INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, HUMAN RIGHTS AND POVERTY

By Joji Cariño

A first reading of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gives no indication at all about how these relate to indigenous peoples. They are not mentioned and are completely invisible. Indigenous peoples, therefore, fear that culturally insensitive implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), Millennium Development Goals and country-wide Poverty Reduction Strategies could lead to further impoverishment and marginalization. For example, water and energy development through the building of large dams for water and energy could flood our lands or result in involuntary displacement, unless rights-based participatory approaches, including respect for our right to free, prior and informed consent of is secured as part of the development process.

Governments speak of “Poverty” while Indigenous Peoples speak of “Rights”. The MDGs must therefore be firmly grounded on a rights-based approach, to have meaning for indigenous peoples. Such an approach is fully compatible with the Millennium Declaration adopted by General Assembly which sets out the United Nations agenda for the twenty-first century for peace and security; development and poverty eradication; protecting the environment; human rights, democracy and good governance; protecting the vulnerable; meeting the special needs of Africa and strengthening the United Nations. This broad agenda was distilled into eight Millennium Development Goals, around which the United Nations system has developed a number of activities, including the establishment of a United Nations Development Group working group on the MDGs charged with the task of operationalizing them.

This narrowed focus on the eight MDGs could have the effect of leaving out or marginalizing the central concerns of indigenous peoples. The UN Secretary-General recently noted that insufficient progress was being made in meeting the broader objectives of the Millennium Declaration on such issues as human rights, democracy and good governance; also on conflict resolution and the special needs of Africa. The MDGs face the dangers of replicating a technocratic development process which is too narrow; too determined by “external” experts; too concerned with measurable outcomes, which may mean too much support for top-down, targeted interventions to deliver on the chosen targets (and indicators), and a neglect of developments whose impacts are not easily measured; too reliant on indicators that are conceptually flawed; and too focused on the role of international agencies and national governments.

This paper uses the MDGs primarily as an entry point to highlight the marginalisation of indigenous peoples within this common framework agreed to by all governments, and to underline the barriers to the achievement of these goals without the recognition of indigenous peoples’ rights. It provides some perspectives on how a rights-based approach to implementing the MDGs must necessarily address the rights, the concerns and the priorities of indigenous peoples, if they are to be met. It draws on the UN’s own guidance the document on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty (A/67/369) and on indigenous peoples’ statements to show a way forward in bridging the UN Development Agenda and that of Indigenous Peoples.
The conceptual framework of a human rights approach to poverty reduction

In May 2001, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted a statement on poverty, which recognized that poverty constituted a denial of human rights and defined poverty as a human condition characterized by the deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights (E/ C.12/ 2001/ 10).

A rights-based approach to poverty reduction is a conceptual framework for the process of sustainable human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights of people living in poverty. The human rights approach integrates the norms, standards and principles of the international human rights system into the plans, policies and processes of poverty reduction. The norms and standards are those contained in the numerous international treaties and conventions. The principles in question are the identification of the poor; empowerment; the international human rights framework; participation; equity and non-discrimination; the progressive realization of rights; and accountability.

Identification of the poor

From a human rights perspective, poverty may be seen as the non-fulfilment of a person’s rights to a range of basic capabilities to do and be the things that the person may value. Capability failure is thus the defining attribute of poverty. Since different societies may have different orders of priority, the list of basic capabilities may differ from one society to another.

Empowering the poor

Fundamentally, a human rights approach to poverty is about the empowerment of the poor. While the common theme underlying poor people’s experiences is one of powerlessness, human rights empower individuals and communities by granting them entitlements that give rise to legal obligations on others. Provided the poor are able to access and enjoy them, human rights can help to equalize the distribution and exercise of power both within and between societies. In short, human rights can mitigate the powerlessness of the poor.

