“We are the first generation to feel the effect of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it.”

Wilben Garcia, one of the new Tebtebba staff, enthused on the need to help solve the problem of climate change during the Indigenous Peoples’ Sustainable, Self-Determined Development (IPSSDD) three-day training that took place on 26 to 28 April 2021 in Baguio City, Philippines.

The event was participated in by six new staff members as they familiarized themselves with the IPSSDD framework which primarily directs Tebtebba’s collective indigenous advocacy work and overall operations as an institution. The training was facilitated through the Elatia Training Institute with the support from
Bread for the World and was done in a peer-to-peer learning manner with the assistance of other older Tebtebba staff members.

“Tebtebba’s aim is community strengthening, although communities must also do their part. The government must do its part, as well. Our goal is to multiply communities who are able to protect and assert their rights in the achievement of human rights,” highlighted Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, executive director of Tebtebba and former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as she provided an overview of the IPSSDD framework in relation to the overall work ethic of the Foundation.

A film viewing of Woody Harrelson’s documentary, Kiss the Ground, commenced which highlighted the manifold alternative methods of slowing down climate change and biodiversity loss including organic farming, carbon sequestration, and so forth. Terms like desertification and regenerative agriculture were introduced as well as the necessity of eradicating the widespread use of commercial fertilizers and pesticides. Discussion of the documentary’s key messages followed right after the viewing, citing various age-old indigenous peoples’ knowledge systems and practices that have long been proven to be sustainable in terms of environmental resource utilization, protection, and conservation.

Maribeth Bugtong-Biano, Elatia IPSSDD Training Institute training coordinator, facilitated the expectation check and iteration of the event’s training objectives, mentioning also the different topics that were to be introduced.

“There is something wrong in the situation of indigenous peoples as all the different issues confronted by indigenous peoples are interrelated,” enthused Helen Biangalen-Magata, Communications Officer of Tebtebba, who facilitated the training’s first session, “Understanding Contemporary Global Change and the Multiple Crises of In-
She highlighted that in the Philippines alone, there is an extreme incidence of hunger in terms of population density. She also pinpointed the fact that the country is currently a climate and biodiversity hotspot, although it is one of the first countries in Asia to ever pass a law protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.

Biangalen-Magata, however, highlighted that despite the presence of the Indigenous People’s Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, indigenous peoples in the Philippines still experience an insufficient access to education, health, and other social services. She also emphasized the continuing non-recognition of indigenous peoples’ traditional medicinal systems, the prevalence of irrelevant and non-culturally responsive education, and the widespread presence of extractive industries in indigenous territories, among others. She asserted that indigenous peoples were “unwilling victims of war and of peace,” as they are typically caught in the crossfires of diverging political factions.

She, then, iterated the phrase, “Nothing about us without us,” as she mentioned the need for indigenous peoples’ inclusion in the different decision-making platforms that concerned their well-being and the necessity of recognizing various indigenous systems that can slow down climate change and biodiversity loss. “Indigenous peoples can be political actors,” Biangalen-Magata stated, referring to the need for indigenous peoples to act upon the multitudinous issues concerning their collective situation. Tebtebba, she said, must be a bridge between indigenous peoples and the government. “It is necessary to capacitate indigenous peoples and strengthen their effort to claim their spaces in the different decision-making bodies,” she added.

Abigail Kitma of the Human Rights Program, remarked that “human rights are interdependent and indivisible” during the second session of the training, “The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to Indigenous Peoples’ Development.” She, then, affirmed that indigenous peoples’ rights are the collective rights of certain indigenous communities that need to be upheld and supported by the different states that govern them in relation to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Attorney Jennifer Corpuz defined the term “indigenous,” highlighting that “indigenous peoples differ in their response to colonization.” She cited as an example the Igorots of the Cordillera Region in the Philippines who fought against Spanish conquest, allowing them to maintain a huge part of their indigenous customs and traditions up to this day. She mentioned that, at present, many indigenous peoples still have their customary justice systems that allow them to effectively manage their communities. “The customary justice system is a key mechanism for sustainable conflict resolution,” she stressed.

