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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

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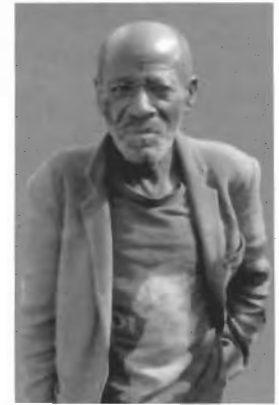
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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND POVERTY REDUCTION: EXPERIENCES FROM IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DANISH STRATEGY FOR SUPPORT TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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IWGIA update

In 2002, like many other NGOs based in Denmark that rely on funding from the Danish Government, IWGIA had to face the fact that our funding from Danida was to be reduced by 15 per cent. This meant cutting back on activities in general and, for our quarterly journal, *Indigenous Affairs*, reducing the number of pages from 64 to 48. We regret having had to take this decision and hope that it will not be an irreversible one. In the meantime, we would ask you, our subscribers and readers, for your understanding at this time. Our yearbook, *The Indigenous World*, however, will be published in the same format and at the same time as usual, i.e., early July.

Regarding IWGIA's other activities, we have strived to meet commitments already made to our indigenous partners.

Our current *project portfolio* contains some 30 projects in Europe (Russia), Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific. Among the major projects are land titling initiatives in Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Botswana and the Philippines; legal support projects in East Africa, Asia, and Latin America; and empowerment projects in India, Indonesia, Thailand, Russia and a number of other countries.

Over the coming months, IWGIA will dedicate much of its time to international issues, such as the *Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*, which is to hold its first regular meeting in May. IWGIA will be present at this meeting and will facilitate the participation of a substantial number of indigenous representatives. Before and after this meeting, IWGIA will facilitate and co-organise regional preparatory and consultative meetings of indigenous peoples. The first meetings will take place in Paraguay and in Bangladesh/Indonesia. It is our opinion that these meetings are very important when it comes to coordinate and improve indigenous input to the Permanent Forum.

The future of the drafting of a *Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is another area of concern and IWGIA will, together with indigenous organisations and experts, lobby for as strong a declaration as possible.

Finally, it is our hope that the forthcoming 33rd session of the *African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights* will adopt a resolution making indigenous issues a point that is considered on a regular basis by that body in the future.

Jens Dahl

Cover: Chaco, Bolivia. Photo: IWGIA archive; Kalinga woman, Philippines.
Photo: Chris Erni; Oil exploration, Peru. Photo: Alejandro Parellada.

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INTERNATIONAL WORK GROUP FOR INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

International secretariat

Classensgade 11 E, DK-2100
Copenhagen, Denmark
Phone.: (+45) 35 27 05 00
Fax: (+45) 35 27 05 07
E-mail: iwgia@iwgia.org
Website: www.iwgia.org

General editors: Marianne Jensen and Alejandro Parellada

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By Diana Vinding

Over the past decade, poverty reduction has become the main objective of most multilateral and bilateral donor agencies, and the UN Millennium Declaration adopted by 189 member nations in September 2000 has the target of reducing by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015.

Perceived as being among the poorest sector of society, indigenous peoples therefore constitute an important target group of various policies and strategies: the World Bank Operational Directive (OD 4.20) from 1991 and its new Draft Operational Policy (OP 4.10), the European Commission's (EC) Document on Support for Indigenous Peoples in Development Co-operation (1998), the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Policy on Indigenous Peoples (1999), the International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) Strategies for Poverty Reduction (2002-2006) and the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Policy of Engagement (n.d.), to name a few.

Needs-based vs. rights-based approach

Most of these policies recognize that the nature of indigenous peoples' poverty and its causes may differ from that of other sectors of the population, and that meaningful consultations with indigenous peoples need to take place in order to develop the most relevant strategies.

However, their strategies differ. Some are more needs-based while others take a more rights-based approach. The World Bank concentrates on mitigating "the adverse impacts" of Bank-assisted development projects but leaves its policy requirements in the hands of the Borrower-country, enjoining it to take the views and preferences of indigenous peoples into consideration when making decisions on projects (Draft OP 4.10). The UNDP, on the other hand, bases its policy on the international human rights framework, and stresses the importance of working in partnership towards the advancement of the goals of the International Decade and the Third International Decade against Racism. The UNDP commits itself to incorporating the concerns of indigenous peoples into its approaches to poverty reduction both at the macro level, through participation and inclusion in poverty-reduction strategies and action plans, as well as at the local level by empowering

indigenous peoples and their organizations to network and influence policy (UNDP n.d.).

IWGIA has often been asked how we deal with the issue of poverty in our support of indigenous peoples, and we have been both criticised and praised for our approach. In 1999, for instance, the report of a "Capacity Analysis" commissioned by Danida criticized IWGIA's support to a San organisation in Botswana for not contemplating poverty as an issue, since our support did not include subsistence and income-generating activities. A more recent assessment of our programme work in Asia, on the other hand, reaches the opposite conclusion, stating that by supporting indigenous peoples to organise, and by supporting their rights in general, we contribute to reducing their poverty.

As a matter of fact, traditional poverty alleviation projects (e.g. income-generating activities) have not been one of IWGIA's priorities. Our implicit position all along has been that a lack of rights was a crucial aspect of indigenous peoples' poverty and that by supporting these rights – human rights, land rights, cultural rights, political rights – and by contributing to the empowerment of indigenous peoples by helping them to organise, we were creating a necessary basis for improving their socio-economic conditions.

In other words, we have endeavoured to address non-economic forms of poverty and deprivation, which we see as being the roots of economic poverty, thereby hoping to eventually contribute to improving indigenous peoples' livelihoods. But the context in which indigenous peoples now live is not that of 10 or 20 years ago and the question arises as to whether this approach is still relevant. Is it sufficient today to promote human and other rights when people are living under increasing economic hardship – without sufficient food, access to health services or cash to buy the most essential goods? And what does poverty mean in an indigenous context, how do indigenous peoples themselves perceive their situation? Is a rights-based approach still adequate or should it go hand in hand with a needs-based strategy?

The need to revisit some of these issues, to discuss the relevance of different approaches and consider how they respond to the expectations of indigenous peoples prompted IWGIA to convene an international seminar on *Indigenous Peoples and Poverty* in November 2002.

The Seminar was held at Österlen Folk High School in Tomelilla, Sweden, and was attended by some 30

indigenous representatives, researchers and representatives from Donor Agencies and development NGOs. Over the course of the two days, the many illuminating presentations and interventions raised useful issues and were followed by fruitful debates, all of which will feed into IWGIA's internal policy and strategy development. Some of the participants had also prepared written papers and IWGIA is happy to present these in this issue of *Indigenous Affairs*.



IWGIA Seminar participants, Tomelilla, Sweden 2002. Photo: Göran Göransson

and discriminatory connotations. On the contrary, they consider that they have resources, unique knowledge and know-how and that their cultures have special values and strength. But they often feel 'impoverished' as a result of processes which are out of their control and sometime irreversible.

These processes have dispossessed them of their traditional lands, re-

stricted or prohibited their access to natural resources, resulted in the breakdown of their communities and the degradation of their environment, thereby threatening their physical and cultural survival. In the case of India, Tiplut Nongbri writes that, "it is significant that tribal poverty is highest in states where the people have lost control over land". She also shows how poverty can be linked to access to forests and non-timber produce, and how the recent decisions taken by the Indian Supreme Court empowering the government to bring all forests under working plans and evict encroachers will have disastrous effects on the livelihood of tribal people in general, and of tribal women in particular.

Poverty in an indigenous context

One of the first aspects brought up in Tomelilla was that the concept of 'indigenous peoples' has changed over past decades. Today it covers a number of very different livelihoods (subsistence farmers, forest dwellers, pastoralists, agricultural workers, urban dwellers, etc.), and there was general agreement that it is impossible to develop a concept of indigenous poverty that is equally applicable to the different livelihood systems and the different geographical regions. Even within one specific indigenous group, as illustrated by Dorothy Jackson in her article on the Pygmies in Central Africa, there will be a variety of socio-economic situations. It is therefore important to speak of different dimensions and levels of poverty.

The notion of poverty was also debated. Rather than simply stating that indigenous peoples are *poor*, it seems more appropriate to talk about *impoverishment processes*. As several participants remarked, indigenous peoples do not consider themselves to be *poor*, many in fact dislike being labelled as such because of its negative

Poverty through loss of culture

In his article from West Kalimantan, Indonesia, John Bamba further explores the consequences of these processes. Taking the Jalai Dayak as an example, he contrasts the seven principles on which the Dayak base their cultural values and manage their environment (referred to as the 'Dayak system') with the principles underlying what he calls the 'Development System', which comes in the form of logging, monoculture plantation and mining activities, a system which prioritises individual compe-



tion, considers rituals as a wasteful activity, etc. In doing this, Bamba not only highlights the incompatibility between the two systems but also illustrates how the imposed Development System makes it impossible for the Dayak to manage their natural resources according to customary laws. And, no longer able to live according to and on the basis of their culture, they can no longer maintain their way of life as distinct communities, and ultimately experience what he calls "cultural/social poverty".

The need for new poverty indicators

The fact that indigenous peoples – not only in West Kalimantan but elsewhere too – perceive the loss of cultural values and ideals as impoverishment raises the issue of poverty indicators. The seminar agreed, as is also reflected in this issue, that the traditional poverty indicators are all too often based on Western, urban perceptions and are related to cash income and expenditure. Instead we need poverty indicators based on the indigenous peoples' own perception of their situation. As noted by Maria Teresa Quispe: "No planning or investment will ever be successful unless indigenous peoples, leaders and community members are taken into account ... And western experts and partners have to be trained. It is a useful exercise in humility to understand the greatness of different types of knowledge." She also advocates that, instead of talking of 'poverty', the concept of 'well-being' should be used, based on each community's own perception and own indicators.

Breaking with the dichotomy

Another deficiency noted is that traditional indicators only look at the consequences of poverty, not at its

underlying causes. These may range from negative stereotyping, denial of rights and segregation (Jackson) through isolation and exclusion from the country's social, material and symbolic resources (Nongbri) to (inadequate) development models, economic policies or formal education models (Quispe). But they all underscore "the need to view poverty reduction more broadly than simply improving per capita economic growth rates and improving living conditions", as noted by Susan Ulbæk.

However, this consensus regarding the need to look at root causes and, by implication, support indigenous peoples' rights, does not preclude the necessity to look at the well-being of indigenous peoples and try to meet their basic needs. On the contrary. All the articles in this issue advocate that a rights-based approach and a needs-based approach must go hand in hand and, based on the Danish experiences of implementation of the Strategy for Support to Indigenous Peoples, Susan Ulbæk concludes that these experiences "underscore the fact that addressing the situation of the indigenous peoples requires a mix of the rights-based approach and the development approach. The exact strategy for appropriate interventions will depend on the national context and will have to be decided by the indigenous peoples themselves based on analyses of their perceptions of poverty and its causes and in the light of their overall vision for future development."

However, as Susan Ulbæk also points out in her article, addressing structural causes requires different approaches directed at changing national-level policy. The Danish experiences of bi-lateral government co-operation show that there is a limit to what one donor can achieve. Better donor co-ordination, as well as pressure for change from within the country, would enhance the chances of success in terms of strengthening indigenous peoples' rights at the national policy level.



At work. Tomelilla, Sweden 2002. Photos: Göran Göransson

The way forward

Two important recommendations are put forward in this issue's two final articles. Based on her experience of working with indigenous peoples in Venezuela, María Teresa Quispe stresses the need for indigenous leaders and their communities to find spaces for a more in-depth reflection and discussion on the rights they want to promote and defend. "What's the meaning of these rights? What is our policy for defending these rights? Are these rights right? Are we prepared for them? Is it possible that these aspects we call rights and so strongly defend can, by any chance, do any harm to our communities or to society in general?" These are all questions that should be debated and answered so that indigenous organisations can better define their strategies and concrete actions. Quispe also reminds us that indigenous peoples live surrounded by very strong societies, with different interests, and that they therefore also need to reflect upon the issue of globalisation.

As for Susan Ulbæk, she concludes her article by recommending that donors should, in co-operation with indigenous peoples, "develop further methods for poverty analyses in indigenous communities to enhance the understanding of the dynamics of poverty and the impact of different interventions on indigenous communities, men and women." She also sees a need to "further develop an integrated approach to working with indigenous peoples' rights and development simultaneously."

Together with some of the issues raised during the Tomelilla Seminar and in this issue of *Indigenous Affairs*, these two recommendations will form part of the on-going policy and strategy development process within IWGIA. We would hereby like to invite our readers and partners to come forward with ideas, comments and suggestions that could further enrich this process. □

Website references on indigenous peoples and poverty reduction strategies

www.unhchr.org

Click on *Issues in Focus, Human Rights in Development and Poverty*

www.undp.org/csopp/CSO

Click on *Indigenous Peoples*

www.undp.org/seped

Click on *Poverty*

www.oecd.org

Click on *Themes, Poverty Reduction and DAC Guidelines on Poverty, Equity and Development*

www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/ip

Gives access to the main reports on EU Policy on Indigenous Peoples & Development.

www.worldbank.org/indigenous_peoples

Besides many important themes and links the site brings an update on the consultations on Draft OP/BD 4.10.

www.adb.org/Documents/Policies/Indigenous_Peoples

About the Bank's policy on indigenous peoples.

www.adb.org/Poverty

About the Bank's policy on poverty and poverty reduction

www.ifad.org/rural

Gives access to the Rural Poverty Knowledgebase of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

www.ifad.org/operations/regional

Gives access to IFAD's regional strategies for rural poverty reduction.

www.minbuza.nl Click (*International site*), *Development Assistance, Grant Programmes and Theme based Co-financing* for accessing document on *Civil Society and Structural Poverty Reduction*.



SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FOR PYGMY PEOPLES

DOROTHY JACKSON



The forests of Africa have been inhabited for thousands of years. It is not known when the indigenous hunter-gatherer 'Pygmy'¹ peoples first appeared in Africa but their origin stories and those of their farming neighbours portray the Pygmy peoples as always having been there. Early on, Pygmy peoples established trading relationships with the farming and fishing peoples moving into their areas. These systems of cultural and social exchange persist today, in some cases more freely entered into and in others more exploitative.

Diversities and similarities among Pygmy peoples

Many different groups of Pygmy peoples live in the forests and once-forested areas of the Congo basin and the Great Lakes region, stretching from Cameroon through the Central African Republic (CAR), Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, and possibly Angola. The situation and way of life of these different groups differs greatly.

At one end of the spectrum are groups such as some Mbendjele, Mbuti (northern Republic of Congo, north-east DRC) and some Aka and Baka communities (south-west CAR, eastern Cameroon) who still maintain a largely autonomous, nomadic forest-based existence centred on hunting and gathering. Some of these people have little contact with the market economy and 'Bantu' villages.

At the other end of the spectrum are the Twa of Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and eastern DRC who have been dispossessed of their forest lands, are sedenterised, can no longer practise hunting and gathering, and live on the fringes of dominant society, exposed to but scarcely participating in, the market economy.

In between these two situations are many groups who, although they have access to forest in varying degrees, are sedenterised, living in fixed villages along roadsides, and are closely associated with and, in many cases, under the control of Bantu or other villagers.

Despite the differences in situations of Pygmy peoples, their social, economic and cultural life is distinctively different from that of their neighbours, even in cases where neighbouring groups are also strongly dependent on the forest.

Pygmy societies are characterised by anthropologists as egalitarian 'immediate-return' societies.² They are mobile and flexible; they seek a direct and immediate return for their labour, they do not accumulate property or store surpluses, and are strongly orientated towards

the present rather than the future. Economic inequality within the group is levelled by obligatory sharing. Social inequalities are resolved by teasing, joking, jeering and avoidance. Individuals with recognised skills or experience may be accepted as leaders in relevant situations, but there is no overall leader. Decisions are taken collectively and everyone may voice their opinion, the society is inclusive. Problems and conflicts are often dealt with by avoidance and moving away from the source of difficulty.

Although the different present-day Pygmy peoples live many hundreds of kilometres apart, speak different languages and have different livelihoods, these social and cultural characteristics are shared by the forest-dwelling groups and, to varying degrees, are still evident in groups who lost their forest way of life many years ago, such as the Twa of the Great Lakes region.

Another factor common to all Pygmy peoples is that they are subject to prejudice and discrimination from farmers and herders. This discrimination takes three main forms: negative stereotyping, a denial of their rights and segregation,³ and is even more severe amongst peoples who are no longer able to practice hunter-gathering and have to a large extent adopted the way of life of their neighbours.

Pygmy peoples are stereotyped as sub-human, dirty, immoral, ignorant, backward, stupid and childish.

Their rights to have control over their own labour, their lands or their marriages, and to represent and speak for themselves are denied. They "are freely, even casually, dispossessed of the land by agricultural and pastoral people."⁴ Pygmy peoples are not permitted to eat or drink with other people, sit on the same bench, draw water from wells at the same time, or intermarry with non-Pygmy people. Hunting and gathering is not recognised as a valid way of life, in contrast to farming and pastoralism. These attitudes are beginning to change but are still very widespread and in many areas extreme.

Concepts of Poverty

Forest-based Pygmy peoples consider themselves to be in an intimate, nurturing relationship with the forest, the forest will always be there for them and provide what they need. They believe that the forest is the source of all abundance, and this is maintained by proper sharing between people or between people and forest spirits, and by singing and dancing rituals which ensure the support of spirits to help them satisfy all their needs.⁵ Their sense of quality of life is extremely closely linked to the well-being of the forest and its resources.

Pygmy groups who still have forest-based livelihoods in relatively intact forests, who are nomadic, autonomous and relatively isolated, without marked dependence on trade and exchange relationships, do not tend to conceive of themselves as poor except in terms of money. In terms of land, food, shelter they consider themselves to be well-off. The Mbendjele, for instance, do not have a word for 'poor'.

However, Central African forests and their resources are facing a massive and accelerating onslaught from logging, forest clearance for agriculture and development projects, and from wildlife conservation agencies placing forest areas off limits to the inhabitants. Pygmy peoples are losing the physical and political space in which they can decide their own future. Groups that have been dispossessed of their forest territories nevertheless still feel connected to the forest, such as the Twa in eastern DRC, who were evicted in the 1970s during the creation of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park. "Even today one hears ... them lament having lost their vital domain where they lived from hunting and gathering."⁶ Twa elders in Rwanda also fondly recall how they hunted in the Nyungwe forest and brought buffalo horns and elephant tusks to the Mwami Kings as tribute. For them, the forest was a utopia where life was easy, their culture was strong and they had self-respect.

Dispossessed Pygmy groups living on the margins of dominant society have limited livelihood options and are much more exposed to discrimination and exclusion. These groups are acutely aware of their poverty. They have a very low sense of well-being because they lack the following: freedom from hunger and violence, respect from others, control over their lives, having a voice, knowledge and skills, good health, adequate shelter, material possessions, income and access to infrastructure and amenities.

In the rest of this paper I will look at the main factors affecting Pygmy peoples' ability to secure sustainable livelihoods, and the issues that need to be addressed by development and other poverty reduction initiatives.

Pygmy peoples' resources

Natural resources

A key issue for Pygmy peoples is land. Forest-based Pygmy groups have clearly defined territories within the forest, but Pygmy peoples' customary rights to land and forest resources are not recognised in written law or in the customary rights systems of the dominant Bantu society. In many cases, Pygmy groups' lands are overlain by villagers' land claims. In some cases, access and use rights are mutually recognised by villagers and Pygmy groups, enabling co-existence between these two communities. In other areas, villagers may claim exclusive rights, as with some Mbendjele groups in northern Republic of

Congo,⁷ or consider the whole of the non-cultivated forest area to be common property to which villagers have priority of access, as is reported for Bantu people living in Bagyeli areas.⁸ Nevertheless, Pygmy groups who have retained access to forest resources are able to supply some or most of their needs for food, shelter, clothing, medicines and technology, and can trade or barter surpluses with neighbours.

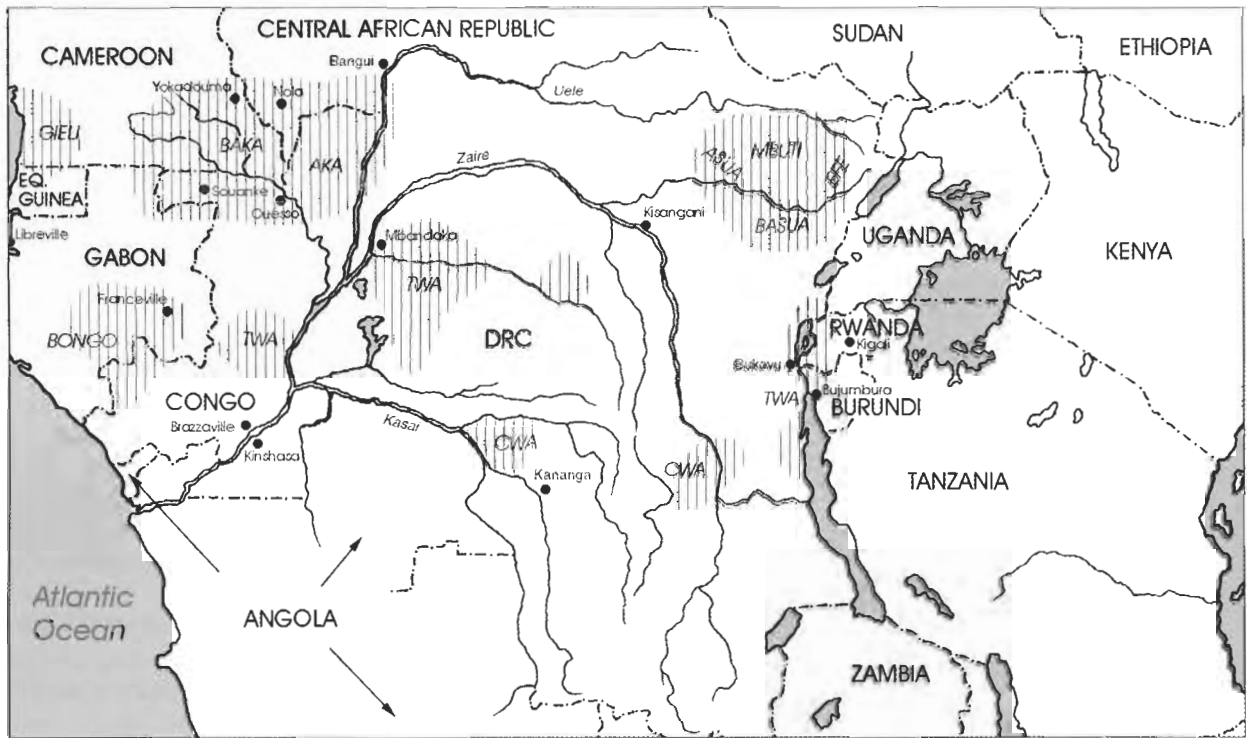
The failure of national, local and customary institutions to recognise Pygmy land rights is a major factor affecting their ability to maintain and develop sustainable livelihoods. Groups that are expropriated of their forestlands, or whose forest resources are destroyed, rarely get compensation or alternative land provision. Loss of forestlands inevitably leads to landlessness and severe unmet needs in terms of food security, shelter, clothing and medicines.

There are no instances of Pygmy peoples obtaining secure rights to control their forestlands and resources. Limited use rights have been accorded by some conservation agencies in buffer zones around national parks. For example, 1500 Aka people are permitted to hunt with nets and registered guns, gather forest produce and carry out limited cultivation in the buffer zone around the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park in CAR. But the core area of the park is out of bounds - only ecotourism and research may be carried out there. The project has thus put the Aka under greater pressure by reducing their hunting and gathering areas and increasing competition between Aka and villagers for forest resources.

In Cameroon, agencies working with Pygmy peoples are trying to secure land rights through new administrative structures, for example, registering Pygmy lands as community forests under the 1994 forest law. There are numerous problems, including the 5000 ha limit for community forests whereas Pygmy peoples' hunting and gathering areas are often much larger and the fact that community forestry is only possible in the areas along roads, where Pygmies' customary use rights are denied by Bantu settlers. The remote forest areas, where Pygmies could still claim their customary rights and would benefit from having their own community forests, are part of the permanent forest estate and thus reserved for commercial logging or conservation.

Some Pygmy groups have been able to obtain land outside the forest. This may be through patronage, for example, 84% of the few Twa that have land in Rwanda were gifted it by the former *Mwami* kings, or by 'buying' rights from local *Mwami* rulers, as with the Twa in eastern Kivu. However, few Twa are able to obtain the valuable items needed to pay for perpetual use rights (*kalinzi*) or, if they do, they may be cheated out of the land by the *Mwami*. Most Twa in eastern Kivu have been allocated temporary (*bwassa*) use rights in very small plots on the least fertile lands, which they may be ordered to leave at any time.⁹

Some Twa groups and individuals in Rwanda and Burundi have entered the informal land market and bought



Distribution of Batwa and Pygmy communities in Central Africa

The Twa NGO CAURWA training some of its local representatives. Rwanda. Photo: Dorothy Jackson





land with cash. In Rwanda, Twa communities are able to obtain usufruct rights to marsh lands owned by the state, if they organise themselves as collectives and present a use plan for the land. In Uganda some land has been bought for Twa people evicted from the Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable Forests by a Trust fund set up to manage the parks.¹⁰

Human resources

Skills and knowledge

Pygmy peoples have a wide range of specialised skills and knowledge necessary to carry out their forest-based livelihoods, including an incomparable knowledge of plants and animals, and skills in medicine, music, dance and crafts. Some of these skills can be adapted for alternative livelihoods to get cash incomes, such as tree spotting for logging companies, trackers, patrols and guides in conservation areas, ecological research informants, dance and music troupes providing entertainment for tourists and local festivities. However, as these skills are generally undervalued by outsiders, payments are very low.

Pygmy peoples tend to be information-poor concerning events and trends outside their immediate environment, due to their geographic remoteness, lack of literacy, lack of access to radios and their high mobility even in 'sedenterised' populations. In addition, national and local institutions are often ineffective in disseminating information to Pygmy communities, or carrying out effective consultation or promoting participation. As a result Pygmy communities are generally unaware of their rights and entitlements as citizens of their countries, and are not informed about national and local policies and legislation that affect them.

Health

The health status of Pygmy groups varies with a number of different factors. Forest-based groups are vulnerable to disease epidemics, due to their lack of inclusion in government health and vaccination campaigns. For example, mortality due to measles was five times higher among the Mbendjele than the villagers and the overall under-five mortality rate was 27% among Mbendjele children compared with 18% in villager children.¹¹

Sedenterisation is associated with health and social problems related to a lack of sanitation, alcoholism and transmission of infectious diseases, including STDs and HIV / AIDS. In the Great Lakes region, backache is thought to be cured by sleeping with a Twa woman, putting them at increased risk of HIV / AIDS. Health issues are a major concern expressed by non-forest groups, such as the Twa in Rwanda and Burundi, whose poor health situation is exacerbated by malnutrition and inadequate shelter.

