



Indigenous Affairs

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International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs

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Indigenous Women

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Cover: Kui woman, Kuidina, Orissa, India.
Photo: Roger Begrich

EDITORIAL

The Economic and Social Council (Ecosoc) of the United Nations took a historic decision on 28 July 2000 when the Council adopted a resolution to establish a "Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues". Having taken this decision, the United Nations has come that much closer to realising one of the goals to be fulfilled within the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. A prominent but outstanding goal is still the adoption of a universal declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

The Ecosoc resolution of 28 July was a landmark. However, to what extent this decision will cut an edge and make a difference to the world's indigenous peoples still remains to be seen. It is IWGIA's firm viewpoint that a Permanent Forum *might* have potential as a catalyst for the improvement of the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide. Under the umbrella of the United Nations' system, a Permanent Forum is the most promising institutional mechanism to which indigenous peoples will have access in order to enhance their social, economic and human rights. This is the reason why IWGIA, since the initial discussions concerning the Permanent Forum, has endorsed its establishment and put a great deal of resources into the process. This was done, first of all, by supporting indigenous peoples' own participation in the process in all its phases.

IWGIA is fully aware of some of the pitfalls of the Permanent Forum in its current form. In our eyes, the Permanent Forum is not an ideal construction – it is a compromise. Yet, it is, after all, the first body within the UN system where indigenous peoples are represented. It can never be perfect or ideal and indigenous peoples, IWGIA, other NGOs and supportive governments all have to make every effort to make it ideal. Furthermore, it must not be for-

gotten that the effectiveness of the Permanent Forum ultimately not only depends on the individual members of the Forum but also on the competence, credibility and legitimacy of those who want to make an impact on its work. Finally, the activities of the Permanent Forum will not be static, but processes that can be continuously improved.

The Permanent Forum offers unique opportunities for enhancing the human, economic, cultural and social rights of indigenous peoples – considering that indigenous organisations and others in support of indigenous rights will use the opportunity and the potential and look upon the Forum as a process. To this extent, the coming years will be extremely important. Before we enter into this discussion, it is worth looking at the historical facts and giving a short summary of the nature of the Permanent Forum.

The Permanent Forum will have 16 members, each appointed according to his/her personal capacity. 8 members are to be nominated by governments and elected by the Ecosoc Council and 8 (indigenous) members are to be appointed by the President of Ecosoc following consultation with indigenous peoples – and governments. The Permanent Forum will be a subsidiary and advisory body reporting directly to Ecosoc. It is thus a high level body such as, for example, the Commission on Human Rights. The meetings will be open in the same way as meetings of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) are. Although the WGIP has only five government-appointed members, hundreds of indigenous persons and others have participated in its meetings.

The mandate of the Permanent Forum is a broad one. It will "discuss indigenous issues within the mandate of the Council [Ecosoc Council] relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and

human rights". The Forum will provide expert advice and give recommendations to the Ecosoc Council; it will raise awareness of indigenous issues and coordinate activities between the various UN agencies; and it will provide and disseminate information to the public. The mandate of the Permanent Forum is broader than that of the WGIP and is more far reaching than human rights issues alone. This is extremely important at a time when environmental issues (the Rio process first of all) have given indigenous peoples wide opportunities to promote their interests in a much less politicised environment than the one characterised by human rights issues.

Certain governments have continuously raised the concern that a Permanent Forum will be too costly, and they may now try to restrict the financial resources to be allocated to this new body. In response, we must recall that, in 1995, the Secretary General of the UN, after a seminar held in Copenhagen, was requested to prepare a review of the existing mechanisms, procedures and programmes within the United Nations concerning indigenous peoples. The review clearly illustrated that indigenous peoples are essentially excluded from most of the UN programmes and, furthermore, it expressed the need for an integrative or coordinating mechanism within the UN for indigenous peoples. The creation of a Permanent Forum, however, will consolidate and make the work of the UN regarding indigenous peoples more financially efficient.

There are serious issues to be overcome before the Permanent Forum is established and can start its work in 2002 as planned. One is the appointment of indigenous members to the Forum. Although this is a major issue, it will hopefully not hamper the goal. Another problem is the location of the Forum Secretariat. The wish of indig-

enous peoples is to have an independent secretariat staffed by indigenous persons. Since the Forum is established directly under Ecosoc and covers many issues other than human rights, indigenous peoples have strongly emphasised that it should be independent and not located under the High Commissioner for Human Rights (HCHR). To what extent the UN bureaucracy will use the opportunity, maybe under the guise of saving money, to have the secretariat located under the HCHR, and thus indirectly try to restrict its competence, still remains to be seen.

The process leading to the point we are at today is perhaps interesting in itself but even more so if we want to have an idea of the prospects for the Forum – and for the future of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

The idea of a Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples within the UN was introduced by an indigenous group that participated in the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations at the end of the 1980s. At that time, the indigenous representatives presented the need to create a Permanent Forum at the highest possible level within the UN system, a Forum that might deal with all issues affecting indigenous peoples such as human rights, the environment, development, the protection of their cultures, health care, education etc.

In 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna discussed the topic of the Forum and recommended that the UN General Assembly consider the establishment of a Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples within the UN. The Vienna recommendation was supported by the Commission on Human Rights and the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1994.

Since then, the issue of the establishment of a Permanent Forum for

indigenous peoples within the UN system has been the subject of many deliberations and resolutions by the Sub-commission (the Sub-commission on Discrimination and Protection of Minorities), the Commission on Human Rights, Ecosoc and the General Assembly. Two workshops of experts were organised, in Copenhagen, Denmark (June 1995) and in Santiago de Chile (June-July 1997) respectively. Moreover, since the first workshop took place, indigenous organisations have expressed the need to initiate indigenous activities focusing on information, discussion and strategy development with regard to the establishment of the Forum, between indigenous organisations themselves at regional level. Four indigenous international conferences have been held in Temuco (Chile), Kuna Yala (Panama), Indore (India), and Arusha (Tanzania). The indigenous declarations arising from these conferences have been included both as official UN documents and as annexes in some of the UN meeting reports.

The outcome of this process was a resolution adopted by the Commission on Human Rights in 1998 to establish an ad hoc working group on the possible establishment of a Permanent Forum. This working group met for the first time in 1999, and at its second and latest meeting in February 2000 an agreement was reached among governments, and a final (amended) resolution passed by the Commission on Human Rights in April 2000 – and endorsed by Ecosoc in July.

When the Permanent Forum becomes a reality, it will be the outcome of firm endeavours by indigenous organisations, and subsequently carried through the UN system by interested and supportive governments. The UN system consists of states, and from an early point in this process a group of states and the chairman of the Perma-

nent Forum working group endorsed the establishment of a Permanent Forum and, sponsored by Denmark-Greenland, a resolution was drafted. In this process there were governments who either opposed the establishment of a Permanent Forum or tried to downgrade its location within the UN system and narrow its mandate to an extent that – if ever established – it would soon fade into oblivion. For two consecutive meetings in the CHR, the Cuban government tried to block the resolution. They did not succeed but they managed to limit the influence of indigenous peoples. The motivation of the Cuban government was highly dubious but became absolutely hypocritical when the Cuban government, in Ecosoc, spoke out against the Permanent Forum model in its current form. The reasons given by the Cuban government were absolutely sensible – the only problem was that the Cuban government had been instrumental in weakening the resolution leading to the final establishment of the Permanent Forum.

There is obviously a connection between the Cuban opposition to the Permanent Forum and the election of Miguel Alfonso Martínez as new chair of the WGIP. Although the conditions under which the change of chair took place were quite chaotic at the WGIP meeting in July 2000, and might do much harm to the WGIP, its bleak future is due to completely different circumstances.

Under the chairmanship of Mme. Erica Daes, the WGIP became an unequivocal success. Every year, hundreds of indigenous persons representing indigenous communities and organisations met in Geneva to present statements. For years they were listened to – by governments and indigenous peoples from all corners of the world. Indigenous networks were created, governments were lobbied, projects were negotiated and hopes were created among indigenous peoples that the international links would make an impact at home and improve the human rights situations. To this should be added the fact that the WGIP managed to adopt a Draft Resolution on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – a major step in the process towards ensuring fundamental human rights as they relate to indigenous peoples.

In IWGIA's archives we have kept the hundreds and hundreds of statements by indigenous peoples as presented to the WGIP. These statements bear witness to the gross violations of human rights committed against indigenous peoples all over the world. The only good thing about all the appalling stories behind these documents is that, through the statements given to the WGIP, knowledge of the state of affairs of the world's indigenous peoples has become public – and sometimes action has been taken to improve their conditions of life.

However, with the enormous increase in the number of participants in the WGIP (800-1000 in the last two

years) each presentation becomes buried in the huge pile of statements. The effect has been that governments have stopped listening. The many statements must also have overwhelmed indigenous peoples because they themselves have stopped listening. More and more participants only entered the meeting room when his/her number was called – and left the room immediately afterwards.

To some extent, the WGIP is drowning in its own success. Perhaps the time is ripe for a change in the structure and set-up of the "Review of Developments", the agenda item under which these statements are given. In our opinion, this could be one of the most important challenges to the Permanent Forum – to renew the "Review of Developments" structure without hampering the open access to the process by indigenous representatives.

Now five years into the "International Decade of the World's Indigenous People", the adoption by Ecosoc of the recommendation to establish a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is the most significant and concrete step so far taken by the United Nations system to address the unique issues faced by indigenous peoples. We see this as the first indication of political will to put into practice the goals of the Decade, which the UN outlined as the strengthening of international cooperation for the solution of the problems faced by indigenous peoples.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN

This issue of Indigenous Affairs focuses on indigenous women: their situation, hopes and aspirations at the beginning of a new millennium. The articles reflect very clearly the fact that indigenous women face serious problems, ranging from extreme poverty and discrimination to horrific human rights abuses such as killings, torture and rape.

Many indigenous women suffer from double repression: as indigenous peoples they are oppressed by the dominant cultures and nation-states and as women they face repressive traditional practices in their indigenous

and largely patriarchal societies. This kind of double repression is reflected in most of the articles, the majority of which are written by indigenous women themselves. In her article, Jorunn Eikjok gives a very clear and personal account of how she, as a Sámi woman, experiences this double repression, and of the major challenges that lie ahead.

Globalisation in the form of mining and logging operations, dam construction, tourism development projects, industrial agricultural schemes etc. increasingly encroach on

the lands of indigenous peoples. This impacts seriously on the lives of indigenous women, both in Asia, as described by Jill Carino, as well as in other parts of the world. Globalisation implies, among other things, dislocation from ancestral lands, marginalisation from traditional means of subsistence and increasing poverty in indigenous communities, and this has far reaching consequences for the well-being of indigenous women.