These paragraphs are direct quotes from Secretary General’s Report on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty (A/67/369) drawn from Section III Paragraphs 30-47 of the report. Boxed sections are interpretations as applied to Indigenous Peoples.
Explicit recognition of the international human rights normative framework

The international human rights normative framework provides norms and standards that empower the poor. A human rights approach to poverty will include an explicit recognition of that framework. Special attention will be given to those treaties that a State has ratified for two reasons: treaty ratification represents “country ownership” of the relevant provisions; and second, a ratified treaty is legally binding on all branches of Government. Careful attention will also be given to the commitments entered into during the recent world conferences, so far as they bear upon international human rights.

Non-discrimination and equality

The right to equality and the principle of non-discrimination are among the most fundamental elements of international human rights law. The poor are usually victims of discrimination on various grounds, such as their birth, property, national and social origin, race, colour, gender and religion. …As discrimination may cause poverty, poverty also causes discrimination. In addition to discrimination based on their race, colour, gender or social origin, the poor are subject to discriminatory attitudes by governmental authorities and private actors because they are poor. The twin principles of equality and non-discrimination require States to take special measures to prohibit discrimination against the poor and to provide them with equal and effective protection against discrimination. Since

Cultural Poverty: a Dayak Perspective

These seven principles summarize the way in which the Dayak achieve their ideal of life, based on their cultural values.

1. Sustainability (biodiversity) versus productivity (monoculture)
2. Collectivity (cooperation) versus individuality (competition)
3. Naturality (organic) versus engineered (inorganic)
4. Spirituality (rituality) versus rationality (scientific)
5. Process (effectiveness) versus result (efficiency)
6. Subsistence (domesticity) versus commerciality (market)
7. Customary law (locality) versus state law (global)

Failure to achieve these ideals is believed to result in barau (Jalai Dayak): a situation when nature fails to function normally, and thus results in chaos. Barau is a result of Adat transgression, a broken relationship with nature. “Poverty” for the Dayak is linked directly with failure to exercise the Adat that governs the way in which the people should live.

From: John Bamba “Seven Fortunes and Seven Calamities”
International Standards on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous peoples’ rights have assumed an important place in international human rights law. This body of law is still expanding and developing through Indigenous advocacy in international fora; through the decisions of international human rights bodies; through recognition and codification of Indigenous rights in international instruments presently under consideration by the United Nations and Organization of American States; through incorporation of Indigenous rights into conservation, environmental and development-related instruments and policies; through incorporation of these rights into domestic law and practice; and through domestic judicial decisions. Indigenous rights have attained the status of customary international law and are therefore generally binding on states. International law recognises the rights of indigenous peoples to:

- Self-determination
- To ownership, control and management of their traditional territories, lands and resources;
- Exercise their customary law
- Represent themselves through their own institutions
- Free, prior and informed consent to developments on their land
- Control, and share in the benefits of the use of, their traditional knowledge.

Self determination for indigenous peoples means "the right to control over their institutions, territories, resources, social orders, and cultures without external domination or interference, and their right to establish their relationship with the dominant society and the state on the basis of consent."

the poor are among the most vulnerable groups of every society, there is a need to start by addressing the special need of the poor not to be discriminated against, according to the particular circumstances of the society concerned.

Participation

A human rights approach to poverty also requires the active and informed participation of the poor in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies. The right to participation is a crucial and complex human right that is inextricably linked to fundamental democratic principles.

The international human rights normative framework includes the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs. Although free and fair elections are a crucial component of the right to participate, they are not enough to ensure that those living in poverty enjoy the right to participate in key decisions affecting
International standards on Indigenous Peoples Right to Participation and to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

Article 7(1) of ILO Convention 169 provides that:

*The people concerned shall have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development.*

This article is one of the general principles of the Convention and provides a framework within which other articles can be interpreted. Other general principles of the Convention require participation, consultation and good faith negotiation.