Social resources

Within their groups, forest-based Pygmy peoples are linked by a strong sense of connectedness to each other and the forest. There is the feeling that there is plenty of everything; if not, someone is not sharing properly. Their social networks are intimately connected to their forest resource management systems, which are based on

use rights for particular areas and resources, and enable goods from the forest and outside agencies to be distributed among the group.

Social cohesion is less pronounced in groups who have lost their forest-based way of life, particularly in settlements composed of families from different clans, where mistrust and disagreements may be rife. Nevertheless, these groups retain an egalitarian spirit, sharing resources coming into the group and giving everyone the right to comment and contribute to decision-making.

Generally, Pygmy groups lack access to wider institutions that could provide safety nets, except for the relationships with their Bantu neighbours, to whom they may turn for food or other resources in situations of need. These relationships may be more or less exploitative.

The egalitarian social organisation, which minimises differences in wealth, power and status within Pygmy communities, makes it difficult for these small, isolated groups to organise themselves to oppose powerful outside forces or to connect with development agencies to bring benefits to their communities. Cohesion and negotiating power are weakened by individualistic, opportunistic and autonomous behaviour, fragmentation of groups, and ousting of temporary 'leaders' who are considered to have overstepped their boundaries or failed to share material benefits gained as a result of their leadership.

Pygmy Organisations

Pygmy organisations, particularly in the Great Lakes region where most of the existing organisations are located, have struggled to develop representative structures which respect the egalitarian social organisation of their communities but are also able to influence the outside world and bring benefits to the communities. Their position as interlocutors between the Pygmy communities and government and outside agencies requires them to respond appropriately to the differing requirements of these two groups.

Broadly speaking, Pygmy organisations fall into two kinds, both with important roles to play:

- NGOs set up by concerned, educated, urban-based individuals with little direct contact with the grassroots but with experience in dealing with outside agencies. These organisations can be effective at policy level, raise awareness and run projects, but need to learn how to involve communities in their activities and decision-making if their advocacy work is to be genuine and effective.
- Organisations set up by the communities themselves. As direct representatives of the communities, their advocacy is extremely powerful, especially if they can be helped to get information about how the outside forces affecting their lives are organised. However, outside agencies find it hard to work with the fluid, non-hierarchical structures of Pygmy groups. The social code of obligatory sharing places Pygmy 'leaders' under intense pressure to share money and benefits with relatives and clan members, which is seen as corruption by western donors. An alternative approach could be for Pygmy groups to enlist trusted outsiders as 'gate-keepers' who mediate with the outside world, managing money and





Goat flocks. Rwanda. Photo: Dorothy Jackson

facilitating actions decided by the communities, so that the communities can achieve their aims without compromising their traditional institutions and social mechanisms.

Financial and material resources

Pygmy groups generally have very few financial resources and are scarcely connected to the cash economy, particularly forest-based groups and, if they are, this is usually on very unfavourable terms. Some cash is generated through sale of forest products, wild game and crafts, or from short-term employment, such as with logging companies or conservation projects but often payment is in kind (food, seeds, tools etc). Increasingly Pygmy people need money to pay for things like ID cards, schooling, medical treatment and transport.

Forest-based groups tend to show little interest in possessions, although they value certain aspects of modern technology, such as plastic sheeting, mosquito nets and cartridges. Sedentised and non-forest groups have increasing aspirations to lead similar lifestyles to their neighbours, to avoid being ridiculed and ostracised, and also a settled life brings with it requirements for durable housing, household items such as jerry-cans for water collection and bought clothing.

Institutional and policy issues

A major external factor affecting the ability of Pygmy peoples to secure sustainable livelihoods is the widespread prejudice, discrimination and exclusion they face from dominant society, which increases their vulnerability and prevents them from enjoying due rights and entitlements. Most African governments do not recognise indigenous peoples, fearful of recognising the rights of peoples within the framework of the state. The acute human rights issues faced by Africa's indigenous peoples thus remain unaddressed by state agencies.

Consultation and participation

The failure of local and national authorities to recognise Pygmy peoples as stakeholders has led to a widespread lack of prior, informed consent when setting up infrastructure, development and conservation projects impacting on Pygmy peoples. For example, consultations carried out prior to the implementation of the Chad-Cameroon oil-pipeline failed to adequately inform Bagyeli communities about the pipeline process.¹² Similarly, no consultation was undertaken with Twa people displaced from the Gishwati forest in Rwanda by livestock and afforestation projects, and consultation with Pygmy peoples affected by conservation projects and logging activities throughout the Central African forests has been almost non-existent to date.

Representation

Pygmy peoples have virtually no representation in local or national politico-administrative structures. Such representation is needed to get redress for past wrongs and to secure rights to development and a share of benefits offered by outside agencies.

Forest-dwelling Pygmy communities are regarded as the property of the Bantu villagers and thus not needing their own representation at local or regional level. For example, despite Mbendjele having some permanent camp sites occupied for over 30 years, none of their communities are officially recognised or represented through their own village committees or village heads.¹³ The lack of effective representation of Pygmy peoples puts them at a severe disadvantage when compensation for damage to their resources is being disbursed, as the compensation gets captured by the villagers, as happened to Bagyeli people affected by the Chad-Cameroon oil-pipeline project.¹⁴

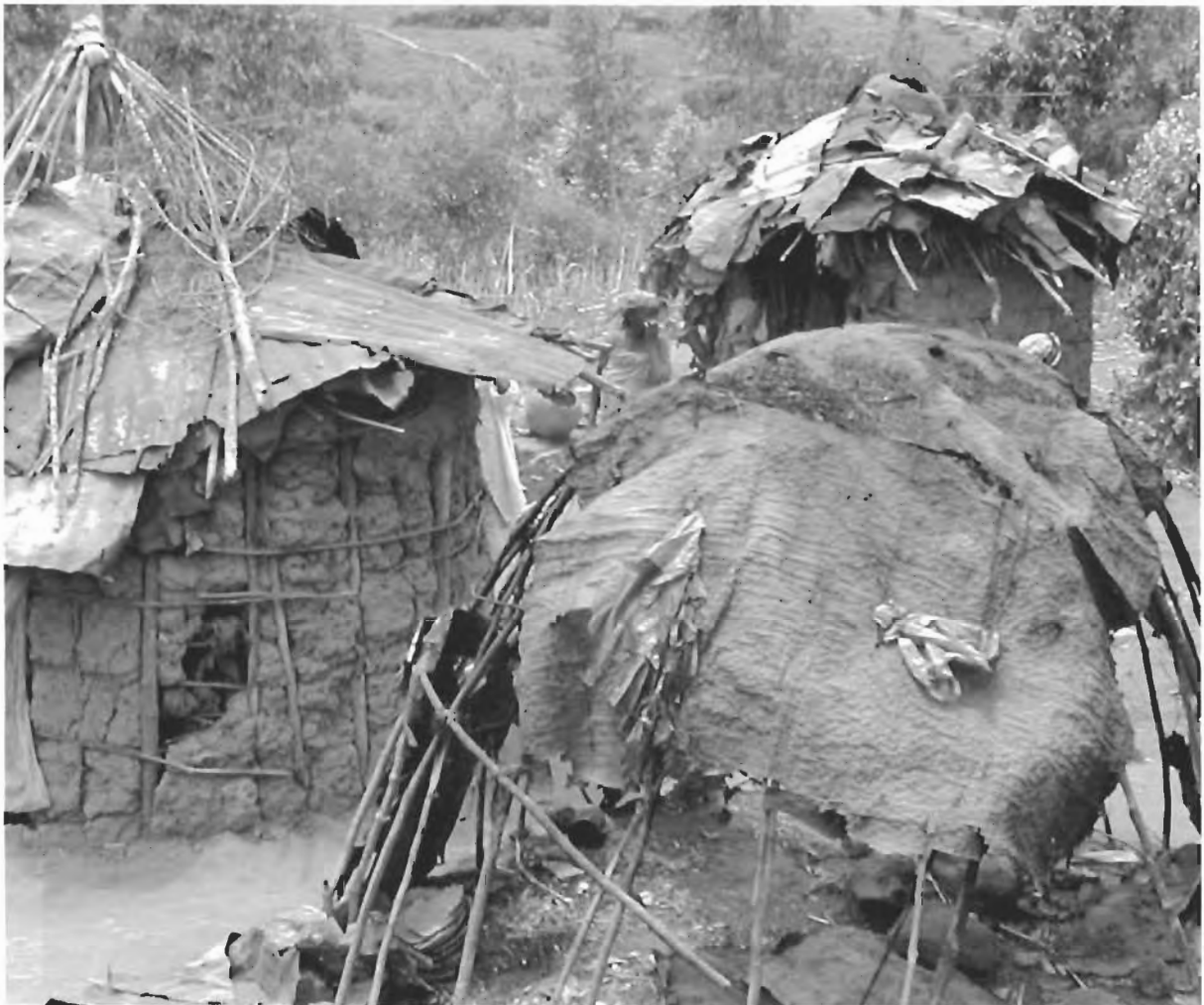
Justice

Pygmy peoples are widely unable to assert citizenship rights. They may not be able to afford to buy ID cards, or vote freely in elections. They frequently encounter official obstruction and harassment. In forest-based groups, deemed to be 'owned' by Bantu villages, individuals can only file a formal complaint against a Bantu if another Bantu represents them, a system which prevents Pygmies from obtaining redress against many injustices.¹⁵ Claims that do get brought to the authorities are often ignored, or treated lightly. Murderers of Pygmy people caught thieving or trespassing may be jailed for a short period, then quietly released, creating a sense of fear and powerlessness within the Pygmy community.

Because of their low status and lack of representation and political power, Pygmy peoples are extremely vulnerable to expropriation of land and property by neighbours,



Batwa community, Uganda. Photo: Penninah Zaninka



Twa huts in Nyaruguru, Rwanda. Photo: Dorothy Jackson

local authorities, parastatals and commercial enterprises. They are often victims of violence and, in situations of conflict, such as the ongoing civil conflict in DRC and Burundi, and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda,¹⁶ are amongst the most vulnerable, targeted by all sides.

Access to services

Pygmy people often have difficulty accessing education and health services, through not being able to pay for them, the discrimination they face when attending clinics or schools, or the fact that services are not adapted to needs of Pygmy communities, especially forest groups. Education is often provided by evangelising churches seeking to make Pygmy culture conform to the mainstream. School terms may coincide with the times for harvesting certain forest resources, and curricula generally do not reinforce traditional knowledge.

Some initiatives have started to develop primary health care services implemented by Pygmy people. For example, the Dzanga-Sangha project in CAR has trained Aka as health scouts, and brought basic health care and health education to remote Aka camps. In Republic of Congo, Mbendjele healers were trained in primary health care and a Mbendjele-run pharmacy was established.¹⁷ In Rwanda, Twa families with small cash incomes are enthusiastic subscribers to local health insurance schemes that cover a whole family for a modest monthly payment.

Development approaches

The predominant development model promoted for forest-based Pygmy peoples is that their forest way of life is anachronistic and doomed and that the only way in which they can secure an acceptable standard of living is to settle in fixed villages where they can learn how to farm, and have access to health and education services and other benefits of 'modern' life. The focus is on provision of services, rather than recognition of rights.

Pygmy peoples should, however, not have to choose between their rights to land and culture and their rights to services. They should be given space and options to make their own choices. For example, an indigenous peoples' plan developed for the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project decided that the Bagyeli needed agricultural education and training, the Bagyeli themselves determined that they needed security of land tenure over their agricultural land, and long-term protection for their customary rights to forest resources.

Throughout their history, Pygmy peoples have encountered many changes and have shown considerable fluidity in behaviour, while retaining their essential autonomy. Their continuing existence is testimony to the successfulness of their strategies. As pointed out by Kairn Kliemann:

If the descendants of hunting and gathering peoples continue to exist today as distinct socio-cultural units, it is only because at some point in the past their ancestors chose not to assimilate into the communities they adopted Bantu languages from. If such a choice had not been made, these peoples would have been integrated into agriculturalist communities like thousands of other indigenous peoples the world over whose history is now lost forever.¹⁸

Our experience has shown that development for indigenous peoples does not work without a proper state framework that ensures recognition of indigenous peoples and their needs, effective consultation, participation, representation, non-discrimination, mechanisms for exercising customary rights, access to entitlements and to mechanisms for redress. Poverty reduction interventions for indigenous peoples must address rights and policy issues at the same time as meeting basic needs. Only in this way will Pygmy peoples be able to continue to develop livelihood strategies that will meet the challenges they now face.