Violence committed against indigenous women is also alarming. Samar Bosu Mullick and Debbie Stothard give shocking accounts of gross human rights violations against indigenous women. These consist both of human rights abuses caused by State-sanctioned violence, as in Burma, where troops belonging to the military regime rape, torture and kill indigenous women in the conflict-ridden ethnic areas, and of extreme human rights violations taking place within the indigenous communities, as in Jharkhand, India where indigenous women are molested and killed when they are accused by their own families or community members of being witches.

The Nagas have also suffered for years from the brutality of the Indian security forces. However, as described by Shimreichon Luithui, Naga women are now playing a crucial role in trying to foster a genuine and long lasting peace in the area.

Indigenous women carry a heavy burden. They are very often responsible for the survival and well-being of their

families and children under extremely difficult, discriminatory and poor conditions. In spite of this, indigenous women around the world are organising to improve their situation, as described in the articles by Jill Carino and Lucy Mulenkei. Indigenous women are also increasingly creating international networks to jointly address their common problems. In her article, Lea Nicholas-MacKenzie focuses on the international work of indigenous women and, despite the very harsh conditions which so many indigenous women live under, it is encouraging to learn that they are coming together in their local settings and in international fora to fight for their rights and for a better future. As Jill Carino so incisively expresses it in her article:

"Indigenous women remain among the poorest, most violated, most oppressed, most scorned and most exploited sectors of society. Their situation is a dark picture of human misery painted by the powers-that-be, who covet indigenous peoples' land and who would do anything to control power and profits in the global economy. The redeeming features in this picture are the struggles of indigenous peoples themselves who have persevered, despite the odds against them. Their struggle as indigenous peoples and as women for self-determination and equality is a ray of light for the future of humankind." □

NEW STRUCTURE OF IWGIA

IWGIA is now a membership organisation

In May of this year, IWGIA was established as a membership organisation.

The aim of this change is to give individuals who agree with IWGIA's general policy the opportunity to develop a closer attachment to the organisation. The intention is also to maintain and strengthen the existing network around IWGIA and to give members more direct access to relevant information and decision-making processes.

Annual Forum

Once a year, all members will be invited to a general meeting, the Annual Forum. At the Annual Forum, matters of relevance to IWGIA will be discussed. The Annual Forum has consultative status as an advisory body to the Board.

Members will receive the periodical *Indigenous Affairs*, the yearbook *The Indigenous World* and IWGIA's annual report.

The Board

IWGIA's board is elected by the members.

Membership Fee

Membership fee for the year 2000 is US\$ 35.00.

Applications

Applications for membership should be addressed to the Board. In order to be approved, an application should be supported by at least two members of IWGIA and be approved by the Board. The Board may reject any application at its discretion.

Further information

Please contact IWGIA's Secretariat

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INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Create New International Organization

By Lea Nicholas-MacKenzie



Participants at the International Indigenous Women's Forum on Beijing+5

The United Nations estimates that there are over 300 million Indigenous People in over 70 countries throughout the world. Despite this fact, Indigenous Peoples are often excluded from international processes. Indigenous women have begun to organize on an international level in order to ensure that the voices and concerns of Indigenous Peoples are heard. A recent United Nations meeting on women provided the backdrop for this historic work.

The most recent World Conference on Women was held in September 1995, and was known as the Beijing Conference. The United Nations held a Special Session of the General Assembly on June 5-9, 2000 (commonly known as "Beijing+5") in order to evaluate the progress of women since the Beijing Conference.

The 1995 conference resulted in a *Declaration and Platform for Action*, with commitments to women in twelve critical areas of concern. The Platform also contained a number of commitments for Indigenous women relating to poverty, health, violence against women, armed conflict, the economy, power and decision-making, human rights, the media and the environment.

Indigenous Women on the edge of the New Millennium: International Workgroup

Indigenous women at the 17th Session of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations discussed the need to strengthen international relationships amongst Indigenous women, and to continue to develop the capacity of Indigenous women worldwide. CHIRAPAQ, an Indigenous Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Peru, offered to host an international meeting of Indigenous women in order to begin creating international networks and discussing issues of common concern.

The meeting, "*Indigenous Women on the Edge of the New Millennium: an International Work Group*" was held from November 24 – December 2, 1999, in Lima, Peru. The meeting included participants from Kenya, Algeria, Norway, the Philippines, Canada, USA, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Peru.

The work group focused on sharing information regarding various international initiatives, including the Organization of American States and the United Nations' Draft Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Beijing+5 and Cairo+5 reviews, the Permanent Forum and the forthcoming World Conference on Racism in 2001. The participants also formulated recommendations for increased international cooperation regarding these and other initiatives.

Regarding Beijing+5, a key recommendation emerged that a meeting of Indigenous women should be held prior to the United Nations Special Session on Beijing+5. In order to achieve this, the participants agreed to create an *International Indigenous Women's Steering Committee*. The International Indigenous Women's Steering Committee was composed of the following interim members:

- Bernice See (Asia) Asian Indigenous Women's Network
- Lucy Mulenki (Africa) African Indigenous Women's Network
- Jorun Eikjok (Europe) Arctic Indigenous Women's Network
- Dr. Larissa Behrendt (South Pacific)
- Esther Camac (Latin America) Continental Network of Indigenous Women
- Fay Blaney (North America) Aboriginal Women's Action Network and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women

- Lea Nicholas-MacKenzie (Coordinator/North America) Assembly of First Nations

The role of the Steering Committee included dissemination of information to regional contacts; gathering information on regional priorities, statistics, local, regional and national organizations; assisting in the identification of representatives to attend the International Indigenous Women's Forum and assisting the representatives in identifying funding, gaining accreditation and registering for United Nations meetings.

International Indigenous Women's Forum on Beijing+5

The International Indigenous Women's Forum on Beijing+5 was held on June 1&2, 2000 in New York City. Over sixty Indigenous women participated in the Forum. The main objective of the Forum was to prepare Indigenous women to participate in the Beijing+5 review. The Forum included training and information sessions, workshops and strategy sessions.

Day one of the Forum was co-chaired by Vice-Chief Mary Jane Jim (Canada) and Rose Cunningham (Nicaragua), and the meeting was opened by Elder Lorraine Canoe. Dr. Larissa Behrendt (Australia) provided information on Indigenous Women, the United Nations and International Law, while Rose Cunningham provided an overview of the world conferences on women and Indigenous Peoples. Lea Nicholas-MacKenzie provided background information on the Beijing+5 Review, and Susana Fried from the United Nations Development Fund for Women informed the participants about the progress of negotiations and expectations for the forthcoming United Nations General Assembly on Beijing+5.

Carol Kalafatic from the International Indian Treaty Council shared information about the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, while Vicky Tauli Corpuz (Philippines) and Tarcila Rivera (Peru) informed participants about the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Finally, Monica Aleman (Nicaragua) provided participants with an update on the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

The remainder of day one was spent in workshops on the following topics:

- Education and training, power and decision-making and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
- Human rights and the environment
- Poverty and the economy
- Health and violence

The workshop participants reviewed earlier declarations, the Beijing Platform, and other relevant materials in order to formulate strategies with which to address the issues at a local, national, regional or international level and build upon existing commitments.

Day two of the Forum was co-chaired by Vicky Tauli Corpuz (Philippines) and Angie Akee (Australia). During day two, the workshop participants reported back to the larger group, and shared strategies with which to lobby participants at the United Nations General Assembly on Beijing+5. The remainder of the session was spent in discussions on formalizing the international network. It was agreed that the International Indigenous Women's Forum would continue as an information sharing body and confirmed the following members of the Steering Committee:

Lucy Mulenkei – Africa
 Bernice See – Asia
 ATSIC Commissioner Marion Hansen – South Pacific
 Lea Nicholas-MacKenzie – Coordinator / North America
 Fay Blaney – North America
 Tacila Rivera – Latin America
 Jorunn Eikjok – Europe / Arctic

The Steering Committee agreed to develop terms of reference and a mission statement to guide its work. The committee also agreed to focus on the autumn 2000 World March of Women and the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Finally, the committee agreed to continue its outreach efforts in order to share information with as many Indigenous women as possible.

United Nations General Assembly on Beijing+5

The United Nations General Assembly on Beijing+5 resulted in a document entitled *“Further Actions and Initiatives to Implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action”*. Indigenous women who participated in the Beijing review process lobbied to ensure that Indigenous women would be included in the document.

Despite the lobbying effort, Indigenous women were specifically included in only six paragraphs in the section on *“Actions and Initiatives to Overcome Obstacles and to achieve the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action”*:

- 100 e. Address the barriers faced by women, particularly indigenous and other marginalized women, in accessing and participating in politics and decision-making, including lack of training, women's double burden of unpaid work, negative societal attitudes and stereotypes;
- 103 g. Take concrete steps, as a priority and with their full voluntary participation, to address the impact of violence on indigenous women, in order to implement appropriate, effective programs and services to eliminate all forms of violence;
- 106 a. Consider adopting, where appropriate, national legislation consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity to protect the knowledge, innovations and practices of women in indigenous and local communities relating to traditional medicines, biodiversity and indigenous technologies;
- 126 d. bis. Undertake appropriate data collection and research on indigenous women, with their full participation, in order to foster accessible culturally and linguistically appropriate policies, programs and services;
- 128 h. With the full voluntary participation of indigenous women, develop and implement educational and training programs that respect their history, culture, spirituality, languages and aspirations and ensure their access to all levels of formal and non-formal education, including higher education;
- 129 d. Apply and support positive measures to give all women, particularly indigenous women, equal access to capacity-building and training programs to enhance their participation in decision-making in all fields and at all levels;

Over 100 Indigenous women at the United Nations General Assembly on Beijing+5 attended a daily Indigenous Women's Caucus meeting which was organized by the Steering Committee. The caucus developed a declaration (printed below), which reaf-



Participants at the meeting "Indigenous Women on the Edge of the New Millennium: an International Work Group" in Peru 1999. Lea Nicholas-MacKenzie is third from the right. Photo: Diana Vinding

firmed the Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women, the right to self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, our connection to land and territory and the balance that is required to ensure the well-being of our peoples. Recognizing the effects of colonialism and neo-liberal economic policies, the participants developed fourteen broad recommendations relating to the issues of:

1. the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
2. the term "Indigenous Peoples"
3. the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
4. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization
5. Commitments to Indigenous women in the Beijing Platform
6. International instruments
7. Patenting of life forms and intellectual property
8. Poverty
9. Education
10. Decision-making
11. Health
12. The World Conference on Racism
13. Displacement of Indigenous Peoples
14. The Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women

Indigenous women also participated on panels organized by the Asian Human Rights Council and the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations

(CONGO), spoke to the media at press conferences and interviews, lobbied governmental and non-governmental representatives, met with other caucuses, such as the youth caucus and the various regional caucuses and participated in the International Coordinating Committee of CONGO.