In its 1997 General Recommendation, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination elaborated on state obligations and indigenous rights under the Convention. The Committee called upon states-parties to:

*... ensure that members of indigenous peoples have equal rights in respect of effective participation in public life, and that no decisions directly relating to their rights and interests are taken without their informed consent.*

In its Concluding Observations on Australia’s report, the Committee reiterated in 2000:

*its recommendation that the State party ensure effective participation by indigenous communities in decisions affecting their land rights, as required under article 5(c) of the Convention and General Recommendation XXIII of the Committee, which stresses the importance of ensuring the ‘informed consent’ of indigenous peoples.*

their lives. Specific mechanisms and detailed arrangements for the enjoyment of the right to participate will vary greatly from one context to another: one size does not fit all. It must be recognized that some traditional elites are likely to resist the active and informed participation of the poor in decision-making.

The enjoyment of the right to participate is deeply dependent on the realization of other human rights. For example, if the poor are to participate meaningfully in poverty reduction strategies, they must be free to organize without restriction (right of association), to meet without impediment (right of assembly), and to say what they want without intimidation (freedom of expression); they must know the relevant facts (right to information) and they must enjoy an elementary level of economic security and well-being (right to a reasonable standard of living and associated rights). Thus, without parallel arrangements to realize these other rights, the poor cannot participate in an active and informed
manner in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies.

**Progressive realization of human rights**

In the context of international human rights, progressive realization requires the use of human rights indicators and benchmarks. Briefly, a bundle of disaggregated indicators will be identified for each human right that is subject to progressive realization. Realistic time-bound national benchmarks (or targets) will be set in relation to each indicator; consistent with their right to participate, the poor should participate in the identification of these benchmarks. Importantly, the progressive realization of human rights and poverty reduction strategies demands effective monitoring by way of indicators and national benchmarks. Furthermore, indicators and benchmarks are an essential precondition for another vital feature of a human rights approach to poverty reduction: effective accountability.
Accountability

The international normative framework empowers the poor by granting them rights and imposing legal obligations on others. Crucially, rights and obligations demand accountability: unless supported by a system of accountability, they can become no more than window-dressing. Accordingly, the human rights approach to poverty reduction emphasizes obligations and requires that all duty-holders, including States and intergovernmental organizations, are held accountable for their conduct in relation to international human rights.

While duty-holders must determine for themselves which mechanisms of accountability are most appropriate in their particular case, all mechanisms must be accessible, transparent and effective.

Indigenous Peoples and the MDGs

Efforts to bring together indigenous peoples to talk about MDGs were done in the past two years. Tebtebba Foundation, organized a roundtable discussion on Indigenous Peoples and the Millenium Development Goals during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002 and participated in the UNDP Forum on MDGs in Asia Pacific held in Laos in October 2002. At the Second Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues last May 2003, the UNDP Civil Society Organization team also held a brief consultation with indigenous peoples on the MDGs. Some of the views in this paper emerged from these various processes.

Poverty Among Indigenous Peoples

Indicative research on the poverty situation of indigenous peoples generally conclude that indigenous peoples are disproportionately represented among the poorest in both developed and developing countries. Of the 1.2 billion people estimated to live on less than US$1 a day (i.e., those that are the target of MDG1), 70 per cent live in rural areas with a high dependence on natural resources for all or part of their livelihoods. A World Bank study on indigenous peoples and poverty in Latin America concluded that “poverty among Latin America’s indigenous population is pervasive and severe”. This study which documented the socio-economic situation of around 34 million indigenous peoples in the region, representing eight per cent of the region’s total population showed that the poverty map in almost all the countries coincides with indigenous peoples territories.

A similar study in the region by the Inter-American Development Bank observed that being poor and being indigenous are synonymous. Its report on Mexico concluded that indigenous peoples live in “alarming conditions of extreme poverty and marginality...Virtually all of the indigenous people living in municipalities with 90 per cent or more indigenous people are catalogued as extremely poor.”
Indigenous Peoples, Human Rights and Accountability of Development Agencies

In a recent survey carried out of the development policies of 27 multi-lateral and bilateral development agencies, it was revealed that only 8 had dedicated formal standards on indigenous peoples and development (EU, UNDP, WB, ADB, DANIDA, DGIS, BMZ, AECI). Of these 8, only 4 had mandatory or binding safeguards, the other 4 only constituted of optional best practice and only 3 of these employed an explicit rights-based approach to development. Two policies contained no clear operational standards and 4 others only featured limited operational instructions. Half of these policies contained out of date provisions that fail to meet current human rights and sustainable development standards (WB, ADB, DGIS, AECI). Among the 19 agencies without a policy, 7 of these identify indigenous peoples as target groups for overseas aid (WHO, I-ADB, IP Fund, SDC, DDC, USAID, FINNIDA.)