Notes and references

- 1 The terms 'forest peoples' (used by forest-based groups to describe themselves) and hunter-gatherers do not apply to all the groups covered by this paper. I therefore use the term 'Pygmy peoples' – a term also used by indigenous 'Pygmy' activists – to encompass the whole spectrum of forest-dwelling and non-forest groups and their diverse situations.
- 2 Lewis, J. 2000. The Batwa Pygmies of the Great Lakes Region. *Minority Rights Group International*, p. 8.
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- 4 Woodburn. 1997, op. cit., p. 350.
- 5 Lewis, J. 2002a. Scarcity and Abundance. Contrasting conceptions of the forest in northern Congo-Brazzaville and issues for conservation. Paper prepared for Ninth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, Edinburgh 9-13 September 2002. p. 6.
- 6 Barume, A. 2000. *Heading towards extinction? Indigenous Rights in Africa: The case of the Twa of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo*. Copenhagen: Forest Peoples Programme and IWGIA, p. 75.
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- 8 Van den Berg, J., and K. Biesbrouck. 2000. *The Social Dimension of Rainforest Management in Cameroon: issues for Co-Management*. Tropenbos-Cameroon Series 4.
- 9 Barume, A. 2000, op. cit., pp. 98-101.
- 10 Kenrick, J. 2001. *The Batwa of South West Uganda: World Bank Policy on Indigenous Peoples and the Conservation of the Bwindi and Mgahinga National Parks*. Manila: Tebtebba.
- 11 Lewis, I. 1999. *Discrimination and Access to Health Care: the case of nomadic forest hunter-gatherers in Africa*. MSc Dissertation, University of London.
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the Chad-Cameroon oil-pipeline project. Forest Peoples Project. www.forestpeoples.org

- 13 Lewis, J. 2002b, op. cit., p.19.
- 14 Nelson et al. 2001, op. cit.
- 15 Lewis, J. 2002b, op. cit.
- 16 Lewis, J. & J. Knight. 1995 *The Twa of Rwanda. Assessment of the Situation of the Twa and Promotion of Twa Rights in Post-War Rwanda*. Copenhagen: World Rainforest Movement and IWGIA.
- 17 Lewis, I. 1999, op. cit.
- 18 Kliemann, K. 1999. Hunter-gatherer participation in rainforest trade-systems: a comparative history of forest vs. ecotone societies in Gabon and Congo, c. 1000-1800 AD. *Challenging Elusiveness. Central African Hunter-Gatherers in a Multidisciplinary Perspective*, eds. K. Biesbrouck, S. Elders and G. Rossel. Research School for Asian, African and Amerindian Studies (CNWS), University of Leiden, Holland. (pp 76-88).

Dr Dorothy Jackson is British and grew up in Sudan. She holds a PhD in Tropical Forest Ecology from Oxford University. She has conducted field work in tropical forest ecology and entomology in Colombia and Cameroon and spent four years in northern Thailand carrying out community-based research on infant health and nutrition. On her return from Thailand, she established the Soil Association's environmental timber label, Woodmark, accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council, and ran a voluntary rainforest campaign group. Since 1991 Dorothy has worked with the Forest Peoples Programme, a British NGO working to support indigenous and tribal peoples to secure their rights to lands, resources and sustainable livelihoods. Dorothy is the Africa Programme Coordinator of the Forest Peoples Programme and its UK-registered charitable arm, the Forest Peoples Project.

Contact: Forest Peoples Programme, 1c Fosseyway Business Centre, Stratford Road, Moreton in Marsh, Glos. GL56 9NQ
UK. djackson@gn.apc.org □

IWGIA publication

The book documents and discusses the case of the Twa, the so-called 'pygmy' people, of the Kahuzi-Biega forests, South Kivu province in eastern Congo.

The particular case of the Twa of Kahuzi-Biega is presented in the African context as well as in the context of emerging and established international norms and principles of indigenous peoples' rights.

Heading Towards Extinction? is a plea for recognition of the legal rights that the Twa are entitled to as an indigenous people. The book calls for the reform of the assimilationist approach taken by the Congolese Government as well as the agencies involved in managing the Kahuzi-Biega National Park.

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HEADING TOWARDS EXTINCTION?

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF THE TWA OF THE KAHUZI-BIEGA NATIONAL PARK, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Albert Kwokwo Barume

POVERTY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA

TIPLUT NONGBRI





Rice harvesting in Manipur. Photo: Christian Erni



Poverty eradication has been one of the most popular rhetorics deployed by Indian politicians to stir the imagination of the poor and ensure their votes in the elections. From late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's historic statement that 'poverty is the greatest pollutant' at the 1972 Stockholm Conference on Environment and Development and her 'Garibi Hatao' (Eradicate Poverty) slogan that dominated the Congress regime in the 1970s to Atal Bihari Vajpayee's 'Antodaya Scheme,' proudly announced as his birthday 'gift' to the poorest of the poor in December 2001, promising 35 kgs of food grains per family per month at the rate of Rs. 2 per kg for wheat and Rs. 3 per kg for rice, India's poor have been on the receiving end of empty promises made by successive governments.

It is therefore not surprising that 10 months down the line since Prime Minister Vajpayee proudly announced the Antodaya scheme, the country has witnessed some of the most serious poverty-linked deaths by starvation of the decade. Significantly, the worst affected are the tribals/indigenous peoples (Adivasis or aboriginals) in the states of Rajasthan and Orissa, societies where caste prejudice is also widespread and intense.

Tribes constitute about 8.04% of India's population (1991 census). Approximately 83% of these are concentrated in the central tribal belt, 12% in the Northeastern region and 5% in the rest of the country. Although geographically dispersed and culturally and linguistically varied, India's tribes are characterised by their poor socio-economic condition. Although internal class differentiations are slowly emerging in a small segment of the population, tribes generally occupy the lowest rung of the country's economic and development ladder. This is reflected in the high incidence of poverty recorded among them. Ac-

ording to available figures, the percentage of tribes living below the poverty line in the mid-1990s was 52.17% as compared to 37.09% for the population as a whole.

A major factor that contributes to poverty in India is the failure of the state to address the structural conditions under which the poor live. This is particularly true in the case of tribes for whom poverty is not simply a lack of access to income but is due to the cumulative effect of their isolation and exclusion from the country's social (education), material (land, capital, technology) and symbolic (authority, power, status) resources. This explains why, despite the constitutional provisions of affirmative action in matters of education, employment and political participation adopted by the state since 1950 when India became a republic, a large number of tribes still live below the poverty line. Half-hearted implementation of development programmes and the entrenched prejudice of the Hindu upper castes against the reservation policy in particular and the underclass in general, coupled with the mass corruption that has crept into Indian bureaucracy, make poverty eradication and empowerment of the tribes an uphill task.

Investigations into the recent deaths by starvation in the states of Orissa and Rajasthan reveal that upper caste prejudice and the corruption of the administrative machinery contributed in no small measure to the tragedy. Reports published by citizens groups and journalists from the print and electronic media reveal that the victims had to feed on roots and vermin due to the non-availability of food grains in the government's fair price shops and the fact that they were too poor to procure them on the open market. But what is shocking is the brazen denial by the politicians and officials that the deaths were caused by starvation, attributing them instead to the primitive diet



*Birhor woman with freshly harvested forest produce. Jharkhand, India.
Photo: Roger Begrich*

Thangkhul (Naga), Manipur, India Photo: Christian Erni



of the people, who were feeding on mango kernels and wild roots and plants from the forests. A critical question that the politicians/officials failed to answer, however, was why people should choose to eat roots and kernels if sufficient food was available.

Basis of tribal poverty

To have a clear and holistic understanding of tribal poverty we need to go beyond particular instances to the root of the problem. To begin with, it is significant that tribal poverty is highest in states where the people have lost control over land. A perusal of the National Sample Survey report on consumption and expenditure patterns shows that the highest incidence of poverty among the tribal population is found in the states of Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh,¹ all states in which the tribes' access to land has faced severe erosion.

This implicitly points to a close nexus between land alienation and tribal poverty. Limitation of space does not permit me to go into the detail of the matter. Suffice to say that the alienation of tribal land has had a long and chequered history. Although the process began with the feudalisation of tribal society in the pre-colonial period, it intensified under the British, who rationalised the feudal structure and introduced state monopolies over land, forest and species.² The process reached its peak in the post-independence period. The Indian state not only gave constitutional sanctity to the principle of eminent domain introduced by the British but also aggravated the process by going in for a highly resource and technology intensive development, policies that resulted in the mass estrangement of tribes from their land and forests. Although the spread effect is by no means uniform, given the close correspondence between areas of tribal concentration and abundance of natural resources, it is largely tribes who are affected by these policies.

The worst affected are the tribes in the central tribal belt, whose rich mineral, forest and water resources made the region the natural choice for industrialization. However, far from reaping the fruits of progress, industrialization has instead resulted in the proletarianization of the peasantry and the disintegration of tribal society. One particular dimension of industrialization that has left its imprint on the region is the massive in flow of immigrants to staff the new industrial complexes along with contingents of teachers, health workers, traders and other skilled and unskilled personnel to serve the needs of the new industrial society. The net effect of the process is that, devoid of education and the requisite skills to compete with the immigrants, the indigenous populations get pushed to the margins of survival while the colonisers occupy centre stage in both a social and a material sense.

What is a matter of serious concern is that while industrialization has brought little benefits but a major source of misery to the tribes, its tentacles are fast spread-

ing into hitherto unexploited territories. Kashipur in Orissa, where bauxite mining has been the bane of the local tribal population and which is now the site of an aluminium factory, is one case in point. However, the tribes of Kashipur, chastened by the effect of bauxite mining on their fragile economy, have shown strong opposition to the proposed factory. The result, however, has been far from happy for the hapless people as, in addition to increasing poverty and the savage onslaught of recurring epidemics, they are reported as being subjected to repressive acts by the state.

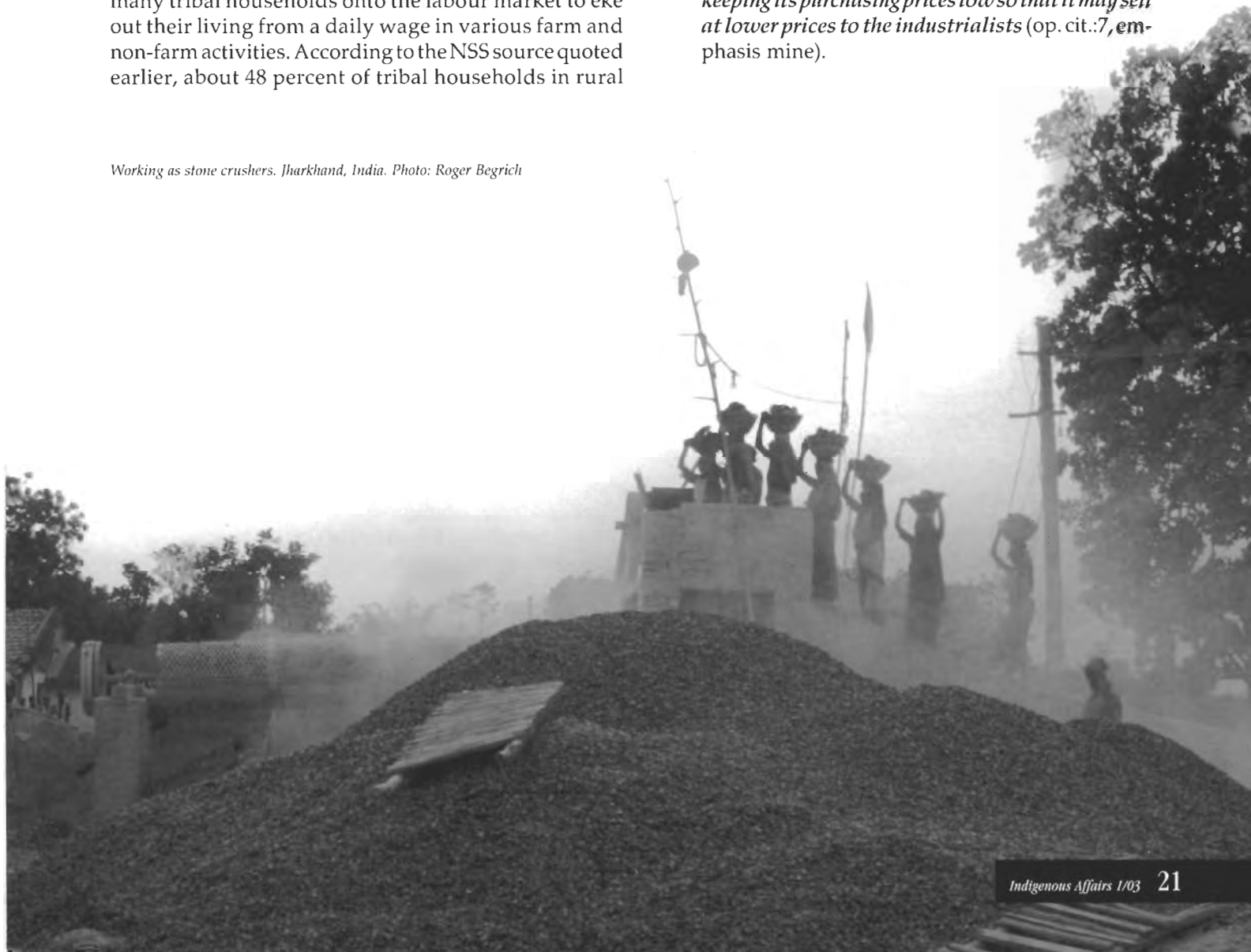
What adds to the problem of tribes is their high dependence on forests to meet their survival needs. Roughly 95 percent of India's tribal population is located in the rural areas where agriculture and forestry traditionally constitute the main source of livelihood. Although wide variation exists among tribes in their level of development, ranging from hunter/gatherers³ to settled cultivators⁴ to a small number of educated people in the tertiary sector, on the whole, land and forests are critical for their survival. However, decreasing availability of land due to the twin processes of commercialization and privatization and acquisitions by the state for development and conservation projects has thrown many tribal households onto the labour market to eke out their living from a daily wage in various farm and non-farm activities. According to the NSS source quoted earlier, about 48 percent of tribal households in rural

areas are engaged in wage labour. Even among those who remain in agriculture, few own enough land to meet the family's food needs or provide them all year round employment. As a result, many agrarian families are forced to supplement their income with wage labour and/or augment their diet with uncultivated items gathered from the forest or by exchanging these for staples on the market.