The important achievements at the United Nations General Assembly on Beijing+5 were that the profile of Indigenous women and their concerns were significantly raised, the networking process was begun and relationships amongst Indigenous women throughout the world were solidified. The challenge will be to maintain the momentum, expand the Indigenous women's network and publicize the International Indigenous Women's Forum.

Lea Nicholas-MacKenzie is a member of the W̓lastəkwewinowok (Maliseet) First Nation at Nekwotkok (Tobique). She is currently the Coordinator of the International Indigenous Women's Forum, and an Advisor on International Indigenous Women's Issues at the Assembly of First Nations in Canada. Prior to undertaking this international work, she served as the Chief of Staff for National Chief Phil Fontaine at the Assembly of First Nations. She holds a Master's Degree in Leadership and Training from Royal Roads University in British Columbia, Canada. Lea can be reached at: lmackenzie@hotmail.com. □

DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S FORUM

On the Occasion of The Special Session of the General Assembly at the United Nations
On Beijing+5

We, the women of the International Indigenous Women's Forum, have come together in New York in order to assess our situation five years after the Beijing Platform for Action. We reaffirm the Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women, which emerged from the Indigenous Women's Tent in Huairou in 1995. The analysis, issues and proposals in the Declaration are still relevant and must be addressed.

Affirming that, as Indigenous Peoples, like all Peoples under international law, our inherent right to self-determination guarantees our ability to freely determine our political status and pursue our economic, social and cultural development. This includes our collective rights to land and territory, natural resources, biodiversity and intellectual property.

Affirming further that, as Indigenous Peoples, our lands and territories are inextricably linked to our survival, development, identity and self-determination.

Reaffirming also that, as Indigenous women, we recognize that the well-being of our Peoples is dependant upon the past, present and future generations, the balance between men and women, the experience and knowledge of our elders and the energy of our youth.

Recognizing that, five years after Beijing, Indigenous women continue to experience extreme and disproportionate poverty, and face a decline in health, education, social, economic, cultural and political conditions. This is due to factors such as racism, colonialism, neocolonialism, macroeconomic policies promoting trade and financial liberalization, privatization, deregulation and displacement.

Recognizing also that Indigenous women face an increase in violence and trafficking of women and girls. Militarization and armed conflict have also increased, leading to internal and external displacement, increased poverty and violations of human rights, particularly violence against Indigenous women.

Considering that the exploitation of natural resources in Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories, and the dumping of nuclear waste, and toxic and hazardous materials, infringes upon the human and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples by causing displacement and endangering lives.

We therefore recommend the following:

1. As the midpoint of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples has passed without seeing the adoption of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we urge member States to adopt it in its present form without further delay.
2. We urge governments and the United Nations to consistently use the term "Indigenous Peoples" in all international instruments.
3. We strongly urge UN member States to continue their commitment, as expressed by the Commission on Human Rights at its 56th Session, to establish a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, as an effective mechanism for addressing Indigenous Peoples' concerns, with the full and equal participation of Indigenous Peoples and their organizations.

4. Recognizing the devastating impact of multilateral organizations and lending institutions upon the socio-economic conditions of Indigenous Peoples, the World Bank should not be involved in shaping the social development policies and programs of governments. Likewise, the International Monetary Fund should not be involved in the macroeconomic policies of governments. Finally, the World Trade Organization should recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their territories and resources.
5. We call upon governments to honor the commitments made to Indigenous women in the Beijing Platform for Action without further delay. We strongly recommend that the lives and experiences of Indigenous Peoples be taken into account when implementing the Platform for Action.
6. We call for the ratification and implementation of all international instruments that relate to the lives and conditions of Indigenous Peoples, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
7. We call for an immediate moratorium on the patenting of all life forms, traditional knowledge and all forms of intellectual property.
8. Recognizing the drastic poverty levels faced by Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous women, we urge that the eradication of poverty amongst Indigenous Peoples be made a priority.
9. We urge governments to implement, in full partnership with Indigenous Peoples, formal and informal education programs that respect our history, languages and cultures.
10. We urge governments to give a commitment to ensure that Indigenous women fully participate in decision-making at all levels, so that we are able to actively and effectively participate in policy decisions that affect our Peoples.
11. We call upon governments to ensure that Indigenous Peoples have full access, without any discrimination, to all medical institutions, health services, and medical care, including traditional medicines and health practices.
12. We call for the full and equal participation of Indigenous Peoples in the process leading up to and at the World Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Other Forms of Discrimination, including mechanisms and resources to ensure our participation.
13. We urge governments, agencies and institutions to address the issue of displacement of Indigenous Peoples due to development, aggression, armed conflict and other factors. This would include conflict resolution and reparations, with the full participation of Indigenous Peoples.
14. We strongly urge that governments review and address the proposals and demands contained within the Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women, which to date have not been addressed.

Adopted by the participants of the International Indigenous Women's Forum on June 9, 2000 in New York City. □

PIECING TOGETHER A PICTURE OF ASIAN INDIGENOUS WOMEN

By Jill K. Carino

The stories of Asian indigenous women's lives and problems are as varied as they are numerous. Written accounts of indigenous women in Asia are found in a number of sources. These include news and feature articles, proceedings of conferences on women where indigenous women themselves are able to tell their own stories, special issues on women in indigenous peoples' publications, and other assorted books and articles. In most publications on indigenous peoples, indigenous women are hardly ever mentioned as a special sector. Even publications on the situation of women in general seldom tackle the added dimension of indigenous women. Available materials on indigenous women are in no way as substantial or comprehensive as we would like. However, they are sufficient for us to be able to piece together a broad picture, or to come up with an initial overview, of certain patterns and trends that draw together the complex situations of indigenous women in Asia.

It is clear from the start that Asian indigenous women occupy an extremely disadvantaged position in society. They are victims of multiple forms of oppression, because they are indigenous and because they are women, added to the fact that the majority of them are farmers or workers belonging to the most exploited classes in society. In



Kalinga women planting rice, Cordillera, the Philippines. Photo: Christian Erni

Chakma woman and child, returned refugees, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. Photo: Christian Erni



Taiwan, for instance, indigenous women are called “third class citizens” because of their inferior status in relation to both men and non-indigenous people, that is, those belonging to the dominant Han culture in Taiwanese society.

Women who are also indigenous people experience discrimination and racism from the dominant culture and nation-state. On the one hand, their status as indigenous people is not recognized by the state within which they find themselves. On the other hand, it is their distinctiveness as indigenous people that is used by government policies as justification for assimilation, integration, resettlement, transmigration, or militarization. These policies are employed not only as a means of erasing their existence as indigenous peoples but also to dispossess them of their rich ancestral land — the basis of their culture and survival. In the most extreme cases, such state policies lead to cultural genocide or ethnocide, as in the case of the indigenous peoples of Nagaland, the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Burma.

In addition, indigenous women live in traditional and largely patriarchal societies, which

dictate that women are subordinate to men. From birth, females are considered inferior to males. An indigenous woman is viewed as being there to bear children, to serve her father, her brother and later her husband and her family, including her in-laws in some cases. In most instances, women do not have any property rights or, if they do, they cannot inherit these rights. In the few matriarchal or matrilineal societies, such as the Lahu and Karen in Thailand, the hill tribes of Cambodia or the Amis in Taiwan, the women generally have more control over property, resources and production, and there is a fairer division of labor between the sexes. However, they eventually lose their relatively egalitarian status as a result of the erosion of traditional indigenous culture. Conversion to Islam or Christianity has further weakened the position of women and reinforced their subordinate status to men.

In both indigenous and state-imposed socio-political structures, indigenous women are often excluded from roles of political leadership. They are seldom consulted on political matters concerning the community, and far less involved in actual decision-making, which is usually done in structures or institutions dominated by men, such as the traditional village council. Women are not allowed to hold positions of leadership at the village level, as these are usually passed down from father to son.

Asian indigenous women play a primary role in production in their largely subsistence agricultural communities. They engage in swidden farming or plough cultivation in settled, irrigated or terraced fields, bearing the brunt of the work such as hoeing, transplanting and weeding. Farming by indigenous women is usually augmented by other productive activities such as foraging, fishing and handicrafts, for example, weaving, knitting, basketry and embroidery. In hunter/gatherer societies, it is usually the women who forage for food and other forest products while the men hunt. There is now also an increasing number of indigenous women migrating to urban centers in search of work as laborers in the formal and informal sector. As farmers or laborers, indigenous women are exploited by the propertied classes. The mere fact that they are women aggravates the oppression and exploitation they experience as members of the working classes and as indigenous people. In addition, women undertake almost all the household chores and work of child-rearing.

It is against this backdrop of discrimination and oppression of indigenous women that the phenomenon of globalization has appeared, to further complicate the problem. Globalization has encroached in varying degrees into the local economies of the different countries in Asia. Nevertheless, pressures of the global market are felt even in the most remote communities of indigenous peoples, with a profound and intense impact on indigenous women.

Kreung woman and children, Ratanakiri Province, Cambodia. Photo: Christian Erni



Impacts of globalization

Globalization seeks the removal of national barriers in order to allow multinational corporations (MNCs) to maximize their profits through free and open access to natural resources. In most cases, the land on which indigenous peoples live is where many of the world's remaining natural resources are still to be found. Sadly, it is this natural wealth in indigenous peoples' territories that has now become the target of MNC exploitation and commercialization.

Globalization comes in the form of mining and logging operations, dam construction and other energy projects, agriculture for export, inflows of imported goods and crops, tourism development projects such as national parks and golf courses, agricultural plantations and industrial estates, among other things. While MNCs are clearly the winners in the process of globalization, there are also obvious losers – among them the indigenous peoples whose land and resources are ravaged in the globalization race.

The particular impacts of globalization on the indigenous women of Asia are profound and far-reaching. Globalization impacts on the various roles they play in life: as productive forces in society, as child-bearers and rearers, and as vital members of indigenous communities.

The loss of land due to incursions by MNCs, government projects or settlers into indigenous territories is crucial in deciding the fate of indigenous women. Physical displacement from their ancestral territories and production base leads to economic and cultural dislocation. With the loss of their land, women also lose control over the natural resources that have been the source of their survival since birth. They are marginalized from their integral role in agricultural production.