Corpuz, then, reiterated the fact that “indigenous peoples’ rights are inherent rights, distinct from the rights of others because they are collective.”

In the training’s third session, “Mainstreaming Indigenous Women and
their Human Rights in IPSSDD,” Ruby Bangilan-Espanola, Tebtebba’s project coordinator for the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Policy (IPAF), discussed the differences between the terms, sex and gender, narrating the prevailing ideas in relation to gender roles and the dangerous impacts of gender stereotyping.

Ellen Dictaan-Bang-oa, project coordinator of the Gender Program, further highlighted the necessity of amplifying indigenous women’s rights and roles in the different programs work. She recapitulated the need to eradicate the rampant discrimination against indigenous women especially in the multifarious power structures of society.

During the event’s fourth session, “Knowledge-Based Approach and Intercultural Approach,” Florence Daguitan of Tebtebba’s Biodiversity Program launched into the discussion of the different knowledge systems among various indigenous groups, stating that their knowledge is based on orally transferred facts and experiences. She emphasized that the term “interculturality” refers to the universality of the patterns of interactions and behaviors as well as cognition in a specific cultural context which, then, differs from one culture to another.

“We should, however, safeguard ourselves against over-romanticizing culture,” Daguitan cautioned as she narrated the dangers of aggrandizing indigenous ways of life including the failure to deem the real-life struggles and actual day-to-day situations of indigenous communities.

Corpuz introduced the “legal framework for the protection of indigenous knowledge and creative expressions” wherein she mentioned the need to practicalize indigenous knowledge systems and practices through the “protection of indigenous culture, traditions,
and institutions.” Corpuz further underscored the need to mainstream the use of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) when working with and extracting information from indigenous peoples so that their rights are protected and exercised in the process. “FPIC is a safeguard against piracy,” she posited.

In the fifth session, “Indigenous Peoples’ Territorial Management Systems Approach to IPSSDD,” June Cadalig-Batang-ay of the Indigenous Peoples and Biodiversity Program (IPBP) dispensed the current status and struggles faced by indigenous peoples in relation to their territorial management systems. “There is a need to implement the UNDRIP in the local levels,” she added. Subsequently, Cadalig-Batang-ay further underlined the following key points: “Indigenous peoples’ well-being is linked to biodiversity and the diverse ecosystems within their territories; indigenous knowledge systems and practices sustain, protect, and conserve lands; and biodiversity is less declining in indigenous peoples’ territories.”

Grace Balawag of Tebtebba’s Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Program highlighted the necessity of strengthening the different indigenous peoples’ organizations as they continue
to lobby for the recognition and implementation of their indigenous rights. “We must demand that the UNDRIP be put into action. We must defend our rights,” she asserted.

During the training’s final session, “Indigenous Peoples’ Sustainable Local Economies and Well-Being,” Roger Lambino of Tebtebba’s Indigenous Peoples and Biodiversity Program shared the different concepts essential to the continuous achievement of context-based development in the different indigenous communities. He introduced the term, “buen vivir,” which he posited meant “living well but not better than others or at the cost of others.” He pointed out the positive relationship between indigenous peoples and the environment, accentuating the indigenous peoples’ sustainable use and stewardship of the ancestral land and all the bio-diversified ecosystems contained within these territories. “For indigenous peoples, the sustainable development of the land and the environment means the continuous development of their culture,” Lambino added.

“The training successfully enabled our colleagues to appreciate their finance and administration works in relation to the overall thrust of Tebtebba towards a self-determined and sustainable development of indigenous peoples. They came to understand the rich stories behind the figures of dollars and pesos they encounter in their books,” enthused Maribeth Bugtong-Biano during her wrap-up and assessment of the event.

The IPSSDD training course is a result of the intensive indigenous peoples’ advocacy work done by Tebtebba as they aim to enhance its own and its partners’ capacities toward sustainable development based on self-determination. The training course was first piloted among Tebtebba partners in October 2011 and, with the launching of the ELATIA Indigenous Peoples’ Training Institute in 2018, it has been further reviewed and revised to suit the different context-based realities of indigenous peoples all over the globe.

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