While this search for alternative sources of sustenance has given rise to the emergence of 'minor forest produce' or 'non-timber forest produce'⁵ as an important component of the tribaleconomy, exploitation by non-tribal agents and state control over the resources provide little real relief to the people, as the profits from these are cornered by the capitalists. This predicament has been clearly highlighted by Sundar in her study of Bastar. In her words:

Currently, the state-monopolized purchase of *tendu* leaves (used for making *beedis*) and *sal* seeds (used domestically and exported for making soaps and chocolates) structures local relations with capital. Although nationalization ostensibly occurred to reduce exploitation by private traders, in effect it has meant that the state acts as a monopsonist, *keeping its purchasing prices low so that it may sell at lower prices to the industrialists* (op. cit.:7, *emphasis mine*).

Working as stone crushers. Jharkhand, India. Photo: Roger Begrich



Thus, caught between dwindling resources and the overriding power of the state, on the one hand, and exploitation by non-tribal agents and a corrupt bureaucracy on the other, tribes are pushed to the limits of their endurance. This not only explains the recent rise in environmental and livelihood-based conflicts among tribes in many parts of the country but also their vulnerability to exploitation at the hands of vested interests and extremist groups who are not averse to using them as tools to achieve their own narrow ends. The appropriation of tribal poverty by the ideologues and front runners of the Naxalbari and Srikakulam movement is a classic illustration of this tendency. Of course, we do not rule out the possibility that these struggles could bring some gains for the tribals. As the above author notes, many localized struggles in recent years, led by the CPI (Communist Party of India), Naxalites and others, have been over attempts to get the government to raise the prices of NTFPs (*ibid*). But whether these struggles could reverse tribal poverty and ensure them a level of well-being that is in keeping with the standards of a democratic and just society remains a moot point.

Judicial activism and the indigenous peoples

If the process of development has shattered the tribal economy and displaced several thousands of families

from their hearths and homes to give way to industry, recent decisions taken by the Indian Supreme Court have further compounded the problem. Faced with the incompetence (read unwillingness) of the government to stop the despoliation of nature and natural resources by the unscrupulous many, ecologically sensitive individuals and groups are turning to the judiciary to put a check on these activities. While the apex court has ostensibly taken a few landmark decisions on these issues, many tend to impinge on the livelihood needs of the poor who often had nothing to do with these activities. A case in point is the Supreme Court order passed on the public interest litigation filed by an estate owner of Tamil Nadu against illicit felling of timber in his privately owned forest.⁶ Deciding on the case, the apex court imposed a blanket ban on timber logging in all forests across the country except in accordance with working plans prepared by the State Forest Department. Ironically, while this decision has been widely welcomed by city-based environmentalists and nature lovers, it further concentrates the powers over forestlands in the hands of the same bureaucracy against whom the case was filed (Sarin, 2002, see also Nongbri, 2001).

What is distinctive about this case is its far-reaching effect. Although state control over land and forests is not a novelty, its harsh effect was primarily borne by populations in and around industrial/commercial belts or where the government had acquired land/forest for development, conservation or for 'public purposes'. Private and communally held resources and forests in outlying areas were more or less allowed to exist undisturbed. However, under the present judicial order even forests under the occupation of people or community-owned resources are not spared. In the words of the court the order, "must apply to all forests irrespective of the nature of ownership or classification thereof" (*italics mine*). Acting on the order, state governments have not only issued instructions to the Forest Department to complete the process of preparing working plans for all forests under its jurisdiction, the central Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) has also similarly directed all state governments to evict all 'encroachers' from forestlands.

That this move spells doom for the indigenous peoples is evident from the fact that those states with the highest concentration of forests are also the ones with large tribal populations. Incidentally, these are also the states with low poverty levels. This confirms our earlier view that, where tribes have access to land and forests, their economic conditions are far better than those with poor or no access. Data from North-East India attests to this fact. According to the Forest Survey of India Report (1997), the forest cover in the North-Eastern region is 64.31 percent as against 19.46 percent in the country as a whole. In terms of the ratio of land covered by forest to total area of the state, Mizoram has the highest percentage of forest cover (89.06%) followed by Nagaland (85.77%). Mizoram also has the highest percentage of tribal population in the state (94.75%) again followed by Nagaland (87.07%).



Naga woman, Manipur, India. Photo: Cristian Erni



Bhil village, Madhya Pradesh, India. Photo: Diana Vinding

Van Gujar pastoralist and his buffalos, Uttarakhand, India. Photo: Christian Erni



Assam, on the other hand, not only has the lowest percentage of tribal population (12.82%) among the states in the region but also the lowest percentage of forest cover (30.40%). Significantly, the poverty levels of the tribal population in these states also vary sharply, 6.24% in Mizoram, 1.79% in Nagaland and 42.21% in Assam.⁷

Given these facts, the Supreme Court order empowering the government to bring all forests under working plans and evict encroachers from forestlands would not only have a disastrous effect on the peoples' livelihood but also infringe on their customary rights and systems of resource management and land use. It is pertinent to note that on both these counts the court based its decision on western imported standards alien to the people, namely scientific forest management in the first and formal legal rights [of ownership] in the second. That the effect of these measures is not confined to North-East India but affects millions of tribes and forest-based communities all over the country is evident from the fact that about 800 interlocutory applications have been filed in the case from different parts of the country.

Of course, to be fair to the issue it needs to be acknowledged that the decision in question came in the wake of widespread deforestation caused by indiscriminate and illicit felling of trees. But what the court failed to pick up on was that these activities are not the handiwork of indigenous peoples or forest-based communities but of forest contractors and business mafias with wide national and international networks for whom the forest is just a resource to be exploited.⁸ The court, however, has done little to punish these people who, along with the state, are the real predators of forests. Instead, by donning the cap of the legal-rational scientific conservationist, the court has not only strengthened the hand of those responsible for the despoliation but has also used its baton against the innocent whose only fault is that they lack the voice to speak out and the clout to wield their influence. This fact comes out forcefully in the formation of the Supreme Court-directed Central Powered Committee to look into the question of forest encroachments. The five-member committee has no provision for any representative from the indigenous peoples or local community and is exclusively reserved for MOEF officials (3 in number) and wildlife conservationists, albeit non-government (2 in number). That not a single member of the affected community is included in a body that looks into an issue that has a profound effect on their [social and economic] life is strange to say the least.

Conclusion

What the above discussion suggests is that tribal poverty cannot be explained solely in economic terms, that is, simply in terms of purchasing power and expenditure patterns, but is directly linked to increasing erosion of their control over land and forests that are critical for their

survival. In this context, it would be pertinent to draw attention to Amartya Sen's notion of entitlement, which links poverty to the denial of people's claims over resources leading to their unequal distribution in society (1982). To paraphrase Sen, poverty occurs when people's claims over resources are denied, therefore thwarting not only the fulfilment of basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter but also a host of socially valued needs such as education, health and cultural identity. The current judicial environmental activism that goes on in Indian society today exemplifies this process in which the legitimate and customary entitlements of indigenous and forest-based communities are systematically extinguished, reducing them not only to paupers but also to encroachers and law-breakers.

It is significant that the greatest victims of this process are women who not only have to bear the brunt of depleting resources but also the subordination of their gender. In this context, we may take note of Agarwal's (1997) assertion that the privatization and statization of land and forest is associated with a progressive deterioration in women's access to and control over resources. In her opinion, rights (to resources) are most egalitarian between the sexes in common property regimes. Declining rights/access to natural resources accentuate women's vulnerabilities both within and outside the household. The situation is particularly harsh for women in poor households where scarcity of resources and gendered notions of entitlements often leave them with precariously little to provide for their needs, resulting in malnutrition, anaemia and numerous diseases. Where women are forced to seek employment away from the community, as they often do (e.g. women domestic workers⁹ or women in mines and construction sites), their problems are further compounded by the close interaction between class, gender and ethnic factors. This makes them highly vulnerable not only to economic but also sexual exploitation.

What is a matter of serious concern is the oblivion under which Indian planners and policy framers appear to function, which reflects a total lack of co-ordination between the facts on the ground and the model on which plans are drawn up and implemented. As the above discussion shows, poverty among tribes is more a consequence of lopsided policies taken by the state and structurally reproduced inequalities in the distribution of resources. Poverty eradication programmes advanced by successive governments, however, rarely take note of this fact – primarily focussing on income generation without addressing the structural factors that gave rise to the problem in the first place. An illustration of this is the anti-poverty programme (*Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna*) adopted by the present BJP Government and extended to all states from April 1999. The programme seeks to remove poverty and facilitate income generation by establishing infrastructure for "production, processing, quality testing, storage or marketing". To achieve this objective, states are advised to organise the poor into self-help groups, establish micro-credit institutions, upgrade skills

and technology and promote marketing support to the *swarozgaris* (poor people). These measures, although laudable in themselves, are hardly sufficient to remove the deeply entrenched poverty among India's indigenous population. At best they facilitate households who are at the threshold of the poverty line to cross over to the other side of the line, but are grossly inadequate to lift those who are at the bottom of the system up to the desired level.

Notes

- 1 National Sample Survey (NSS) Consumption Expenditure Report, 1993-1994.
- 2 For a deeper understanding of this process see Devalle, 1992, Sundar, 1997 and Damodaran, 1998.
- 3 Like the endangered tribes of the Andaman Islands and some of the tribes of Jharkhand.
- 4 Such as the Gonds and Santhals.
- 5 Nowadays the term 'non-timber forest produce' (NTFP) has replaced the term 'minor forest produce' (MFP) used previously, as the word minor in the latter tends to undermine the importance of the resource for the survival of poor households.
- 6 T.N. Godavardan Thirumulpad v. Union of India, Writ Petition No. 202, 1995.
- 7 The figures used in this discussion are based on the 1991 Census for population, Forest Survey of India Report, 1997 for forests and NSS Consumption Expenditure Report, 1993-1994 for poverty.
- 8 This differs sharply from the tribes' idea of forest, for whom it is not just an economic resource but also a source of their culture and identity.
- 9 See Bosu Mullick, Samar. 2002. Tribal domestic working women in Delhi, India. In: *Indigenous Affairs* 3-4/2002. Copenhagen: IWGIA.

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Tiplut Nongbri is a Khasi from Meghalaya, India. She has a Ph.D. in Sociology and is currently an Associate Professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, where she teaches post graduate courses on Family and Kinship, Sociology of Tribes, Ecology and Society, and Research Methods, besides guiding M.Phil. and Ph.D. students. Her own research is in the area of gender, family studies, natural resource management and ethnicity largely focused on indigenous peoples.

Contact: tnongbri@satyam.net.in □

Van Gujar lopping fodder trees. Uttaranchal, India.
Photo: Christian Erni

'SEVEN FORTUNES vs.
SEVEN CALAMITIES'
CULTURAL POVERTY FROM
AN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S
PERSPECTIVE

JOHN BAMBA





Sabah (Malaysia). Photo: Christian Erni



Kalimantan (Borneo), Indonesia.

*There are shrimps under the leaves sunk
on riverbeds, there are fishes in the water,
there are animals in the forests.*

(Sasak be-hundang, arai be-ikan, hehutan be-jaluq)
Jalai Dayak proverb

"Underdevelopment, and its corresponding hunger and poverty, has its root in the minds and hearts of individuals and in the moral and ethical ideals of cultures. Value-neutral critics imprison people in poverty, as do cultures which embrace values that produce underdevelopment." This statement by Darrow L. Miller¹ is a crystal-clear interpretation of culture and all its values as the root causes of poverty. Wittingly or unwittingly, it explains why the 'minds and hearts' as well as the 'moral and ethical ideals' of individuals create poverty, primarily among others rather than for oneself.

When Christopher Columbus, James Cook and James Brooke believed that the native Americans (Indians), Australians (Aborigines) and Borneans (Dayak) respectively were 'uncivilized' based on their very own standard of 'minds and hearts', they 'imprisoned' those indigenous peoples in their own 'moral and ethical ideals', including in terms of poverty. Since Columbus, Cook and Brooke, and those who came after them, were more powerful and shrewd, they were able to impose those standards, and eventually succeeded in changing indigenous peoples' own perceptions of what prosperity and poverty were. So, the issue of poverty is obviously an issue of

politics, ideology and paradigm. And, as an ideology perpetuates, so does the quest for achieving its ideal conditions.

By saying this, I do not mean to say that poverty in the real sense of the term is non-existent in the life of indigenous peoples, even before Columbus, Cook, Brooke and the era that we know as colonialism. But the faces and complexity of the poverty experienced by around one billion people today in the world -among them indigenous peoples- could have been different. So, is poverty structural or cultural? Is it internal or external? Or is it both? This paper does not challenge these theories or offer a new theoretical explanation of poverty and indigenous peoples. It only shares the so-called 'moral and ethical ideals' of one indigenous community in Kalimantan/Borneo, the Jalai Dayak who live in the southern part of Ketapang District, West Kalimantan Province, Indonesia.

