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Challenges for the Maintenance of Traditional Biodiversity Knowledge in Latin America

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ABSTRACT This paper discusses the maintenance of “knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity” in Latin America – or traditional knowledge of Latin America in abbreviated form. It addresses some issues and challenges that IUCN considers relevant for its own programme. For IUCN, the interest in the maintenance of traditional knowledge is linked to the implications of the loss of traditional knowledge for sustainable management of ecosystems, and the impacts of such loss on the cultural integrity of communities and on their capacity to manage and adapt to ecological change. If maintained and appropriately encouraged and supported, traditional knowledge can become a very important tool for improved management of ecosystems more widely. Other important elements of the approach to traditional knowledge maintenance are equity, with particular consideration to vulnerable groups, and cultural rights. The paper examines national and community factors that threaten the maintenance of traditional knowledge in Latin America, such as demographic changes, national development policies, poverty, education, trade, land tenure, cultural policies, and others. It provides recommendations to address such factors and to counter the loss of traditional knowledge.