From: Tom Griffiths, A Failure of Accountability
From: Forest Peoples Programme www.forestpeoples.org

In a study undertaken by the Asian Development Bank in 2002 covering Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia and Indonesia, trends establishing the linkage between poverty and ethnicity could not be found due to lack of disaggregated data based on ethnicity. Vietnam was an exception to this although the worst poverty situation in Vietnam can be found among the ethnic minorities from the highland areas of Northern and Central Vietnam. For the other countries, like the Philippines, this report established that poverty is much higher in regions which are populated mainly by indigenous peoples. For example in 1997 in the Caraga region, the average income of indigenous peoples was 42 per cent lower than the national average. Basic services such as health and education are more easily available in urban areas, leaving out the rural poor.

In a recent meeting held by UN Department of Political Affairs last January 19, 2004 to follow-up on the UN Secretary-General’s visit to Latin America, it was stated that “indigenous groups are at the bottom of the scale in the Latin American countries with regard the Millenium Development Goals – be it poverty, hunger and education” and it was recommended that the “linkage between indigenous issues and development work needs to be strengthened.”

Roots of Indigenous Peoples’ Poverty

The various studies cited agree that pervasive poverty among indigenous peoples has its roots in the history of colonization and in the continuing systemic discrimination and non-recognition of indigenous peoples’ individual and collec-
tive rights. Indigenous peoples have expressed that “they do not like to be la-
belled as poor because of its negative and discriminatory connotations”, 14 high-
lighting instead on the process of impoverishment caused by dispossession of
their ancestral lands, loss of control over their natural resources and indigenous
knowledge, and to their forced assimilation into the mainstream society and inte-
gration in the market economy.

Concerns were raised about the need for poverty indicators which are not
constructed around solely on cash incomes and expenditures and framed within
a market and cash-based economy. These are non-indigenous parameters and
the poverty indicator of living with $1/day cannot capture nor adequately re-
fect poverty as perceived by indigenous peoples (see Dayak perspective on Cul-
tural Poverty).

Poverty alleviation must start from indigenous peoples’ own definitions and
indicators of poverty, and particularly address the exclusion and lack of access to
decision-making at all levels. Rather than being merely lack of money and re-
sources, poverty is also defined by power deficits and absence of access to deci-
sion-making and management processes. Social and ecological inequalities and
injustice breed and perpetuate the impoverishment of indigenous peoples.

**Conflict of development paradigms**

In countries experiencing economic growth, indigenous peoples’ situation
has not improved. They have became more impoverished where economic growth
has been dependent on massive extraction of natural resources such as minerals,
oil, gas, timber and aquatic resources, and the construction of large infrastruc-
ture such as hydroelectric dams. The incorporation and encapsulation indigenous
peoples’ within modern states through colonization and modernization has ren-
dered their land and resources open to expropriation for use by others. Indig-
enous peoples’ poverty is directly linked to dispossession of their lands and re-
sources which are essential for their security, livelihoods and well-being. Mate-
rial impoverishment is also associated with language and cultural loss.

Under this present era of globalization where trade and investment liberal-
ization, deregulation and privatization are the policies followed by most govern-
ments, the poverty situation for many indigenous peoples has worsened. A case
study on the dumping of cheap imported vegetables in the Philippines between
2002 to 2003, showed that the imported vegetables were priced 30 to 50 per cent
lower than the local produce, resulting in loss of profits and the destruction of
the livelihoods of 250,000 indigenous farmers and 400 vegetable traders.15 This
loss of local livelihoods resulting from economic globalisation exacerbates indig-
enous peoples’ poverty.