Why popular theories of poverty do not fit with the conditions of indigenous peoples

I believe that what we intend to explain about the 'cultural/ social poverty' issue here is not the common understanding of "... the poor's subculture ... so pervasive that these deviant attitudes are reproduced from one generation to another by parents who act as 'deviant role-models to their children' ".² Indeed, such a definition needs no further explanation as its paradigm is already self-explanatory. In order to talk about 'cultural/ social poverty'



Aerial view of Asmat villages, West Papua, Indonesia. Photo: ILO

in relation to indigenous peoples, a totally different perspective must be taken. I therefore propose we approach this issue, firstly from indigenous peoples' own perception of poverty based on their cultural values and secondly, from the perspective of how indigenous peoples manage their livelihoods to achieve the ideal conditions. From these two angles, we hope to arrive at the 'causes and roots of cultural/social poverty' according to indigenous peoples' own perspectives. Again, I will use the Jalai Dayak in Kalimantan as a case study.

The meaning of 'poor' and 'rich' among the Jalai Dayak

Although there have been some criticism of the indigenous peoples' philosophy of "living in harmony with nature" as the basis of their livelihood, the Jalai Dayak proverb quoted above offers a very clear message of their perception of prosperity. The ideal conditions, as pictured through the availability of "shrimps, fishes and animals" in their natural ecosystem, can only be fulfilled when the supporting system is available. More simply put, shrimps and fishes cannot survive in polluted rivers and animals cannot exist when forests are destroyed and ruined.

An extension of the proverb gives, "Farm a good harvest, live in a long house and store in a high rice barn". If these are considered as the indicators of prosperity for the Jalai Dayak then this signifies three main things: employment, collective livelihood and security. Again, these three conditions required other pre-conditions in order to exist.

For the Jalai Dayak in the southern part of Ketapang District, West Kalimantan, there are no exact words for 'rich' unless the one borrowed from the Malay words *kaya* and *sugih*. Thus the word *kayaq* is in Jalai Dayak used mainly for people from outside the community. The Jalai rarely use the term for their own community members. "He/She/They are rich" is an expression mostly used for outsiders, such as the Chinese or Malay merchants, and signifies the possession of goods coming from outside. This can be understood by the fact that, within their own community, the gap between rich and poor is narrow. It can further be explained by their indicators of prosperity, which are based more on the availability of (natural) resources that can be accessed equally by all members of the community (the causes), than what can be possessed by them (the results). Back to the quoted proverb, it is not the "shrimps, fishes or animals" that matter but the quality of the "river-beds, rivers and forests" that sustain the livelihood they support.

Indeed, rivers and forests are the two most important things in all Dayak's life, not only for the Jalai. This can be seen from the roles of rivers and forests in their self-identification. Most of the Dayak sub-ethnic groups use names similar to or related to the rivers and forests near to where they live. For the Jalai Dayak, the river and the immediate forest around their village are places where they make offerings to the *Duataq* - the Creator/good spirits - and the *Hantuq* - the bad spirits. It is signified by the saying, "Place the offerings for the Creator on the river and for the bad spirits at the end of the village."³

The uses of the term *kayaq* in the *Mas Kayaq* or *Urang Kayaq* title given to their selected and respected community members also proves that, on the one hand, both the term and the tradition are imported.⁴ On the other hand, although the titles use the term *kayaq*, they have nothing to do with the titleholders' possession of wealth or economic status. It is, however, an acknowledgment of the titleholder's wisdom, cultural knowledge or leadership. The Jalai Dayak equivalent word for 'poor', which is *bansat*, relates to the inability to fulfil one's basic needs, especially food and shelter. The word *langkap* means hunger and is signified by an inability to consume rice, which is replaced by cassava, wild tuber or bamboo shoots at worst. *Langkap* also means 'famine' due to natural disasters, such as a long drought or curse (*barau*).



As the ability to produce rice from subsistence farming is openly accessed by every community member, hunger is generally only possible through natural disaster (famine) and thus an external cause. In other words, lack of food would be experienced by the community as a whole, thus reducing the chances for increasing the differences within it.

In the case of shelter, the condition is perceived more as a matter of choice than inability. Therefore, as far as it relates to the issue of poverty, a particular living condition is considered 'simple' or 'unmanaged' rather than an inability. "Raw-cut poles, cutting-in-half bamboo roofs" (*tihang pambang, hatap kalah*) is the simplest house a Jalai Dayak could expect, due to the temporary condition of the house. Such houses are mostly found in their present rice fields. They could also be houses built by community members as temporary shelters while preparing more permanent ones in the village.

The particularity of an unexpected house condition is also pictured in the prayer of young shamans. As the shamans' highest duty is to serve others voluntarily, their achievements are reflected in their condition of "not being able to take care of themselves or their family", which is signified by an inability to take care of their own house.⁵ This is due to the hectic services the shamans have to perform for their community. As this is included in the

prayer of a shaman, this condition of having improper housing is 'expected' rather than accepted as an indication of poverty.

Therefore, based on the Jalai Dayak's understanding of poverty and prosperity, which are rooted in their experiences as indigenous peoples in Kalimantan, poverty is a matter of choice or natural disasters. The life of their ancestors in the past clearly showed that the gap between rich and poor was slim. Of course, there were community members who were considerably wealthier, as reflected by their possession of antiques (ceramics, gongs and other music instruments), paddy stocks or large houses but, in those days, the wealth of the wealthier was not obtained from the suffering of others and they did not show off their wealth, which could have created social jealousy within the community.⁶

Seven fortunes versus seven calamities

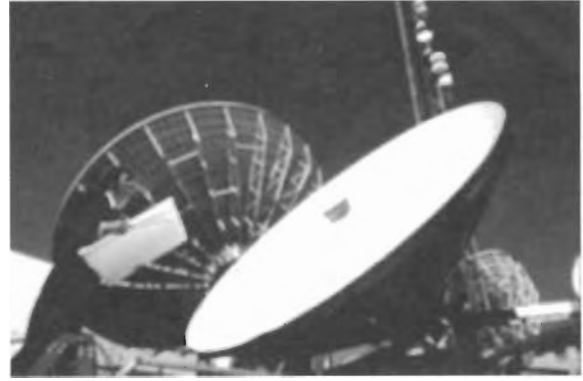
We have to trace the Dayak's natural resources management system as they pursue their ideals on prosperity. This is done in order to put the poverty/prosperity issue in its local context based on the culture in which the communities live. Thus to understand the issue of poverty



Rice fields in the Cordillera, Philippines. Photo: Christian Erni

Mnong Ralam community, Central Highland, Vietnam. Photo: Christian Erni





The Western System. Photos: IWGIA archive



Buhid from Mindoro, Philippines.
Photo: Christian Erni



Oil exploration.
Photo: Alejandro Parellada

based on the socio-cultural context of the Dayak, it is imperative to understand how the Dayak put various principles based on their local cultural values (hereafter, called the 'Dayak System') into practice and how this system is challenged and confronted by other system as the results of the government's interventions (hereafter, called the 'Development System'). This approach is in line with that of the International Social Science Council (ISSC), which is based on three aspects: first, the phenomenological description of their life conditions in the socio-cultural context; second, the hope and ideals of their life; third, the way in which they deal with the issue of poverty and the opportunity to do something and to succeed.⁷ By confronting the Dayak System with the Development System, it is hoped that explanations of the root causes of the Dayak's poverty can be obtained.

1. Sustainability (biodiversity) versus productivity (monoculture)

The Dayak put sustainability as one of the most important considerations in their natural resource management system. This sustainability is inseparable from the biodiversity that has become characteristic of their natural resource management. The biodiversity is clearly seen in the number of crops they grow in their rice fields, the number of plant species found in their gardens (fruit, rubber, rattan) and in their surrounding forest areas. The management of an agricultural area (*Tembawang/Dahas*) is also done in an integrated way. It is not only the place for rice fields but also for rubber, rattan and fruit gardens, for small rivers for fish management (such as for fishing, fish traps and fish ponds), and for last year's rice field that now sustains the new crops (cassava, sugar canes, sweet potato etc.). It is also the place for hunting and putting animal traps, the place for medicines and wild vegetables and fruits, honey-bees nests, and the place for the secondary house where the family raises the domestic animals, processes the rubber sheets and the sugar cane. The biodiversity sustains the resources they need in the long-run and allows them to *preserve their culture and traditions*.

However, biodiversity does have its price. In terms of economic gain, products are less and work is more extensive. This goes against the Development System that glorifies production and intensification. The Dayak harvest their rice fields only once a year, from a field that is worked throughout the year. The Dayak system is now under massive attack from the Development System, which comes in the form of logging, monoculture plantation and mining activities. Millions of hectares of forests have been over logged, hundreds of thousands more have been converted to monoculture palm oil and industrial tree plantations,⁸ thousands of hectares of forested lands have been dug, turned upside-down and polluted with mercury by mining activities. The economic gains obtained from logging, plantations and mining activities are far more than what the Dayak could obtain from their rice fields and rubber/rattan activities but the price people have to pay is also far more unbearable, economically, socially and culturally. Sustainability and biodiversity are the first two things to be sacrificed. It is undeniable that most of the 'biodiversity and



sustainability' of the Kalimantan forests has been 'monoculturized and unsustainabilized' by logging, plantation and mining activities. Culturally, the Dayak are also from diverse realities. There are hundreds of different Dayak sub-ethnic groups, speaking different languages and practising different traditions.

2. *Collectivity (cooperation) versus individuality (competition)*

Mutual help is the main management characteristic to be found in the Dayak System. It is reflected not only in agricultural works through the 'working-in-groups system'¹⁰ but also in their settlement areas, which are characterized by the long-houses. Mutual work is marked by the ritual of welcoming the new agricultural year (*Menyapat Tahun* in Jalai) as well as closing the current agricultural year (*Kaambarahuan*). These two activities are carried out, shared and financed by the whole community. The spirit of collectivity is also reflected in the system of land ownership and the solidarity towards any community member who experiences any problems. The Dayak's reactions to the Madurese aggression against a member of

Table 1
European Financial Institutions and Indonesian Oil Palm and Pulp & Paper Business Groups⁹

Country	Number of institutions	Number of Indonesian business groups to which financial services are provided	
		Oil palm	Pulp & paper
United Kingdom	22	12	5
Germany	19	14	7
The Netherlands	13	12	7
Switzerland	7	9	4
Denmark	4	1	3
Sweden	4	1	3
Total	62	17	7
Total Concession Areas		2,919,699 (ha)	
Total Annual Production Capacity			9,578,250 (ton)

their community in early 2001, during one of the later years' frequent ethnic wars between the two groups, reflect this concept further.¹¹

Indeed, the Dayak might be considered as having a lack of competitive spirit because, for them, it is togetherness that matters. Most of the games the Dayak play are based on co-operation rather than competition. Therefore, when the Development System was introduced to them, which prioritises individual competition, the Dayak were often left behind by their competitors. The companies operating in their areas complained that the Dayak workers were less disciplined, less intelligent and lacked the education to work for the companies. It is said that the Dayak's biggest challenge at present is their lack of human resources. It is said that they cannot compete with the migrant workers from Java and other islands because the Dayak always absent themselves from their work for various rituals they have to attend in their communities. Therefore, the more companies operate in Kalimantan, the more migrant workers are brought in, leaving the local Dayak as marginalized and minority groups in their own land.¹²

Collectivity is also reflected in their worldview, which treats nature as the house of all beings. The world is not only the home of human beings, plants and animals but also of non-physical beings such as the spirits. Therefore, management of natural resources is not only based on the interests of humans, plants and animals alone but also of other beings, dead or alive. Through nature, human beings communicate and maintain the existence and interests of all dwellers as it is believed that there is interconnection and interdependency.

3. *Naturality (organic) versus engineered (inorganic)*

The Dayak believe in nature's revenge if humans go against the *adat*, which provides guidance and a path to life. *Adat* shows how to live in unity with nature. It is not, however, synonymous with Naturalism. This is why the term 'Naturality' is used here instead of 'Naturalism', which is perceived as fatalism or "... living in harmony with whatever fate it delivers."¹³ On the contrary, it is a life that treats nature not as a mere resource to be exploited but as a life support, which has its laws behind it. Human sufferings in the form of diseases, hunger or poverty are the result of humankind's failure to treat nature in line with its laws and existence. The principle of naturality resulted in the use of natural fertilizers and pesticides in agricultural activities as well as in the extraction of other natural resources. For the sake of effectiveness and efficiency, human beings carried out various engineering (genetic engineering, green revolution) leaving nature as a mere object to be exploited and treated as one wishes.

4. *Spirituality (rituality) versus rationality (scientific)*

Spirituality is reflected in various rituals carried out in the life-cycle. It is a way to maintain the links with nature. Every ritual has an important message to tell, to teach and to remind. Rituals connect human beings to other beings with whom they are interdependent. By having a spiritual connection with nature, human beings can find the solutions to their problems based on the law of nature and the teachings of the ancestors. It is therefore a rational way of doing things within the spirituality of life. Spirituality here does not always mean "having connections with the spirits". Spirituality is a way of enhancing human capacity and understanding about 'the way of nature'. This aspect of spirituality contradicts the principle of rationality in the Development System, which considers rituals as a wasteful activity, and the sign of a lack of work ethos. In the Development System, rationality is glorified as the symbol of a modern way of life and educated society.