Agricultural production was traditionally in the hands of women, who spent most of their time working in the fields to produce food for their family's consumption and other needs. Now, MNCs and businessmen tightly control the production of crops for export in plantations. Women are transformed into contractual workers on these plantations. For example, in Malaysia, the mushrooming of big monocrop plantations using mechanized methods, chemical fertilizers and pesticides has displaced rural women from their farms. Aside from agriculture, other means of subsistence livelihood are likewise affected such as fishing, foraging, hunting, livestock raising and small handicrafts, all to the disadvantage of indigenous women. From being important productive forces, they are reduced to being dependent upon their husbands or menfolk. Production of food for export, monocrop production of high-value crops for the market, and importation of food staples in line with the policies of globalization have had the overall effect of degrading the environment and threatening the food security of people in the rural areas, in particular, indigenous peoples and women. The effects range from the loss of soil fertility, massive land erosion, pollution of water aquifers, loss

Lahu
women and
children,
Thailand.
Photo:
Christian Erni



of natural enemies to pests and the loss of biodiversity due to the use of fewer certified seed varieties. As a result, indigenous women who are primarily involved in agriculture are unable to produce the food needed by their families and fall into the trap of commercialized agricultural production for export.

Migration

Poverty, dislocation from their ancestral land and marginalization from subsistence agriculture have pushed thousands upon thousands of indigenous women to migrate to urban centers, in search of other livelihood opportunities. Some try their luck as migrant workers or overseas workers, while others cross national borders as refugees retreating from the armed military repression in their homelands.

In the cities, indigenous women have difficulty finding employment because of the prevailing discrimination against indigenous people and women, and the inherent lack of employment opportunities in underdeveloped countries in Asia. Some are able to find low-level jobs in the formal economy as workers in plantations, factories, hotels or other establishments. Others are not as fortunate to get regular employment. They survive mainly through the informal economy, having odd jobs when they can find them, working as domestic servants, waitresses, sales girls, laundry women, rickshaw pullers, construction workers, etc. Most end up underemployed, or unemployed, living below the poverty line in the city slums.

As workers, indigenous women are exploited by the capitalists in terms of wages, benefits and working conditions. In addition, they experience discrimination in the workplace based on the fact that they are women and indigenous. They easily fall victim to the flexible labor practices of capitalists, which increases their exploitation. In the plantations, indigenous women workers usually receive lower wages than men.

Many indigenous women are forced into prostitution in the cities. Unscrupulous people out to make money by exploiting poor women engage in sex-trafficking of women and children. A particularly serious case is that of the indigenous women refugees of Burma who have fled the excessively abusive military operations in their homeland to live in Thailand. These women have lost everything and have nothing with which to earn a living. They are easy prey for traffickers who force them to prostitute themselves in Thai brothels. Many prostitutes in Thailand come from Burma, an estimated 90% of whom have HIV / AIDS. The number of prostituted indigenous women in the different Asian countries is astounding, reaching hundreds of thousands in countries such as Thailand, India, and Taiwan.

Rising prostitution is largely the result of the poverty and landlessness of indigenous people in areas that have been taken over by exploitative multinational corporations, settlers or hostile government forces. In the countryside, it is the result of the influx of male workers into indigenous peoples' lands. Men who have come to work in the plantations, logging companies or mining operations, usually leave their wives and families back home and look to the local women for sexual services. In Kalimantan, Indonesia, it is clear that prostitution arose with the appearance of logging companies on indigenous territory.

Increased workload, health problems and violence

An additional impact of the loss of land, marginalization of women from subsistence agriculture and destruction of the environment is the heavier workload taken on by indigenous women in the home. The loss of water and forests due to mining, logging, plantations, or the declaration of parks and forest reservations make it difficult for women to maintain the needed supply of water and fuel in the home. They are forced to walk long distances to fetch heavy pails of water or to queue for many hours with other women at the few remaining natural water sources. Wood from forests is no longer available and they are forced to look for cash

to buy commercial fuel. In addition, the lack of basic social services, which are supposed to be provided by the government, makes it more difficult for indigenous women to maintain the welfare of the family.

Neglect of indigenous peoples' welfare on the part of the government is prevalent, as can be seen in the inadequate provision of social services. Health care, education, roads, communication networks, and utilities such as water and electricity are usually the concern of the women in the community. Indigenous peoples generally have poorer health and fewer medical services available to them. For example, in Burma indigenous peoples have the highest infant mortality, the lowest levels of income, the highest illiteracy rates, and no access to basic health, education and social services in the country in comparison with other Burmese. In terms of their health, women are also at a disadvantage in relation to men. In Nepal, female life expectancy is 53 years, 3 years less than that of males.

In this era of globalization, the most common health problems encountered by indigenous women include inadequate health and medical services, miseducation and problems with western medicines, a loss of indigenous medicines, the promotion of expensive drugs leading to added expenses for the family, the forced sterilization of women and other family planning operations, a rise in the mortality of women and children due to hard physical labor, even in times of pregnancy and health problems related to the use of toxic agro-chemicals in plantations and commercial market gardens.

Cases of violence committed against indigenous women are also on the increase. The rape of women and children is a common and widespread occurrence, particularly in areas torn by war or armed conflict. The rape of women in war is as much a part of war as the killing of soldiers. The general perception is that rape is a natural, normal or inevitable outcome of war. The rape of indigenous women has come to be used by soldiers or even settlers as a weapon for the systematic repression and dislocation of the indigenous people.

Another aspect of violence is that committed against women migrant workers. Thousands of cases of physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuse committed by employers against women migrant workers have been reported, while more remain undocumented. The worst cases are those of women who have sold their land and properties to be able to pay their fare and placement fee to a recruiting agency, and who come home a lifeless corpse, the victim of abuse. In the Cordillera, Philippines, there is now hardly a community that does not have an overseas contract or migrant worker coming from their area. Stories of

abuse and violence experienced by indigenous women migrant workers of the Cordillera are common.

Breakdown of traditional culture

A particular concern is the impact of globalization on the children of indigenous peoples. Among the most significant impacts are child malnutrition due to poverty, growing consumerism among the youth due to the creation of new needs, a lack of education opportunities in the school and at home, loss of traditional and natural areas for children's recreation, neglect of children by parents who are forced to work in distant places, and child labor. In Thailand, for instance, many mothers are forced to find work in the city. They are taken out of the home and away from daily contact with their children. The mother's absence from the home leaves a large gap in the children's knowledge of traditional culture, which is usually passed on by the mother through practice. The breakdown of traditional cultural practices contributes to the breakdown of the family system, with many marriages ending in separation or broken families. Children are growing up with multiple problems as a result of this difficult family situation.

The breakdown of the traditional culture and beliefs of indigenous people is a direct result of their integration into the dominant culture and the globalized market economy. Problems such as immorality, drug addiction, alcoholism, the opium trade and suicides are on the increase in indigenous communities where traditional culture has been weakened. The traditional culture is not only weakened but even commercialized to make money and to promote tourism. For the women, this has meant a loss of control over their culture. Traditional crafts made by women, which used to provide them with a sense of pride and some income, are taken over by businessmen who mass produce traditional designs and crafts for a profit.

Traditionally, indigenous women often act as healers or spiritual leaders in the community. They carry with them a wealth of indigenous knowledge regarding agriculture, herbal and traditional medicine. For instance, women have knowledge of indigenous seed varieties of rice and other plants. They know what kind of seeds and plants are necessary for ensuring a bountiful harvest, for providing the nutritional needs of the family, and for healing simple illnesses. The increasing control of biotechnology corporations over the seeds used in agriculture is marginalizing the indigenous peasant women from this important role in the community.

Dusun women,
Sabah, Malaysia.
Photo:
Christian Erni



The trends in the situation of Asian indigenous women outlined above clearly reveal a pattern of violation of the rights of indigenous women. The rights of women and indigenous peoples, contained in several international human rights instruments, are systematically transgressed in a myriad of ways. International instruments and conventions in relation to women include the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, the *Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women*, the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. When it comes to indigenous peoples' rights, the *United Nations Charter* and other instruments such as the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* declare that "all peoples have the right to self-determination." In addition, *Conventions 107 and 169 of the International Labor Organization* recognize the right of indigenous and tribal peoples to the control and ownership of their territories and lands.

Indigenous women's movement

It is precisely the experience of being violated, oppressed and exploited that has been the determining factor in the organization of an indigenous peoples' movement. In Asia, indigenous peoples, including indigenous women, have waged life-and-death struggles against ethnocide, land dispossession and national oppression. They have set up organizations at all levels, from local to international, and launched various activities in defense of their land, life and resources.

Indigenous women have done their part, through participation in general community struggles as well as through setting up their own women's organizations and networks, locally and internationally. Worth mentioning are the Asian Indigenous Women's Network (AIWN), founded in 1993, the

Innabuyog (Regional Federation of Cordillera Indigenous Women), the Indigenous Women's Network in Cambodia, the Naga Women's Union of Manipur, Naga Mothers' Association, the Indigenous Women's Forum in Jharkhand, the Karen Women's Organization, the Jhumma Peoples Network of the Asia-Pacific, the Ghumusar Mahila Sangathan, among others. Forms of action they have utilized range from political and confrontational protest actions to petitions, pickets, litigation and local self-help socio-economic projects.

The situation of the indigenous women of Asia today could not be further from the picture of equality and human dignity envisaged in existing declarations of human rights, women's rights and indigenous peoples' rights. Indigenous women remain among the poorest, most violated, most oppressed, most scorned and most exploited sectors of society. Their situation is a dark picture of human misery painted by the powers-that-be, who covet indigenous peoples' land and who would do anything to control power and profits in the global economy. The redeeming features in this picture are the struggles of indigenous peoples themselves who have persevered, despite the odds against them. Their struggles as indigenous people and as women for self-determination and equality are a ray of light for the future of humankind.

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WITCH ACCUSATIONS IN JHARKHAND, INDIA

A few recent cases



By Samar Bosu Mullick

Munda women carrying Haria, traditional rice beer, Jharkhand. Photo: Roger Begrich



Mother and child at a village meeting, Jharkhand. Photo: Roger Begrich

Jharkhand is located in the eastern part of the central tribal belt of India. It is a forested plateau region surrounded by the states of Bihar in the north, Orissa in the south, West Bengal in the east and Madhya Pradesh in the west. It is the ancestral homeland of several indigenous and analogous peoples. The region is known for its long history of relentless struggle of its peoples for the protection of their indigenous identity and ancestral land, forest and water.