The key weakness of the MDGs is that they do not question the underlying
development paradigm nor does it address the economic, political, social and
cultural structural causes of poverty. This is a central problem for indigenous
peoples who have described the prevailing development paradigm as development aggression.

Recommendations

In the light of these observations indigenous peoples in various forums have presented some recommendations which can be summarized into the following:

1. The adoption of the rights-based framework and approach to poverty reduction strategies which starts with an indigenous perspective of poverty and wealth. The recognition of indigenous peoples’ claims for individual and collective rights, as distinct peoples, is crucial for a just and sustainable solution to widespread poverty in their midst;

2. Disaggregated data should be collected in all countries, based on indigenous peoples’ indicators of poverty, and the UNDP and World Bank should include disaggregated data on indigenous men and women’s poverty situation in their regular human development and poverty reports;

3. Indigenous peoples’ own institutions should be supported so that they have sufficient funding and capacity to provide contextualized empirical data and monitor their poverty situation; and to ensure they contribute to their own development proposals; and fully participate in the planning, design, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes at all levels;

4. Systematic training on indigenous peoples’ rights should be undertaken by staff in donor agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Promote gender equality and empower women

The targets set for MDG 3 are to “eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.”

It is derisory that the MDG targets set which have direct bearing on women were only for eliminating gender disparities in education and improving maternal health (MDG5). These are characterised by feminists as a “distraction from the much more important Beijing Platform for Action with its 12 Priority Areas of Concern. Indigenous women have highlighted militarization and violence against indigenous women as major concerns not only in Asia but also in Latin America and even in Africa. Another form of violence against indigenous women is sex-trafficking which is becoming more common among the hill-tribes of Thailand, the ethnic minority women in Burma and the tribals in Nepal.

Indigenous women participated in the various UN conferences on women like the Beijing Conference in 1995 and the Beijing Plus 5 in New York in 2000. Our participation in the Beijing conference resulted in the Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women containing many significant recommendations and which has been used by indigenous women as an educational resource to raise the gender awareness of indigenous women.
Reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

MDGs 4, 5 and 6 have set targets for 2015 which are “to reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five; reduce by three-quarters the ratio of women dying in childbirth; and to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.” These cluster of goals around health are relevant for indigenous peoples. Accessibility of modern health services for indigenous peoples is bad to start with because their communities are usually found in remote areas least served by health personnel and services. This situation, however, has worsened especially after structural adjustment policies (SAPs) were imposed as conditionalities for further loans. Aside from a decrease in budgets for health, SAPs also pushed for the privatization of health services and other social services like education and water. Indigent indigenous persons cannot afford expensive private health services.

The cited World Bank Report on the state of mortality rates among indigenous peoples in Peru, Bolivia and Guatemala revealed:

In general, indigenous people have much higher mortality rates than the national average in most countries. This is especially the case in countries where the indigenous population makes up a large proportion of the total population. In Peru, the national infant mortality rate is 169 per 1,000 live births, as compared to 269 per 1,000 live births for the indigenous population (Masferrer 1983:600). The national under-5 mortality rate per 1000 live births in Bolivia is 122 for Spanish language speakers, but 186 for indigenous language speakers (Institute for Resource Development 1989). In Guatemala, under-5 mortality per 1,000 live births is 120 for Ladinos and 142 for indigenous people (Institute for Resource Development 1987).

Malnutrition among indigenous children has been recorded at very high levels in many countries. A 1996 National Survey of Nutrition in Rural Mexico, for example, concluded that:

malnutrition is most pronounced (58.3 per cent of the total population under age five) in the Mexican rural communities with the highest concentration (70 per cent or more) of indigenous people, when measured by the ratio between height and weight. This compares with a still serious but less spectacular rate of 48 per cent among children below age five in predominantly non-indigenous (less than 10 per cent) communities and reaches a devastating 73.6 per cent among all indigenous youth (ages 0-16).