5. *Process (effectiveness) versus result (efficiency)*

The various rituals following every step of an agricultural circle show how important the process is for the Dayak. The process could be very complicated but the general belief is that the result of works depends very much on whether or not every step has been carried out consistently. The process shows the attachment to nature; that whatever human beings do, it should be done in unity with nature. While in the Development System, it is the result that decides the process, in the Indigenous System it is the process that decides the results. The priority that is put on the process has given the impression that the Dayak's system is trivial, redundant and inefficient. In the end, it is accused of being an unproductive mode of production. The Dayak's natural rubber gardens and dry paddy fields should therefore be replaced with more productive commodities such as palm-oil, hybrid rubber or tree plantations. When this is done, the Dayak have to give up their customary land rights, are introduced to the market economy and forced to become dependent on the producers of seeds, fertilizers and chemical pesticides.

6. *Subsistence (domesticity) versus commerciality (market)*

Subsistence limits production. All production is for domestic consumption, including the direct extraction of natural resources. As a consequence, both exploitation and extraction of natural resources is limited. Although there are also goods produced for bartering with other products coming from outside, this production is limited and undertaken on the basis of seven principles. It becomes obvious that when production is based on market orientation, over exploitation cannot be avoided, as happens with timber exploitation in many areas.

7. Customary law (locality) versus state law (global)

Adat laws regulate various relationships at the community level. It is therefore a localized legal system and not attached to global interests. Customary law is inseparable from Adat law since it is part of the Adat. Adat provides 'moral and ethical' guidance to keep human beings living in unity with nature. Since Adat law is based on convention and is not written, it has its own strengths and weaknesses. Convention may change over time, depending on the context and specific cases. Thus, in terms of fines and sentences, it is relative to the conditions of the case. It opens up more space for debate and discussion, thus guaranteeing a democratic process in the search for truth. But this is also its weakness. In a community where an authoritarian rule is adopted, justice will be in the hands of the ruler. As Adat law is a local legal system, it has a local jurisdiction and binds the members of a specific community. Non-members of the community tend to reject it and it creates more problems. As Adat law is aimed at moral punishment rather than physical or material, non-members of the community tend to undervalue it. The relatively small value of Adat law fines, when converted to certain currency, could encourage the commercialization of Adat law internally and violations externally.

What is poverty from the Dayak's perspective?

The seven principles summarize the way in which the Dayak achieve their ideal of life based on their cultural values. Failure to achieve those ideals is believed to result from what is called *barau* (Jalai Dayak): a situation when nature fails to function normally and thus results in chaos. Harvests fail, diseases spread, incidents happening more frequently are all indications of *barau*. *Barau* is a result of Adat transgression, a broken relationship with nature. The locust attacks on Jalai Dayak areas since 1997, destroying their crops and leaving them with no effective methods of stopping them, is an example of *barau*. This disaster is caused by the destruction of forests due to the forest fires that have happened every year since 1997, following every dry season. The locust has been dealt with using adat rituals that include providing offerings and the ritual of cleansing the village, but to no avail. The Jalai Dayak communities in the areas, together with the surrounding communities, are experiencing a food crisis and most of them have turned to the forests as the only available alternative to earn cash to buy rice. As a result, forest exploitation activities are increasing, resulting in more pressure on forests.

It is obvious that 'Poverty' for the Dayak is linked directly to a failure to assess the Adat that governs the way in which people should live. In relation to the way in which natural resources are managed, the above seven principles are applied. However, the conditions have

changed greatly now that the Dayak's existence is under attack from the Development System. In Kalimantan, logging, plantations, transmigrations and mining are the main activities of the Development System that is replacing the Indigenous System, and the Dayak are often left with few choices. The results are marginalization and violations of their rights as indigenous peoples. The process of marginalization has been taking place since colonial times right up to the present. It is therefore not very difficult to see the impacts, including in terms of 'poverty'.

'Cultural/Social Poverty' as experienced by the indigenous peoples should thus be viewed as their failure to live on the basis of their culture, which has resulted in their failure to maintain their way of life as distinct communities.

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- 8 For more information on the current condition of palm-oil and industrial tree plantation operations in Indonesia and the role of European financial institutions, see: Table 1.
- 9 Van Gelder, Jan Willem. 2002. *European Banks and Palm-Oil and Pulp and Paper in Indonesia*. A Research paper prepared for WWF International. The Netherlands. pp. 2-5.
- 10 Kanayatn Dayak: Balalek; Jalai Dayak: Bejুরুk.
- 11 The Madurese are migrants from Madura, a small island off the coast of East Java and number about 100,000 (ed. note).
- 12 The Dayak comprise approximately one third of Kalimantan's 9 million population.
- 13 Miller, *ibid*.

John Bamba is a Dayak and the executive director of the Institute of Dayakologi in Pontianak, West Kalimantan (Indonesia). He holds the traditional title of Urang Kayaq (chief) of the Jalai Dayak Communities. He is a visiting lecturer in Dayakology at the Islamic State College in Pontianak, and the author of several publications on the topics of Dayak culture, self-government and natural resource management. He was graduated in Language and Fine Arts from the University of Tanjungpura in Pontianak. Contact: jbamba@johnsmail.com

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RIGHTS vs POVERTY? IS THIS REALLY THE ISSUE?

MARÍA TERESA QUISPE



Wayuu migrants in Caracas, Venezuela. Photo: Alejandro Parellada

Are we correct in thinking that by promoting and defending indigenous peoples' rights we are creating the basis for a good life? Or should we be considering specific concrete projects in order to combat poverty?¹

When envisaging public policies² for indigenous peoples, it seems essential to break with this dichotomy. It is obviously impossible to work with a rights-based approach without looking at people's quality of life. And, just as obviously, it is impossible to ensure the well-being of people without addressing the issue of their rights.

Yet this dichotomy actually appears in most of the discussions regarding public economic and social policies, and there seems to be an ethical, philosophical and methodological reason for this.

In this article, I shall highlight a number of concrete points that refer to both approaches, and which should always be borne in mind when working on policies concerning peoples (indigenous or not).

The poverty-based approach

The classical poverty-based approach has, in my opinion, three weaknesses:

1. *The concept of poverty is usually related to monetary income*

This is an obvious problem when working with communities whose economies are not based on monetary transactions. And it is also a problem because poverty is not an absolute concept.

As has been mentioned before, the concept varies from place to place, and the poverty approach does not actually understand that ethical values may vary from one culture to another. A public policy based on this approach will therefore lead indigenous support projects to work on aspects that are not actually important for indigenous peoples and their own interests. This is why the idea of letting indigenous peoples elaborate their own poverty indicators should be encouraged.

However, we must still be very careful not to lose sight of the idea that indigenous peoples have the right to live and not only to survive. This brings me to the second weakness:

2. *The poverty approach focuses on raising people above what 'experts' define as the poverty line*

This means that the ultimate goal of national, international and multilateral economic and social policies is that people should survive. But this is not the same as 'living' or enjoying 'well-being'.

Well-being is far beyond the poverty line as it relates not only to cash income, access to services, etc. but also includes an ability to maintain one's traditions, values and way of life. Well-being therefore has nothing to do with the poverty line as defined by experts and using the



Yukpa village, western Venezuela. Photo: René Kuppe

poverty approach alone will run the risk of projects only guaranteeing that people are one step above the poverty line. For this reason, I suggest we start talking about 'well-being' instead of 'poverty'.

We should also keep in mind that poverty indicators used by multilateral and national institutions have traditionally been designed by and for people living in urban and densely populated areas, with needs that differ from those of rural and indigenous peoples. Most planning undertaken for indigenous peoples therefore does not make sense in their own reality.

3. *Poverty indicators are designed on the basis of consequences and not on the basis of structural causes*

Although poverty leads to terrible situations for people all around the world, these are actually due to underlying structural causes related to development models, economic policies, formal education models, etc. If international and national institutions work only from a poverty-based approach they will be trying to merely modify the consequences of poverty: the symptoms may be lessened but the underlying illness will persist. Projects for indigenous peoples should therefore try to consider these 'structural causes' in order to formulate ways of addressing them.

The rights-based approach

People's rights, in general, must be respected. Few people will argue with this. Nevertheless, doubts often arise when considering the following questions: Is every person, group or community aware of their rights? Does the definition of these rights mean the same to different communities? And are all their needs a right?

Projects developed from a rights-based approach usually try to:

1. Make people's needs become a right.
2. Promote people's knowledge about the existence of their rights.
3. Develop political strategies to make people's rights become a reality.

In this sense, the rights-based approach is of great importance. If social groups do not have rights, they will be weak in defending whatever they think is closest to a 'Good Life' because the national or international authorities, and society in general, are not under an obligation to guarantee and respect aspects of people's well-being.

Most Venezuelan indigenous organizations are clear that their aim is to promote and defend their peoples' rights. Nevertheless, the following questions are not so easily and concretely answered when it comes to ordinary indigenous peoples in the communities:

What is the meaning of our rights?

What is our policy for defending these rights?

Are these rights right? Is it possible that these aspects we call 'rights' and so strongly defend can, by any chance, do any harm to our communities or to society in general?

How are we supposed to organise in order to defend those rights? And so, how would you define the strategic and concrete actions of an indigenous organization?

To most of these questions, in my experience, there are either NO answers or there are TOO many answers. And by too many answers I mean that there is no conceptual agreement on aspects that one would have assumed had been clear for a while.

Therefore a rights-based approach should promote spaces for discussion and reflection on the part of indigenous peoples, and especially their leaders, spaces that allow them to deliberate among themselves, to think about their present and their future and their position in relation to the rest of the world. In other words, spaces to think about the society they want to keep, to create or to recreate for their own people, and spaces where they can be reminded of the fact that they do not live alone, that they are surrounded by very strong societies with interests that are quite different from their own but that they have, at the same time, the right to live – and not only survive – in this world.

At this point, the example of intercultural education may be a useful one to demonstrate the importance of giving careful thought to recognising rights in general and to the strategies being used to make them a reality.

Intercultural education: empowerment or impoverishment?

Education is frequently seen as a way of empowering. Nevertheless, the concepts and methods behind intercultural education can either empower indigenous peoples or result in their impoverishment.

In other words, if the methods employed are not strictly related to traditional educational concepts, it is impossible to talk of real intercultural education. There are several examples in Latin America of intercultural schools in which one finds indigenous children 'learning' traditional knowledge (how to fish, how to hunt, initiation rites and so on) from a book and inside the four walls of their classroom.

It is impossible to teach indigenous traditional knowledge well using Western teaching methodologies. At the same time, however, it is a sad fact that the intercultural schools' indigenous teachers are often not sufficiently trained in Western knowledge, which is essential for indigenous peoples in order to be able to relate on an equal footing to the rest of the society. This is due to two factors:

1. Inadequate public policies and insufficient private and public investment; and
2. Lack of training that allows indigenous leaders to carry out conceptual and financial negotiations with the State or with private – international or national – funders. Decisions related to investments in this area are taken without the real participation of indigenous leaders. At best, they are invited to discuss but, as they have not been able to reflect upon these matters, their participation is very limited. In the end, planning for indigenous peoples around social matters such as education, health, the environment, etc. is designed by foreigners who, more often than not, are insufficiently trained for this purpose.

The consequence? Children, teenagers and, later, adults who are unable to enjoy a good quality of life either in their own traditional community or in the cities. They have become impoverished.

Rethinking rights

Another important point is that we must never be afraid to rethink certain rights and, most of all, the strategies actually used to make these rights into something truly beneficial rather than harmful. Again, another example illustrates this well, that of collective land rights.

For most indigenous peoples, collective land rights are one of the most precious rights. And this makes sense because of the close relation between their way of life (economically, socially and philosophically) and their environment. The Land is 'Mother Earth'.

Some countries have recognized these rights at different legal levels. Some indigenous peoples have actually gained their collective land titles after years of struggle and negotiations. Nevertheless, in some of these cases, once the communities have obtained their property titles, they start selling off their land or negotiating - under unfavourable conditions - the use of the natural resources within their territory.



Photo: René Kuppe

So when it comes to the promotion and defence of rights, we must always ask: Why? How? When? Are we prepared? If people are not prepared, hard work must be done either before or at the same time as people are struggling for the legal recognition of their rights in order to prevent them from losing those rights once they have finally gained them.

Some concluding thoughts

The dichotomy between a rights-based approach and a poverty-based approach can be a trap when planning economic and social policy for indigenous peoples. International and national institutions and persons who are working for the world's well-being should continue promoting and defending indigenous peoples' rights while at the same time investing in projects that guarantee their 'well-being' as defined by the communities themselves. No planning or investment will ever be successful unless indigenous peoples, leaders and community members are taken into account. And Western experts and partners have to be trained in specific indigenous matters and realities, and especially in *consultative and participatory planning methods*. It is a useful

exercise in humility to understand the greatness of different types of knowledge and it clearly helps to reduce common errors when working with indigenous peoples.

Finally, there is a need to bear in mind that we are not making plans for isolated individuals on some other planet. When discussing indigenous peoples' international political empowerment, globalisation and its potential impacts should be included. Only by knowing and understanding what globalisation means will indigenous peoples be able to negotiate - on an equal footing with Western society - the right to keep or recover their own way of life - their well-being.

Notes

- 1 This paper is based on Venezuelan experiences and does not necessarily apply to other countries and peoples.
- 2 Refers to all policies promoted by the public or private sector in relation to 'public' interests.