Witch hunting

The social and economic crisis that the indigenous society of Jharkhand is experiencing today is not only caused by the aggression of external forces but also by its own internal factors. The most important of these internal factors has been the rampant practice of witch hunting. This not only entails a continuous process of degradation

and dehumanization of the women folk of the society but also perpetuates a gender division within it, which weakens the society from within. However, the popular belief has, on the contrary, been that the 'witches' are to be eliminated regularly in order to make the society stronger against external aggressions.

During all great struggles of the past, such as the Santal Hul of 1855, the Birsa Ulgulan of the Mundas in the last quarter of the 19th century and even the recent Ho uprising in the 1980s, the leaders ordered the killing of witches in order for a purification of society necessary to win the battle. No battle, however, could be won at such a heavy cost of female lives. But that has not deterred the men from carrying on their onslaught against women in an outrageous way.

Under popular pressure from the administration and some non-governmental organizations, the Bihar government passed the Prevention of Witch Accusation Act, 1999. The objective of the Act was stated to be that of preventing women being identified as witches and to stop the torture, dishonor and killing of women by society on the same grounds. The Act, however, even a year after its passage, has failed to yield any significant results. Rather, according to a village headman of the Ho tribe of the Khuntpani Developmental Block in the district of West Singhbhum, the number of incidents of witch accusation and killing in the district has increased after promulgation of the Act.

The number of such cases registered in the Police Stations of other districts show no sign of decrease in the malespree of witch killing and torture. This fact makes one remember the same initiative that was taken by the British colonial government in the latter half of the 19th century. The Santal men folk resented this decision and demanded reconsideration. They said that the witches were inflicting pain and death on their otherwise happy and peaceful life. Thus the initiatives of both the colonial and independent governments for more than a century have resulted in nothing but an emphatic assertion by the indigenous male-dominated society of its belief in the existence of witches and its determination to eradicate them.

The branding of the long established practice of witch harassment and witch killing as the product of superstitious beliefs, and the spreading of a modern education and healthcare system as the cure has yielded nothing. Educated tribal men are reported to be no less enthusiastic in eliminating witches than their 'ignorant and superstitious' brothers. Similarly, despite the presence of the modern medicinal system, death and diseases continue to take place as does the identification of women as the witches who cause them. The belief is deep rooted and certainly serves a social purpose.

The following are a few recent cases of witch accusation, torture and killing, which reveal interesting facts.

Case - 1

Village: Sarauni Kala, Hazaribagh, Mufassil (Suburban) P.S.

Accused: Bhagia Devi

Accuser: Khago Prajapati, husband of the Accused

Tribe/caste: Scheduled Caste - Prajapati

Form of punishment: Killed by slitting the neck

Executed by: The husband

(Ref. Prabhat Khabar 20 Feb 2000)

The case:

"Ghost entered into her body. She planned to eat my son (her stepson). My wife was a witch." Said Khago.

Khago married Bhagia of Kharna Bera under Bishnupur Police Station while his first wife was alive. Bhagia was a widow with no issue. Her second marriage became fruitful and she gave birth to one son and two daughters. Khago had three children from his first marriage. The eldest of the three, a son called Nrayan, developed some kind of chronic disease. Khago suspected Bhagia's hand behind it. As his apprehension deepened, he decided to kill her. On the 10th February, he took Bhagian to the forest asking her to collect firewood. The moment Bhagia stopped to collect the dry branch of a tree Khago slit her neck with a sharp weapon. Then he left the body there for some time and later went back to take the head and bury it near a rivulet. Then on his own initiative, he informed the police

that his second wife was missing; that she had gone to the forest and not come back. He also informed his in-laws and requested them to trace their daughter. The police recovered the body of Bhagia in the forest two days later but could not trace the head until they got a clue from some of Khago's co-villagers. Khago was arrested and accused of killing Bhagia Devi.

This exemplifies an instance of individual effort to eliminate the 'witch'. The immediate cause was incurable disease.

Case - 2

Village: Mukund Gaon, Hazaribagh, Mufassil (Suburban) P.S.

Accused: Samudri Devi

Accuser: Brother-in-law and his family

Tribe/caste: Scheduled Caste - Viswakarma

Form of punishment: Attempted murder

Executed by: The accusers

(Ref. Prabhat Khabar 22 Feb 2000)

The case:

"I am not a witch. I have not eaten any cow. People want to kill me for nothing. One day they tried to kill me by pressing my throat. My brother-in-law and his wife and children hate me. They have made my social life unbearable," said 45 year old Samudri Devi of Mukund Gaon in the Mufassil (suburban) Police Station, Hazaribagh. She has a happy family with her husband Kailash Vishwakarma and their children. But people are envious of the family. The villagers have a strong belief in the



Munda woman with water buffalo and calf, Jharkhand. Photo: Roger Begrich



Birhor woman carrying freshly harvested forest produce, Jharkhand. Photo: Roger Begrich

existence of witches and ghosts and everybody wants the family to leave the village. The police have already arrested two of the those accused under the First Information Report lodged by Samudri Devi. The other two have absconded.

This is an instance of accusation by a section of the family members supported by other villagers. The apparent cause is the death of a cow.

Case - 3

Village: Dumar gaon, Hazaribagh, Mufassil (Subur-ban) P.S.

Accused: Keshvati Devi

Accuser: Tulsi and Munsu Rana

Tribe/caste: Caste - Teli

Form of punishment: Severe beating

Executed by: The accusers

(Ref. Prabhat Khabar 6 March 2000)

The case:

According to the son of the accused, his mother has been the victim of anger from her superstitious neighbors for a long time. The accusation against her has been that she has an evil eye. Whoever she looks at falls ill. The Village Council held meetings on this issue and warned the accusers a couple of times earlier. But despite this, she has been harassed time and again. Once, a written complaint was lodged against the present accusers, Tulsi and Munsu Rana. However, the police did not take any action against them. The present incident happened yesterday morning. The Ranas brought the water pump to irrigate their land. The machine did not work. The Rana brothers believed that it was the evil eye of Keshvati that had caused the problem. They started abusing her with filthy words. When the son opposed this, they assaulted him physically. Seeing this, his mother came to his rescue and, consequently, was also beaten up severely. Later on, both mother and son came to the police station and lodged a First Information Report. The police filed cases under sections 341, 323 and 504/34 of IPC, and 4 and 5/6 of the Witchcraft Prevention Act against the Rana brothers. Neither of them were arrested until the report was written.

This is an instance of accusation by a section of the neighbors. The apparent cause is a machine going out of order.

Case - 4

Village: Sundarpur Toli, Palkot P.S.

Accused: Ratia Baraik, Asari Devi, Bishmuni Devi, Kaushalya Kumari and Fagu Chik Baraik.

Accusers: Ranjit Baraik, Moti Baraik, Bhuneswar Baraik, Manu Baraik and Dilu Baraik

Tribe/caste: Tribe - Chik Baraik

Form of punishment: Severe beating and force feeding of human excreta.

Executed by: The accusers and about 20 to 25 other co-villagers

(Ref. Prabhat Khabar 7 March 2000)

The case:

According to the First Investigation Report lodged by Asari Devi, one of the victims, she was at home on the 4th March together with her husband Fagu, her son-in-law Ratia, and her daughters Bishmuni, and Kaushalya. Her husband and son-in-law had just come back from the fields and were having lunch. At that time, Ranjit came along with four-five people from the village and asked them to attend the village panchayat (council) meeting, which was in session. They took them to the meeting.

Ranjit and others named in the First Investigation Report accused Ratia, the son-in-law, of being a wizard. Then they started to beat him with sticks. When the rest of the family members tried to rescue him, they were also severely beaten up. After that, they were forced to eat human excreta.

Asari Devi further reported that, earlier on, the same group of people had also accused Gotar Urain, wife of Pade Uraon, Rijhe Urain, wife of the late Chamra Uraon and Riba Uraon, daughter of Bhola Uraon, of practicing witchcraft. They shaved these women's heads and forced them to leave the village.

In both of the cases, the apparent objective of witch accusation seems to be to drive out the accused from the village. In the first case, the family has no male issue. The son-in-law is a Ghar Jamai (the son-in-law living with the in-laws). His expulsion from the village would benefit the immediate relatives of the family materially.

Case – 5

Village: Garhatoli, P.S. Gumla, District Gumla

Accused: Lohri Uraon Age: 65

Accuser: Birsu Uraon

Tribe/caste: Tribe - Uraon

Form of punishment: Death

Executed by: Birsu Uraon

(Ref. Prabhat Khabar - 25 April 2000)

The case:

According to the First Information Report lodged by the villagers at the police station, Lohri Uraon was sitting in the courtyard of her house when Birsu Uraon came and accused her of practicing witchcraft. He picked up a wooden stool lying nearby and kept hitting her head with it until she breathed her last. She certainly screamed and cried for help but nobody came to her rescue. She was a single woman with control over some family land for her livelihood, which is a common practice. Birsu's immediate motive could have been to take her land, which naturally passes into the hands of the next male member of the lineage after the death of the widow or spinster, as the case may be.

This is an instance of accusation by a family member supported by other villagers. The apparent cause is not known but the motive was to take land.

Case – 6

Village: Ambria, District: West Singhbhum

Accused: Mecho Purti Age: 50

Accuser: Ramai Purti

Tribe/caste: Tribe - Ho

Form of punishment: Death

Executed by: Ramai Purti, Durgacharan Shundi and five others

(Ref. Documentation centre, Tribal Women's Council, Singhbhum - 19 Dec.1999)

The case:

It was early in the evening. Mecho Purty, aged about 50, was chatting with her two neighborhood friends. Her husband was not at home. Suddenly, seven people with their faces covered with cloth entered the house. One of them, later identified as her son-in-law, accused her of practicing witchcraft and began hitting her with an iron rod until she fell down in a pool of blood. Next morning, the headman of the village was forced by the husband of the victim to lodge a First Information Report in the nearest police station. On the basis of the report of the eyewitnesses, the police could arrest only one of the accused, named Durgacharan Shundi, who confessed to the crime. But the real killer had slipped through the fingers of the police.

This is an instance of accusation by a family member supported by other villagers. The apparent cause is not known.

Underlying causes of witchcraft beliefs

Although these cases are collected randomly, they reveal different kinds of accusations and different forms of punishment. They also show that the belief in witchcraft and the practice of torturing and killing women on the grounds of accusations of practicing witchcraft is not confined to the tribes (indigenous peoples) alone. The analogous peoples, in these cases the Scheduled and other lower castes, are also part of the same system. However, the tribes are more active in witch hunting than their caste neighbors.