This study further revealed that in Guerrero, the poorest-ranking state in Mexico which is predominantly indigenous and rural, has a 71.3 per cent malnutrition in children under five.

Maternal health is just one aspect of the reproductive rights for women. The exclusion of the goal of achieving reproductive rights for women is seen by women’s groups as a serious weakness.
The experiences of indigenous women regarding violations of their reproductive rights are also unique. In countries where there are deliberate population programs to minoritize indigenous peoples, coercive family planning programs were imposed on the women. Forced sterilization, pressure to use Depo-Provera and birth control pills, among others, were the methods done to decrease the population of indigenous peoples. Transmigration schemes where settlers from the plains were brought to indigenous lands accompanied these programs. With these, significant demographic shifts took place in indigenous peoples’ territories whereby they became the minorities. A concrete example is in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. Tribal women report that population programs are seriously carried out in their communities, so many of them usually have two to three children; however, the settler population of Bengalis are encouraged to have as many children as they like. There is an observed difference between the number of children in tribal areas and the settler areas, and the view of many tribals is that this is yet another way to deliberately make them a numerical minority in their own land.

Recommendations

1. The revitalization of traditional health practices including traditional midwifery practices, use of traditional medicinal plants, etc. should be supported through policies and resources;

2. Governments should revive and support the setting up of community-based health programs which includes, among others, the training of local health workers, development of primary health education materials in languages understood by the communities. The full participation of indigenous peoples should be sought when such programs are being developed;

3. Programs to address malnutrition of indigenous children should be undertaken, including research into the extent and causes of malnutrition. The relationship of shifts from traditional foods to modern diets in aggravating malnutrition should likewise be studied;

4. There is a need to undertake a research on indigenous peoples and HIV/AIDS;

5. The Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women, and Reports from Indigenous Women’s Conferences should inform programs on women within the MDG campaign and be used for awareness raising.

MDG 7 - Environmental Sustainability Goals

Indigenous Peoples repeatedly underline the interrelatedness of social and ecological balance and health. The relegation of environment into one of eight development goals is one of the weaknesses of the MDGs as a framework for poverty reduction and sustainable development. Natural resources management is not just the business of MDG 7, rather, it underpins the achievement of the
majority of the other seven goals.

The MDG on “Ensuring environmental sustainability” places too much attention on quantitative measures for protected areas and forest cover when the concern should also be on the form protection takes (and the extent to which it benefits or excludes indigenous and local peoples, who are dependent on resources there. With regard to what is protected, there is too much emphasis on Northern priorities towards rare or endangered species and habitats rather than on species that are valued by local people for food and medicines, or are of cul-

Statement of The International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) on WSSD Follow-up to COP7 of the Convention on Biological Diversity

The Global Indicators and targets developed so far focus on the status and trends of biodiversity health. However, these global biological and environmental indicators must be complemented by human and social indicators which duly reflect critical human development factors affecting biodiversity. The use of complementary human and social indicators in all of the CBD work programmes is a logical extension to the ecosystem approach as the framework for implementation, assessments and monitoring.

We therefore call upon the Parties to:

- **Urge** the Working Group on Article 8j and related provisions to develop human and social global indicators relevant to CBD with the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples. This should draw upon the experience of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, relevant UN bodies such as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as well as existing national, regional and international work on monitoring human and social indicators;
- **Conduct** focused assessments with the close cooperation between Indigenous Peoples, governments and other relevant partners. This process should include assessments conducted across eco-regional levels. These assessments should also be used for the testing of indicators;
- **Develop** national human and social indicators in close cooperation with the respective indigenous peoples.

One concrete example of a Global Indicator directly relevant to our work is the status and trends on linguistic diversity and the number of speakers of indigenous languages. Languages are precise tools developed through many millennia, serving people in their traditional relationship with their land. Our languages hold the knowledge of our lands, the seas and rivers, the ice, the plants, animals, fish, bugs and their interaction. If the present rate of language loss continues, humanity will lose tremendous knowledge of global biodiversity.