María Teresa Quispe is a sociologist and is currently technical team coordinator for the indigenous organisation, ORPIA (Organización Regional de los Pueblos Indígenas de Amazonas), Venezuela. □

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND POVERTY REDUCTION:

Experiences from Implementation of the Danish Strategy for Support to Indigenous Peoples

SUSAN ULBÆK



Chaco, Bolivia. Photo: IWGIA archive

Indigenous peoples' rights and poverty reduction in the Danish Strategy

In the Strategy for Danish Support to Indigenous Peoples, the objective of Danish aid to indigenous peoples is to contribute towards creating realistic possibilities for development on their own terms and based on their own culture and feeling of belonging—especially to a given piece of territory. The Strategy stresses indigenous peoples' right to self-determination which, in the context of development, primarily refers to indigenous peoples' right to decide their own priorities for development and to exercise control over and participate in the process of development.¹

The Danish Strategy for Support to Indigenous Peoples was and continues to be very ambitious and unique in comparison with similar donor strategies. It recognises self-identification, it contains a rights-based approach to dealing with indigenous peoples' issues and it covers all forms of activities, from the international policy level to support for local communities. It calls for actions in international fora in support of strengthening the rights of indigenous peoples through the establishment of the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues and support for the work on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. And it calls for a strengthening of the rights of indigenous peoples through political dialogue, including with Danish co-operation countries, and financial support aimed specifically at promoting conditions and rights.

The Strategy and its implementation were reviewed in 2001 by a team of indigenous experts. The Review concluded that Denmark had played a leading role in promoting indigenous issues in international fora. In particular, Denmark played an important role in the establishment of the Permanent Forum. Further, the Review found that Denmark had provided substantial support for indigenous peoples in many countries through projects and programmes aimed at improving their situation,

including support for indigenous peoples' own organisations. But the review also pointed to difficulties in implementing the Strategy within bilateral development co-operation, in particular with regard to mainstreaming indigenous peoples' concerns into sector programme support. The Strategy was also criticized for not being clear about its objectives, the review stressing the importance of addressing the rights of indigenous peoples whilst at the same time focussing on development and improved conditions for indigenous peoples.

The Danish Government defines poverty reduction as the overall purpose of Danish development co-operation. This is to be achieved through support for pro-poor balanced sustainable economic growth, development of the social sectors and support for democratisation, good governance and human rights. Behind this strategy is a recognition that reducing poverty requires interventions beyond mere increases in income, and strategies for attacking root causes of poverty are becoming more and more important.

Indigenous peoples are often among the poorest people in a country and often excluded from mainstream development and decision-making processes. They are, in many countries, subject to discrimination, including in education and health systems. In many cases, the abject poverty of indigenous peoples is caused by development processes over which indigenous peoples have no influence, for example, where indigenous peoples are pushed off their traditional lands. This has led not only to poverty and marginalization but also in some cases to the break up of traditional communities. Addressing poverty reduction among indigenous peoples requires interventions addressing the root causes of impoverishment. This also logically implies an increased focus on securing the rights of indigenous peoples to resources such as land. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that being poor may mean different things in different societies, making broad-based poverty and poverty perception analyses important as a basis for interventions.

Rally in CHT. Photo: Christian Erni



March for Land Rights, Bolivia. Photo: Edwin Zurita



Experiences from implementation of the Danish Strategy in bilateral development Co-operation

The rights-based approach to addressing indigenous peoples requires working at the national policy level. Securing indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination, to land, education, health, etc., and breaking patterns of exclusion and discrimination cannot be achieved without policy changes at the national level. Often, new legislation is required enshrining these rights. Denmark has supported such policy changes through two channels: support for indigenous organisations and NGOs in order to strengthen their capacity to formulate their own demands and pursue these through democratic processes, and policy dialogue with the government and other important national and international partners in the development process. Often the only donor to do so, Denmark has insisted on dialogue on indigenous peoples' rights and development challenges at the national policy level, even in countries where these issues are controversial.

Experiences with implementation of the Danish Strategy vary considerably from country to country, which is normal given the vastly different situations of the countries and the indigenous peoples in question. It is evident

that opportunities for change increase with the increased responsiveness of the government. In Bolivia, where the Government acknowledges the rights of indigenous peoples and has enacted laws specifying those rights, opportunities for contributing to improving the rights and living conditions of indigenous peoples are considerably better than in countries which do not even recognise indigenous peoples as a group. Indigenous peoples' ability to forge partnerships with the rest of society is essential for enhancing the responsiveness of the government. This is particularly the case in countries where indigenous peoples constitute a relatively small percentage of the population.

Experience also clearly demonstrates that there is a limit to what one donor can achieve – the pressure for change has to come from within that country. This is also important from the perspective of ensuring broad donor co-ordination around strengthening indigenous peoples' rights. Many donors – including international organisations – have strategies for support to indigenous peoples but are reluctant to press for policy changes when there is limited national support for the issue.

Finally, there is a need to further develop the tools to implement the Danish Strategy. In particular, there appears to be a specific need to strengthen the capacity to implement the rights-based aspects of the Strategy.





Schools in Beni, Bolivia. Photo: Giandomenico Tono



Ayoreo Indians harvesting sugar cane, Chaco, Bolivia. Photo: Pablo Lasansky



In the following, a brief review of Danish experiences of implementing the Strategy in bilateral development cooperation in two different countries are used to highlight the importance of the context and different experiences with programmes containing a mix of interventions designed to improve the rights and conditions of indigenous peoples.

Bolivia

Bolivia is one of the least developed countries in Latin America. The country has a population of approximately 8 million, of which the indigenous population constitutes 61 per cent. The indigenous population is not concentrated in specific regions but is found all over the country, although indigenous prevalence is higher in some regions than in others.

Unlike many countries, Bolivia recognises the existence and specific rights of indigenous peoples. Recognition of Bolivia as a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic country was first enshrined in the 1994 Constitution. Since then, the country has ratified ILO Convention 169, and a series of laws, directives and decrees related to indigenous peoples' rights have been adopted by the Bolivian Government.

Danida initiated a sector programme in 1997 in support of indigenous peoples, popular participation and decentralisation to accompany this reform process. The programme supports four thematic areas related to indigenous peoples and their rights:

- Access to and ownership of land/territory
- Access to and control over natural resources
- Intercultural and bilingual education
- Participation in the political process

The programme consists of six components balanced between a fully rights-based approach and a more developmental approach. The work in support of the above thematic areas is carried out at several levels from policy and standard formulation at government level to assisting the development of sustainable resource management plans in the newly titled indigenous community lands (TCO).

The development objective of the programme is to improve the livelihoods of indigenous peoples, supporting their participation in political and economic processes. The six components approach this issue from various angles and the specific objectives are:

- To improve the quality of education for indigenous children in the lowlands through the implementation of an intercultural bilingual education system with the participation of the indigenous organisations;
- To ensure the right to ownership of legally recognised indigenous community lands (TCO) of a sufficient quantity and quality to contribute to

sustainable development within the framework of Article 171 of the Constitution, the INRA Law and ILO Convention 169;

- To improve the livelihood of indigenous communities with titles to indigenous community lands through appropriate natural resource management planning and consolidation of an institutional framework for territorial management;
- To promote integral human development among indigenous peoples, based on their ownership of land and territories, sustainable ways of adding value to natural resources, adequate delivery of basic services, a central indigenous role in the public and private enforcement and exercise of rights, in the overall context of legal recognition and respect for ethnic and cultural diversity;
- To increase the active participation of the indigenous population in economic and political development within the relevant public institutions at national and local level, in order to promote indigenous cultural identity rights and sustainable development;
- To improve the quality of public services in selected municipalities and prefectures through the strengthening of public administration and investment in infrastructure projects.

The most important results achieved encompass a continued policy focus on the situation of the indigenous peoples by, among others, the Government of Bolivia and the signing of titles for a total area of 2,114,973 hectares within 16 TCOs. The territorial demand included in the programme was originally 9,123,000 hectares but the Government has only recognized 5,235,311 hectares based on the economic needs studies carried out prior to embarking on the titling process. In addition, the programme has provided stipends to 179 indigenous teachers and to 165 indigenous assistant teachers in multicultural and bilingual education; supported the elaboration of sustainable resource management plans in the three pilot TCOs; and, finally, increased political participation at municipal level has been achieved.

Hence, the programme applies a two-pronged approach addressing land rights, the right to education and participation in political processes at the same time as supporting poverty reduction.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world with a population of approx. 140 million, of which indigenous peoples constitute less than 1 per cent. The majority of the indigenous peoples live in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). A conflict raged for more than 20 years between the indigenous peoples in CHT and the Bangladeshi Government. In 1997, a Peace Accord was established paving the



Marna women and children, CHT. Photo: Jenneke Arens



Tripuri man, CHT. Photo: Jenneke Arens



Tapiete woman, Pilcomayo River. Photo: Gastón Crespo



Chiquitana, Bolivia. Photo: Gastón Crespo



Timber transport out of CHT. Photo: Jenneke Arens



Tripuri woman, CHT. Photo: Jenneke Arens

way for a specific governing structure for CHT designed to ensure CHT inhabitants' influence over developments in the region. Denmark was keen to support the development of CHT as it was one of the poorest areas of Bangladesh and, in this process, to support implementation of the Peace Accord as it was seen as the only possible way of upholding peace in the region. Consultations were carried out in CHT and with the Government and it was decided to extend the three nation-wide programmes in the sectors of transportation, water and agriculture to CHT. The development objective was to reduce poverty through increased economic activity by linking CHT towns with regional roads, improved health by providing access to safe drinking water and developing sustainable agricultural production. There was recognition of the need to work through the institutions established by the Peace Accord, and there was a clear understanding that the approaches used in the plains might not function in the CHT.

In 2002, the approach to development assistance in CHT was revisited. With a view to strengthening the rights-based aspects, a specific CHT interim programme covering the period 2002-2005 was designed as a preparatory phase prior to initiation of a genuine CHT programme, expected to be launched in 2005.

The interim programme takes as its starting point the needs and rights of peoples in CHT, accepting that their development priorities may not be the same as in other regions of Bangladesh. The development and implementation of the programme will be carried out in close and continuous consultation with institutions and groups in CHT. And support for the development of the institutions in CHT as established in the Peace Accord will be at the centre of the development effort, given that the effective functioning of these institutions offers the best opportunity for people in CHT to determine their own future. Closely linked to this will be support to develop civil society's capacity to work with and influence these institutions. The development objective of the interim programme is dual. It aims to support implementation of the Peace Accord including, in particular, capacity building of institutions essential to the self-determination of the people of CHT and reducing poverty through small-scale development activities. Denmark is considering ways to support the resolution of land rights in CHT as this is essential to stability and peace in the region. Progress in this area will require dialogue between the Government of Bangladesh and indigenous peoples but Denmark can support this process through political dialogue and financial assistance.

Concluding remarks

Addressing poverty among indigenous peoples underscores the need to view poverty reduction more broadly than simply improving per capita economic growth rates, and improved living conditions. There is also a need to

address the underlying causes of poverty and impoverishment. This conclusion is not new and not specifically related to indigenous peoples.

With the growing understanding among development practitioners of the need to address root causes in general in poverty reduction strategies, the potential contradictions between a rights-based approach to addressing poverty among indigenous peoples and a traditional development approach are narrowing.

The Danish experiences underscore the fact that addressing the situation of the indigenous peoples requires a mix of the rights-based approach and the development approach. The exact strategy for appropriate interventions will depend on the national context and will have to be decided by the indigenous peoples themselves based on analyses of their perceptions of poverty and its causes and in the light of their overall vision for future development.

There are limited experiences with poverty reduction specifically directed at indigenous peoples. In co-operation with indigenous peoples, donors should develop further methods for poverty analyses in indigenous communities to enhance the understanding of the dynamics of poverty and the impact of different interventions on indigenous communities, men and women. There is also a need to further develop an integrated approach to working with indigenous peoples' rights and development simultaneously. Such work would also be relevant to addressing poverty issues broadly within development co-operation as it would contribute to the on-going work on designing effective poverty reduction strategies.

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Note

- 1 To access the *Strategy for Danish Support to Indigenous Peoples* (1994; in English and Spanish), consult www.um.dk/Danida/oprindeligefolk and click on *Link til Danida Publikationer*, where you'll find a list that includes the Strategy itself and *Support to Indigenous Peoples. Seminar on Experiences and Perspectives* (1996). For the *Review Report on the Danish Support to Indigenous Peoples* (2001) go back to www.um.dk/Danida/oprindeligefolk

Susan Ulbæk has worked with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1987 and is currently the Deputy Head of the Asia Department. Before that, she held the post of Councillor at the Permanent Representation of Denmark to the EU Development Policy and EU relations to Africa in Brussels (1996-1999) and of Head of the Latin America Section (1999-2000). She holds a Master degree in Economics from the University of Copenhagen, and worked as an economist in the World Bank from 1990 to 1991.



IWGIA - INTERNATIONAL WORK GROUP FOR INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

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The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs - IWGIA - is a non-profit, politically independent, international membership organization.

IWGIA co-operates with indigenous peoples all over the world and supports their struggle for human rights and self-determination, their right to control of land and resources, their cultural integrity, and their right to development. The aim of IWGIA is to defend and endorse the rights of indigenous peoples in concurrence with their own efforts and desires. An important goal is to give indigenous peoples the possibility of organising themselves and to open up channels for indigenous peoples' own organizations to claim their rights.

IWGIA works at local, regional and international levels to further the understanding and knowledge of, and the involvement in, the cause of indigenous peoples.

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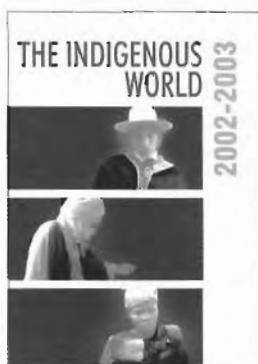
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