The institution of witch finders and the system of belief in which they are embedded has a long tradition in Jharkhand. Tribal myths and legends offer us enough clues to conclude that it was borrowed from the peoples of the neighboring plains, along with the process of sedentarisation of the tribes. Thus the belief in witches is not found among the nomadic foraging tribes such as the Birhors and the Kodaks.

But what was the social compulsion of borrowing such an apparently inhuman institution and related beliefs? The answer cannot be evaded by pointing at a rather vague word as 'superstition'. Every so-called superstition has a material base. So what is the material base of witch hunting in Jharkhand? The above mentioned cases can provide the answer.



Munda woman and child, Jharkhand. Photo: Roger Begrich

All the cases have one thing in common, i.e., a strong belief in the efficacy of witchcraft; witches can cause harm and even death to both humans and animals. Although it sounds ridiculous, they can even damage a machine! The cruelty with which the accused is tortured or killed can only be explained by the strength of the belief, particularly when the accuser is a close relative, which is often the case. The witches are killed individually or collectively by their own lineage members and co-villagers and the crime is committed with the full sanction of the village folk. Those who go against the decision are also harassed and tortured. There can be wizards as well.

Beneath the apparent material gains there lies a more socially important cause to such killings and harassment, because not all the villagers benefit materially from such heinous acts.

It is true that the belief has many dimensions, both economic and cultural, social and supernatural. But at the moment it would be wise to pay a little more attention to the economic and cultural aspects of it.

The fact that the belief in witchcraft is not found among the foraging tribes leads one to presume that the belief has some cultural connection with the economy of settled agriculture and the patrilineal social structure of the major tribes and lower castes of the region. At this juncture, we must remember that the lower castes in Jharkhand cannot be equated with their counterparts in the plains. In Jharkhand, they are very close to the tribes both economically and culturally. That is why some anthropologists call them the 'analogous' peoples.

In the plains, the belief in witchcraft among the castes has become a thing of the past. Thus, the belief in the efficacy of witchcraft is strong and the practice of witch killing is widespread only among the tribes and analogous peoples. Neither the caste society in the plains nor the foraging peoples practice it. This fact leads researchers to believe that, beside other factors, witch hunting is a phenomenon of a society that is in the process of establishing patriarchy.

Though the major tribes of Jharkhand are settled agriculturalists, they are still substantially dependent on forest products. The women traditionally do the foraging, which provides them with economic power. Moreover, since society has still - to a large extent - carried on Neolithic traditions, the woman still enjoys some rights before marriage to the lineage resources of the parents, and to those of the husband after it.

The full growth of patriarchy demands the end of such rights and powers of women. Women's power in this society is also derived from their ritual knowledge. The growing patriarchy in Jharkhand society therefore also needs to make women ritually powerless in order to establish full male domination in the area of the supernatural. The tribal society in Jharkhand must have borrowed the belief in witchcraft from its caste neighbors in response to the demands of patriarchy that started emerging with the adoption of settled agriculture. Thus, at present, the society is passing through a sharp gender conflict resulting in inhuman torture and the killing of women.

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Tangkhul Naga women: Photo: Christian Erui

WOMEN FOR PEACE IN NAGALIM¹

By Shimreichon Luithui

To the great relief of civil society, both Indians and Nagas, the cease-fire agreement between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim - Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM)² has been extended for another year from August 1, 2000. In 1997, the Indian Government took a path-breaking decision to enter into negotiations with the NSCN - IM, the leading Naga national resistance movement. This announcement was followed by a cease-fire agreement between the two on August 1, 1997. The announcement of Indo-Naga peace talks in the Indian Parliament after 50 years of bloody war was supported by all the political parties. The Nagas received it with optimism and hope and used the opportunity of peace to express their strong support for the national resistance movement through public meetings and consultations.

Nagas are a mongoloid people, numbering about 3 million, with more than 40 tribes. They speak languages closely related to the tibeto-burman language family. The Nagas live in the mountains of the Patkai Range between India and Burma. Most of them are subsistence farmers with rice as their main crop. About one third of their land came under the British in 1879, the remaining two thirds were then designated as 'no man's land'. After the British left, Nagalim was divided between India and Burma.



Tangkhul Naga women. Photo: Christian Erni



The three years of cease-fire has allowed Naga civil society to come out in the open and actively participate in the discussions on the Naga political issue and engage in a dialogue with groups from the national movement. Naga women, represented by the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) in Nagaland State and the Naga Women's Union Manipur (NWUM) in Manipur State, have joined in the efforts to consolidate peace in Nagalim. These two women's organisations have been working on human rights issues, afforestation and conservation, empowerment of women, against construction of the multi-purpose Tipaimukh high dam and on alcoholism and drug addiction. The NMA president has received the Padma Shri Award, a very prestigious award for outstanding social work, from the Indian Government this year, in recognition of her work.

Even before the cease-fire, the two organisations had been working with other leading Naga organisations such as the Naga Hoho Summit (federation of traditional tribal councils), the United Naga Council, the Naga Students Federation (NSF), the All Naga Students Union-Manipur, the Council of Churches and Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) to reduce the violence and brutalisation of Naga society. This was largely caused by the Indian security forces and also partly by factional fighting.

Since the beginning of the peace talks, the two women's organisations have become deeply involved in the peace process. Their activities in connection with the peace process have focussed on three areas: peace and reconciliation; participation in capacity building, and the "peoples to peoples dialogue" with Indian civil society.

Peace and reconciliation

The consequence of 50 years of struggle against the Indian State has been thousands of human lives lost and a Naga society that has been left battered and desolated. But their will to continue to fight for their right to self-determination is still intact. The Indian State has employed a "carrot and stick" approach and a "divide and rule" policy to suppress the aspirations of the Nagas. It succeeded in creating divisions in the national movement and society as a whole.

Today, the Naga resistance movement is divided into three groups or factions: the NSCN-IM, with the broadest support base among the Naga people; the NSCN-K – some of whom are alleged to be working in tandem with the Nagaland State Chief Minister, S.C. Jamir, who is known to be co-opted by the Indian State; and the remains of the once leading, but now severely weakened Naga National Council (NNC). One of the major problems facing the Nagas internally is the factional fighting between NSCN-K and NSCN-IM, often fanned by vested interests.

The NMA and the NWUM have been working relentlessly towards reconciliation and unification of these groups. In this effort, as in many other issues facing Naga society, they are working closely with the other Naga organisations mentioned above. The NMA and the NWUM have made every effort and have travelled far and wide to meet all the groups and factions. For instance, in the early days of the cease-fire they walked for days to the Eastern Nagalim, in Burma, to meet the NSCN-K leader Khaplang. They had free and frank discussions with him, appealed to him for reconciliation with the other groups and towards finding a lasting solution to the Naga political problems.

They also participated in the consultation with NSCN-IM leaders and civil society in Dimapur, Nagalim, last year. And two representatives of the NWUM met with the NNC leader Adino Phizo and her brother, who is adviser to NNC, in London last year. They had long discussions with them and also appealed to them to help bring the different groups and factions together.

Although it has been difficult, the two organisations have managed to establish contact with all the factions and hold regular discussions and dialogues with them. This helps to clear up potential misunderstandings between them and civil society and, above all, the different factions. The NMA and the NWUM have succeeded in bringing together some of the leaders of these factions in informal meetings. The women's intervention has helped greatly to reduce tensions and violence in society.

The women activists have also had informal dialogues with the "overground" Naga politicians who, out of personal interest and opportunism, have to a large extent contributed to the divisions in Naga society. Keeping the channels open at every level, creating space for dialogue among different groups with differing opinions, is a crucial factor in healing and enhancing peace in society. And Naga women are indeed playing this role very effectively. As part of India's strategy to weaken the Naga national struggle, a section of the Kuki people living in parts of Manipur were used by the Indian security forces to fight the Nagas. This led to the outbreak of heavy inter-ethnic violence. As a result, hundreds of Naga and Kuki houses were burnt down between 1992 and 1996. Both communities lost hundreds of lives. Many villages were uprooted, causing so much human tragedy and many villagers are still in refugee camps. Major clashes have abated but tensions between the two communities still run high. At the height of the Naga-Kuki clash, the NWUM initiated a peace campaign to resolve the conflict between the two communities, through dialogue and mutual understanding. Women came forward to build a bridge between the two communities when it was impossible for men to do so. The NWUM and the Kuki women continue to try and find ways of working together in order to recover peace and normal relationships between the two peoples.

Previously in traditional Naga society, women acted as arbitrators in times of conflict. Women played the role of peace makers, for instance, in the pitched battles between their village of birth and the village they married into. Holding up a long Y shaped stick they would enter the battlefield and stop the war. Since they were related to both parties by blood and through marriage, neither side could harm them. The NMA and the NWUM are somehow continuing this tradition by new means.

Though it is difficult to see tangible results, the women activists feel that there is positive change and that, to some extent, there is better understanding among the Nagas. At least, since the cease-fire, fratricidal killing among the Nagas has reduced greatly. This can be attributed to people having more space to discuss and clarify and less room for vested interests to play their game. And there is strong pressure from civil society to refrain from violence. In the present situation, where all kinds of conflicting views are kept floating around by vested interests, women enjoying trust from all sides are playing a very crucial role in furthering dialogue and mutual understanding and therefore in bringing peace to society.

Participation in capacity building

The NMA and the NWUM have been participating in several workshops and training programmes on peace and capacity building so that they can positively impact on the on-going Indo-Naga peace talks. At the same time, the NWUM has conducted several small workshops at the village level on methods of democratic participation in the peace process and the villagers have responded very enthusiastically. It has been learned from past experience that, to keep the peace talks on track and to bring about a workable solution, the broadest possible acceptance and support of the people is necessary. It is therefore important to secure the active participation of the people. A well-informed civil society has to stand behind the leaders who are sitting at the negotiation table. So the workshops on capacity building are very relevant.

The Naga leaders, for their part, have responded very positively to the increasing engagement of civil society. Extensive consultations took place in 1999 and such consultation with civil society in order to address the issue of difference of opinions and clarification is continuing. In this context, the Consultative Body, consisting of tribal councils and some NGOs, set up by Naga civil society and the NSCN-IM in May last year is very important. It will hopefully be developed into a mechanism for the effective participation of civil society in the negotiation process.

The participation of the NMA and the NWUM in training to improve their capacity is also part of an empowerment process, to ensure that women's views and positions are taken into account in the discussions on the future of Naga society. Women, out of concern, have

worked relentlessly for peace and for the creation of a better society. And because of their consistency and the crucial role they play, they have gained much respect.