Above all, a key Global Indicator must be the status of indigenous peoples’ rights.
Indigenous Perspectives

The establishment of protected areas has historically been a major cause of forced displacement of indigenous peoples. One recent example was forceful displacement by Forest Department personnel of 30 tribal families of the Kolengere Tribe who are living in the Nagarhole National Park, now known as the Rajiv Ghandi National Park in India. Their houses were demolished and women and men were beaten by the armed officers and brought to a “rehabilitation site” at the fringes of the park. Nagarhole is one of the seven Protected Areas receiving US$68 million from the World Bank under a project called Eco-Development Project.

Indigenous Peoples and Water


At Johannesburg, governments reaffirmed the vital role of indigenous peoples in sustainable development. Today, we indigenous peoples reaffirm our commitment to honour, to care for and to protect water, as our fundamental contribution to meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

We thank the Earth, our Mother, for water, the essential element for life, healthy ecosystems, human settlements, and sanitation. Our lands, springs, river and water basins, and oceans are the fundamental basis for our physical and cultural existence.

Today, we reiterate that underlying the water crisis is not just a governance crisis, but also a cultural crisis.

We call upon the ministers of this High-Level Segment of the CSD 12 to incorporate an ethical framework to guide the implementation of Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Programme of Implementation (JPOI) and the Millennium Development Goals, that would recognize the cultural values of water and human settlements from diverse cultural traditions. Relations between peoples and their environments are embedded in culture. Water is life, physical, emotional and spiritual. It should not be considered merely as an economic resource. Sharing water is an ethical imperative and expression of human solidarity. The cultural relationship between water and peoples should be explicitly taken into account in all decision-making processes.

In reviewing the millennium’s social and ecological crises, we note that the global economic and financial system which has produced tremendous wealth has also delivered extreme poverty in its wake. The continued enclosure and privatization of nature’s services and resources, including water, is undermining the Earth’s and societies’ capacities to meet the water, sanitation and housing rights as basic entitlements for all.
Increasing Number of Indigenous Peoples becoming Slumdwellers, Displaced People and Refugees

As far as the goal of improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers is concerned, it is important to note that there are a significant number of indigenous peoples who have become slum dwellers, internally displaced persons or refugees. The forced displacement of many indigenous communities by development projects is resulting in extreme impoverishment and contributing to urban drift. In the Philippines, some indigenous communities have been displaced from their ancestral lands by military operations, logging concessions and plantation owners, dam-building and eco-industrial zone development and protected areas.

In the cities, indigenous people suffer major disparities in all measurable areas such as lower wages, lack of employment, skills and education; poor health, housing and criminal convictions. They live in poor human settlements outside the support of traditional community and culture. The distinct problems and needs of indigenous slum-dwellers and urban poor are seldom recognized. Many indigenous city dwellers strive to maintain reciprocal relationships with family and their homelands through cultural associations to cope with the drastic change and demands of urbanization. The livelihood and employment strategies pursued by indigenous urban dwellers build on traditional skills but many end up in low-paying work. Some examples are marketing of handicrafts; trading of traditional herbs and remedies; as construction workers by Igorot men skill in building rice terraces and Maasai males serving as security guards reflecting their traditional role as warriors in East Africa. Others are also exploited as tourist attractions in tourism establishments. Many have livelihoods as petty traders, menial and domestic workers and low-paid service workers, as well as being a source of cheap labour in the city.  

Recommendations

Various recommendations have been presented international processes such as the World Water Forum, the World Parks Congress, the World Forestry Con-
gress, among others. Some of these recommendations are the following:

1. The Kimberley Declaration and the Indigenous Peoples’ Plan for Sustainable Development should be used as a reference for governments and multilateral bodies when they are formulating and assessing their sustainable development plans, policies and programmes;

2. Indigenous Peoples’ traditional resource management practices such as those in water management, forest management, biodiversity conservation, maintaining soil fertility and seed diversity, home gardens, etc. should be strengthened and integrated into national resource management policies and programmes;

3. There should be a moratorium on the funding of the World Bank for Extractive Industries;

4. Free and prior informed consent of indigenous peoples should be obtained, in a manner which is acceptable to them, before any development program or research is done in their communities. Licenses and permits for projects and programmes which are in place even without the FPIC of indigenous peoples directly and indirectly affected should be cancelled or withdrawn;

5. Redress and justice for indigenous peoples who are victims of displacement due to militarization, land-grabbing schemes, mining, protected areas, etc. should be provided by the state and the entities involved in committing these injustices;

6. Support for indigenous peoples to participate in multilateral processes on sustainable development should be sustained.

