides a mechanism for giving international recognition to some of the most outstanding natural habitats in the World. It was one of the few treaties prior to the CBD to offer developing countries a material incentive to protect outstanding wildlife habitats.

FURTHER READING

Lyster Simon 1985. *International Wildlife Law* Grotius, Cambridge