However, they will have to make sure that this respect is translated into lasting recognition of their role in politics and that their participation at all levels of political decision-making is guaranteed, particularly once lasting peace is achieved. For example, Naga women still do not have a place on the village council and tribal *Hoho* (council). While many Naga men still need to be educated with respect to gender equality in society, many women still need encouragement to assert their rights. Naga women are as educated and skilled as the men but they often simply lack the self-confidence to take an active part in the discussions and decision-making processes that are so crucial for the future of their communities, and for Naga society as a whole.

“Peoples-to-peoples dialogue” with Indian civil society

There is strong feeling among Naga civil society that in order to achieve a successful outcome to the Indo-Naga peace talks, fostering better understanding and mutual respect between Indian and Naga civil society is much needed. So far, Nagas have interacted mostly with the Indian Government and there has been too much distortion and misunderstanding about the Indo-Naga political problem amongst the public. A direct “peoples-to-peoples dialogue”, in which representatives of civil society are given the chance to explain to each other their situations, views, hopes and concerns has therefore been initiated. This, it is hoped, could help mend the turbulent relationship and contribute to finding an acceptable way of resolving the conflict between the two countries. For this, the NPMHR, together with the leading Naga organisations, has decided to organise “Journeys of Conscience” to some of the main cities of India. Both the NMA and the NWUM are active participants in this initiative.

The first journey, with a Naga delegation of 66 members, was made to Delhi in January this year. The delegates had interactive consultations with Delhi-based civil and democratic rights organisations along, with eminent intellectuals. They also had separate meetings with Naga students who are studying in Delhi.

The journey to Delhi was concluded with a successful *Peace March* to Gandhi Samidhi Rajghat, where the mortal remains of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of India, were interred. The Nagas were joined by representatives of many Indian organisations, including the students. This homage to Mahatma Gandhi was symbolic because Gandhi understood and recognised the rights and aspirations of the Nagas. The Nagas want to build relationship with India based on this promise.

Indian civil society has welcomed the initiative taken by Naga civil society. The response in Delhi was very good. In the meantime, some of the Indian organisations have invited leading Naga organisations, including the NMA and the NWUM, for consultations. The women activists found such consultations very useful, moving in the right direction towards building a better understanding and mutual respect between the two peoples.

Initiatives by Indians in support of the peace process now continue at different levels. Intellectuals in Delhi and three former Prime Ministers of India have sent letters to the Government of India in which they urge the Government to maintain the cease-fire and resume the peace talks in a constructive and meaningful manner. They also appealed to the Government of India to approach the Government of Thailand with a request to release NSCN leader Th. Muivah, who has been imprisoned in Thailand. Muivah, the leader of the Naga peace negotiation team, was arrested by the Thai authorities in January this year for travelling on a false passport.

Naga civil society, together with intellectuals, politicians and human rights activists from India, Thailand and other countries have met twice in Bangkok since July this year to express their support for Muivah and to discuss issues related to the peace process. The NMA and the NWUM also participated. These meetings were extremely constructive, and they marked the beginning of a close and potentially very fruitful cooperation between Indian and Naga civil society. This cooperation, and the active role the Naga women play today, may ultimately prove decisive in bringing about lasting peace to the Nagas.

Notes

- ¹ The Nagas have started using the word ‘Nagalim’ in place of ‘Nagaland’ since 1997. ‘Lim’ simply means ‘land’ in Ao Naga language. When Nagas refer to Nagalim they mean the entire area inhabited by Nagas in the same way they used to use the word ‘Nagaland’, which was divided by the British between India and Burma. The Indian Union created a State in 1963 named Nagaland, comprising only one third of the area inhabited by the Nagas.
- ² The NSCN split into two factions in 1988 - NSCN- K under the leadership of Khaplang and NCSN- IM under the leadership of Isak and Muivah.

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ATROCITIES AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN BURMA

By Debbie Stothard



"It is time we brought the attention of the world to the abysmal conditions under which so many women of Burma are forced to exist, not just for weeks or months but year after year..."—Aung San Suu Kyi.

All ethnic groups, with the exception of Anglo-Burmese, South Asian and East Asian immigrant communities, are considered indigenous to Burma, in their specific localities. Burma is home to a great diversity of ethnic nationality groups, the more well-known ones being the Chin, Kachin, Arakanese, Mon, Shan, Karen and Karenni. The ethnic Burmans who dominate the rich delta area also dominate the central government. It is the Burman-dominated military which rules the country with an iron fist.

Burma gained its independence from Britain in 1948, a year after the independence hero Aung San helped draft the Panglong Agreement that guaranteed the rights of ethnic peoples in Burma. However, post-independence dissatisfaction set in amongst several ethnic groups, who felt that these rights were threatened. A war broke out between the Karen and the Burmese army. In 1962, military strongman Ne Win staged a coup, citing the need for stability. Since then, Burma has been ruled by a succession of juntas under Ne Win's leadership or influence.

In 1988, Ne Win resigned as the chair of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) paving the way for a multi-party system. However, this brief flirtation with thoughts of democracy quickly ended following a general strike on August 8, 1988 - the BSPP had done too little too late, and the people were fed up. Weeks later, Ne Win regrouped and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which eventually held general elections in May 1990. To Slorc's shock, the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi (then under house arrest) had a resounding victory. The junta, reincarnated in 1997 as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), still refuses to honour the outcome of these elections.

Meanwhile, the military regime(s) continued to wage a widening civil war on the ethnic peoples of Burma. This civil war helped justify the increasing resources spent on the military machine and led to the growing militarization of the entire country. It turned the homelands of many indigenous groups into battlefields and arenas of displacement, war atrocities and systematic human rights abuse.

In situations of conflict and oppression, it is usually women and indigenous peoples who bear the worse impacts. Burma is no exception: the most brutal violations tend to occur more frequently in rural areas, especially in the border areas, where there are large concentrations of people of non-Burman ethnic background.

In the civil and political context, the military's refusal to recognise the outcome of the general elections that it organised in 1990 has also greatly disadvantaged non-Burman ethnic nationality groups. The National League for Democracy (NLD), which won 81% of the Parliamentary seats, has a far more progressive policy on ethnic diversity. Seventeen per cent of the Parliamentary seats were won by ethnic-based parties and only 2 per cent by the military-backed National Unity Party. Several of the ethnic parties have since been banned.

While some observers see the civil and political abuses of the junta as affecting mostly Burman dissidents, these abuses also prevent the ethnic nationality groups from legitimately exercising their political rights. Greater democracy in Burma is necessary because it implies greater political space and possibility for the ethnic groups and the Burmese administration to achieve a peaceful, political solution.

Women in conflict areas

State-sanctioned violence is one of the most serious threats to women's well being, especially in the ethnic areas. This violence may be directed at the population at large, as with forced labor and forced relocation, but it can also be directed specifically at women. Humiliation of and violence against women has been documented repeatedly as a tool used to terrorize communities.

Women have been tortured, raped and killed, and women who speak out against injustice have also been subjected to similar violence as examples of what happens to "trouble-makers". When communities seek justice, it is often not the perpetrators of violence but the communities themselves that suffer.

Economic instability and increasing poverty are also great threats to overall well being. Women bear much of the burden of providing for their families, but lack equal educational opportunities. Yet their responsibilities are great, leading to increased migration to cities and neighboring countries. Exploitation by traffickers is more often the rule than the exception for these women.

Access to healthcare in general is limited, especially in rural and conflict areas. Approximately 35% of the population has no access to public primary health care services of any kind.

Women in ethnic areas where forced labor and forced relocation are problems have extreme difficulty in maintaining their own and their families' health. Not only is there a lack of medical care, there is insufficient food and shelter, contributing to poor overall health. Forced labor and fear of violence by military regime troops force many rural communities to flee into the jungle. While there,

Exiled and refugee women of different ethnic nationalities celebrate the Women of Burma Day on 19 June 1999 in Thailand. Photo: Altsean-Burma



people can die of diseases that are not usually life threatening, such as chicken pox, fever, and diarrhoea.

Women in conflict areas often become primary income earners by default when their husbands are taken away for forced labor or killed.

Lack of employment opportunity often leads to the trafficking of women from Burma, both domestically from rural areas to the cities and internationally. Women are trafficked into various fields including construction, agriculture, factory work and sex work. Travelling through contacts with brokers is a common means for women to migrate for economic reasons, but it is neither a safe nor secure means, often with devastating consequences. In its attempt to prevent women from being trafficked to neighboring countries, the military regime created a law prohibiting women between the ages of 16 and 25 from crossing borders unless accompanied by legal guardians. The regime claims this law is to protect women but in reality it only makes them more dependent on traffickers to get them through checkpoints and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.

6 DISPLACED WOMEN RAPED AND KILLED IN A GROUP IN KUN-HING

In late May 2000, 6 displaced women who made their living peddling small goods in the rural areas of Kun-Hing township were raped and shot dead by SPDC troops from IB246, led by Capt. Aung Htay, near the Kun-Hing - Murng-Paeng road between Ka Li village relocation site and Kun-Hing town, Kun-Hing township.

The women were going from Ka Li relocation site towards Kun-Hing town to buy their goods and were carrying 3,000-5,000 Kyat of money each. On the way, they ran into a column of 70-80 SPDC troops from IB246, led by Capt. Aung Htay, who stopped them and took them some distance away from the road and robbed them of all their money. After robbing the women, Capt. Aung Htay raped one of them and told all his troops to rape all the women. After the gang rape, Capt. Aung Htay ordered his troops to make all the women sit in a group and shot them dead.

From Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) Monthly Report, June 2000

Forced labor

In conflict areas, forced labor is often accompanied by extreme violence and leads to food scarcity by undermining a family's capacity to grow their own food or to engage

in paid labor to buy food. Women are conscripted into labor themselves, or have to maintain the household while the husband is doing forced labor. In many cases, men flee the village in order to avoid forced labor orders but women are then rounded up instead. Forced laborers are often beaten and women are also subjected to rape.

One Karenni woman recalled that she and her family had left their village because they did not have enough food. When asked why she did not have food, she replied:

"Because we couldn't work to produce food. Even though the rains were less, if we didn't have to do forced labor we could have worked and produced enough food for us to live. We also had to give them 50 Kyats per week to work on their farms (plots of land allocated by the army) where we could stay with our families. If the Burmese needed us while we were farming, they told the village headman and he told us we had to come back. The money for the farm was already paid and we didn't get it back. We lost those days (offarming which they had paid for)."

Forced labor is widespread and impacts upon entire communities. In extreme cases, an entire village may be called to work. On 15 January 1999, for instance, the chairperson of a village was reprimanded for failure to supply the military with laborers. To compensate, the entire village had to present itself by 6 o'clock the next morning for labor.