Global Partnership for Development

MDG 8 is the goal which tries to address some of the global structural causes of the poverty. It stresses that the debt problem should be dealt with in a comprehensive manner.

Official development assistance (ODA) and loans were the most important sources of external financing for developing countries until the early 1970s. Now this has significantly declined and private capital inflows expanded but only to a few developing countries. Indigenous peoples have questioned the use of ODA when very few benefits reach indigenous communities from ODA projects. Moreover, large infrastructure, extractive and even conservation projects have been harmful for indigenous peoples.

The debt burden and indigenous peoples

In addition to the direct negative impacts of inappropriate development projects, the debt burden, is another major factor for the exacerbation of indig-
enous peoples’ poverty. To generate foreign exchange for payment of the foreign debt, many governments extract natural resources for export even if these are clearly unsustainable. In many countries, the remaining intact natural resources are found in indigenous peoples’ territories.

Another government’s option is to export labour even if labour conditions abroad are oppressive and slavelike. There are significant numbers of indigenous women joining the global labour market. Hongkong hosts the biggest number of Filipino overseas contract workers (OCWs) with around 88,000 Filipino contract workers in 2003. It is estimated that around 10 per cent of these come from the Cordillera region, most of which are indigenous women. The remittances of these workers substantially added up to foreign exchange receipts. With the foreign debt burden, the government cuts back the budgets for basic social services which made these even more inaccessible to indigenous peoples.

The MDG 1 target is to “halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and those who suffer from hunger” by the year 2015. The path taken by a country to achieve this will determine whether indigenous peoples’ poverty will be alleviated or not. The path of incurring more debts, engaging in more aggressive extraction of mineral resources, oil, or gas in indigenous peoples’ territories, or further liberalizing imports to the detriment of traditional livelihoods, will not alleviate poverty amongst indigenous peoples.

The Millennium Summit stated that the central challenge faced today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world’s people. This challenge will not be met for indigenous peoples, unless and until their rights are fully recognised and respected in all parts of the world.

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Endnotes

1 Indigenous Peoples Statement to UN CSD High Level Segment.


6 In this part of the paper, I have drawn extensively from Victoria Tauli Corpuz, Indigenous Peoples’ Perspectives On The Millennium Development Goals (2004).

7 Tebtebba (Indigenous Peoples’ International Centre for Policy Research and Education) is an indigenous peoples’ organization, based in Baguio City in the Philippines.


11 While “ethnic minorities” is still a term used in Vietnam, China, Burma and other Asian and African countries, many of these peoples could fall within the UN working definition of indigenous peoples. These are usually those who successfully resisted colonization and have maintained their pre-colonial cultures and traditions and still are maintaining close harmonious relationships with their ancestral lands. In most cases they are highly discriminated against by the dominant society.

12 Rovillos and Morales. 2001. CARAGA is a region in Mindanao which has a big population of Lumad, the generic term for indigenous peoples in Mindanao.

13 Minutes of Jan. 19, 2004 meeting held at the UN HQ in New York.


15 These are the findings of a case study called “Impact of Trade Liberalization on the Rural Poor: Philippine Case Study,” done for IFAD by Victoria Tauli Corpuz and Ruth Batani-Sidchogan. This is still unpublished but will be presented during the 27th IFAD Board of Governors Meeting in Rome on Feb. 18, 2004.


19 IIED.


21 UNCSD 12 Background Paper by Indigenous Peoples.