Besides being a severe form of economic oppression, forced labor is also a source of terror to communities due to the violence that often accompanies it. In interviews with people who have been subjected to forced labor, many have either witnessed violence or been subjected to it themselves. One woman described the treatment received by two friends. She said:

"I saw them beat my friends. I don't know their names, we didn't know each other very well. They were from other villages and had come to live with us when we were all forced to relocate. The soldiers said to them, 'do it nicely.' My friends said, 'We have never done it before so how can we do it nicely?' Then they beat them. My friends were women about the same size as I am. They beat them with a stick wider than my big toe. They hit them too many times for me to count. Some of them were crying."

The Special Rapporteur on Burma for the UN Human Rights Commission, Rajsoomer Lallah, has also documented violence against women in his interim report to the UN General Assembly last year. He cites the case of one woman who fled to Thailand after being forced to work as a porter four times while still nursing her baby. She was also beaten. In another case, women of Shan ethnicity were among a group of porters forced to carry chickens and dried meat for a military unit from Murngtong. The porters had to sleep on the ground, tied up with a yoke, but the women were kept separately. At night, their screams

were heard by a farmer who was also part of the group of laborers. Though not stated here, it is not uncommon for women porters to be raped by soldiers.

Though only a few examples are given above, forced labor carried out in Burma is extensive, as is the violence that accompanies it. The Special Rapporteur gives the example of the construction of a temple in Kunhing in 1999, which used forced laborers. At any one time, 10% of the workforce was forced labor, including 8 to 15 year old children.

Violence in detention

Women may be detained for their political activities, involvement in ethnic resistance movements, or even simply perceived links to anti-regime groups. When women are detained, they are extremely vulnerable to rape and harassment. Violence is used to terrorize not only the women and their communities but to demoralize the men as if to say they are not strong enough to take care of their own women.

In one instance in May 1999, 4 married couples were detained when the captain of a battalion did not recognize travel passes issued by another battalion. They were held for 3 days and nights, and the women were taken to another place and raped every night. They were released only when their relatives paid 10,000 kyat per couple. A

Karenni woman related her 15-day detention at a military camp as follows:

"In Baw Ka Hta [Army camp] they interrogated us and accused us. They said that we are the wives and children of men who live outside the village and that they would kill us. They said that people from our village have radios and landmines...They said they'd had an order from higher up that they must kill us. ... He said that if we lied to him, he would kill us, but if we 'gave them our meat' he would release us with our lives. ...He forced us to sleep with him. He asked for love. I told him, 'Captain, I am 51 years old. I am the same age as your mother so you'd better not say that word to me. You should also remember that you are a Christian.' He said, 'I won't suffer in Hell.' ...I apologised but told him not to do that to me because I am old. Then he said, 'Then I must kill you, Mother.' He said it slowly, then he forced me to lay down and hold his penis. I didn't dare hold his penis, but he drew my hands and forced me to hold it...While he was doing it he threatened me with a dagger, he touched it to my chest, neck and armpits."

Other acts of military violence

Women are also victims of violence when they encounter soldiers or when troops enter their villages. At the end of

Young women of Mon nationality at a refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese border celebrate Union Day, 1999. The women are wearing "yellow flower badges", a symbol worn by many women from Burma to symbolize their desire for human rights and democracy. Photo: Altsean-Burma



October 1999, four women who had been forced to relocate returned to their fields to reap their rice. They ran into 30 SPDC troops and were subsequently raped and killed. The captain of the battalion accused them of providing rice to the Shan resistance. When the troops returned to the relocation site, they told authorities and community leaders that they had gone to shoot rebels but as all the men got away, they were only able to kill 4 of the wives. The townspeople had to go and find the bodies themselves in order to determine the identities of the women killed.

64 SHAN MASSACRED IN KUN-HING

On 23 May 2000, a column of 90-100 SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) troops from IB246 led by Capt. Htun Aung seized and gathered 64 displaced people, including men, women and children of all ages, who were staying and working in their farms outside Kun-Hing town and near the main road, and shot all of them dead in a group.

On the day of the incident, the troops searched the area and seized all the people they found staying at their farms and brought them together to a place between Saai Mon village and Kun-Hing town, about 20 metres south of the main road. There were altogether 64 men, women and children of all ages.

The SPDC troops separated all the men from the women and children and lined them up, while some of them made the women and children stay together in a group, and shot all the men dead.

The women and children were so terrified by the gruesome scene that they cried and screamed and tried to run away. The troops then turned their guns and fired at them until they all fell dead on top of one another in a pool of blood.

From Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) Monthly Report, June 2000

Among the regime's troops, the most feared in Karen areas are the *Sa Thon Lon*, the Bureau of Special Investigations of the Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence and its Guerrilla Retaliation squads. The Guerrilla Retaliation squads work in small groups with the explicit purpose of executing anyone suspected of present or past connection with the Karen National Union (KNU) or the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).

The Guerrilla Retaliation squads are known for being especially brutal. If they even suspect that someone is a supporter of or involved in activities of the KNU or KNLA, their methods of execution are often gruesome. People have been repeatedly stabbed and dismembered, no questions asked.

In one case, a Karen couple had no idea they were targeted by the squad because the only link they had to the KNLA occurred years earlier when the husband worked as their occasional guide. The wife's brother describes how his sister was almost murdered:

"They captured her, tied her up with rope and then beat her head until her head was broken. Her husband ran away, and they shot at him while he was running but he wasn't hurt. Then they tried to finish killing her. They were beating her to death with a gun butt, but she wouldn't die so they slashed her with a knife. They cut off her ears. There was a set of ornamental earrings worth over 10,000 kyat in her ears. They slashed her chin and her face and left her to die, but still she didn't die."

Later, her brother secretly took his sister to a hospital where the doctor was able to treat her. She lost her ears, but her mouth was sewn back together. When the Guerrilla Retaliation squad learned this, one of the members went to the hospital and threatened to kill her as soon as she left the hospital.

VILLAGERS FLEE AS SPDC TROOPS RESUME BURNING AND LANDMINING OF VILLAGES

Villagers from Dweh Loh township, just south-west of the town of Papun, have begun fleeing the area in large numbers after SPDC troops burned and then landmined at least 9 of their villages in March 2000. At the same time, villagers throughout the region have been fleeing in increasing numbers from increased SPDC militarisation and forced labour.

Villagers from the 9 burned villages in the hills above the SPDC garrison village of Meh Way told KHRG that SPDC columns entered their area at harvest time in November 1999, causing all of them to flee into hiding in the forests to avoid forced labour and forced relocation. While they made forays from their hiding places to try to retrieve rice and belongings and salvage some of the harvest from their fields when they could, the SPDC columns began mining the pathways around their home villages...

The people of other villages in Dweh Loh township are also fleeing, telling KHRG that they cannot bear the increasing burden of forced labour demanded by SPDC Army camps, building barracks and fences, building and maintaining roads, cutting and hauling bamboo and firewood, standing sentry along vehicle roads and going as porters.

From Karen Human Rights Group Information Update: April 25, 2000 / KHRG #2000-UI

Consequences of reporting sexual violence by military personnel

In general, survivors of sexual violence face not only the physical impacts of violence but are also stigmatized for their experiences. In cases where women do have the courage to speak out and file complaints against military perpetrators, a small amount of money is occasionally given to the family as “compensation”. More often, however, the perpetrators face no consequences and those who report the crimes are further harassed.

In one case in June 1999, four women were raped after interrogation about their links to Shan resistance forces. The father of the youngest victim complained to the headman and members of the Village Committee, so they all went to the battalion and filed a complaint with the Commander. The Commander lined up 70 soldiers and instructed the girl to identify her rapist. The man, however, had been purposely left out of the line-up, and therefore could not be identified.

The headman and the Village Committee members were then accused of defaming the military and were detained in the prison at the military base. This was not the end. The following day, the headman was beaten until he lost consciousness and the families were ordered to pay 2,000 kyat each for the release of the detainees. Then the four women who had been raped were also fined 500 kyat each.

Forced marriage

Marriage is sometimes forced upon women, especially in conflict areas, when a Burmese officer takes a fancy to a local girl or woman and demands her in marriage. Sometimes the woman’s family or community will encourage her to marry if they are afraid of the repercussions of her refusal. Other times they may protest, but the women are taken away by the military and forced to marry. In other cases, village leaders will try to arrange for the marriage between a woman and a man who has raped her in an attempt to “normalize” the situation. In one community, the situation was explained like this:

“They like to marry women who are too young. One soldier wanted to take a 12 year old Kayah girl named C— as his wife. People told them the girl is too young and not to take her but their commander forced the people to give her to his soldier. The girl had to agree even though she didn’t want to. Another girl, L—, was studying in grade 8 and had to stop studying [to marry a soldier]. She was 14 years old. An 18 year old girl named H— also had to marry a soldier. They didn’t want to marry the soldiers but the commander said they should marry his soldiers so they had to do it. That was last year. One of the girls is close to having a child. Their parents aren’t very happy about this.”

Others have testified that there is a policy of encouraging soldiers to marry ethnic nationality women. They are promised monetary awards or promotions, the scale of which depends on the education and social rank of the woman. This is significant for two reasons. One is that because the ethnicity of children is most often determined by that of their fathers, marriage between Burmese soldiers and ethnic nationality women contributes to the military’s program of Burmanization in ethnic regions. Also significant is that because soldiers are looking for marriage for promotion or profit, marriages end when troops are rotated out of the area. Women are then left behind with children and receive no compensation from the fathers.

A cause for hope

Despite the extreme oppression that indigenous groups in Burma are subjected to, there is still cause for hope. The growing commitment to human rights and the democratic process amongst many ethnic groups has positive implications for the future of these communities. So, too, is the growing capacity for groups to negotiate with each other. Local communities have found ways to continue their resistance to the SPDC, often in non-violent ways. Their capacity to document abuses and smuggle such information to exiled groups is one such means.

A key development amongst the ethnic women is their increasing ability to speak out for themselves before the international community. In January 2000, a committee of refugee women’s organisations presented a shadow report to the 22nd session of the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to counteract the junta’s assertion that women are entirely equal in Burma. Such efforts should be widely supported and amplified. *“As long as the SPDC refuses to acknowledge the civil war and the rights of ethnic nationalities, the situation for women in Burma will continue to deteriorate”* – Burma: The Current State of Women, A Shadow Report to the 22nd Session of Cedaw.

Many parts of this article are extracted from the Women’s Report Card on Burma, April 2000, Altsean-Burma. Many thanks to Madoka Chase for the excellent research.

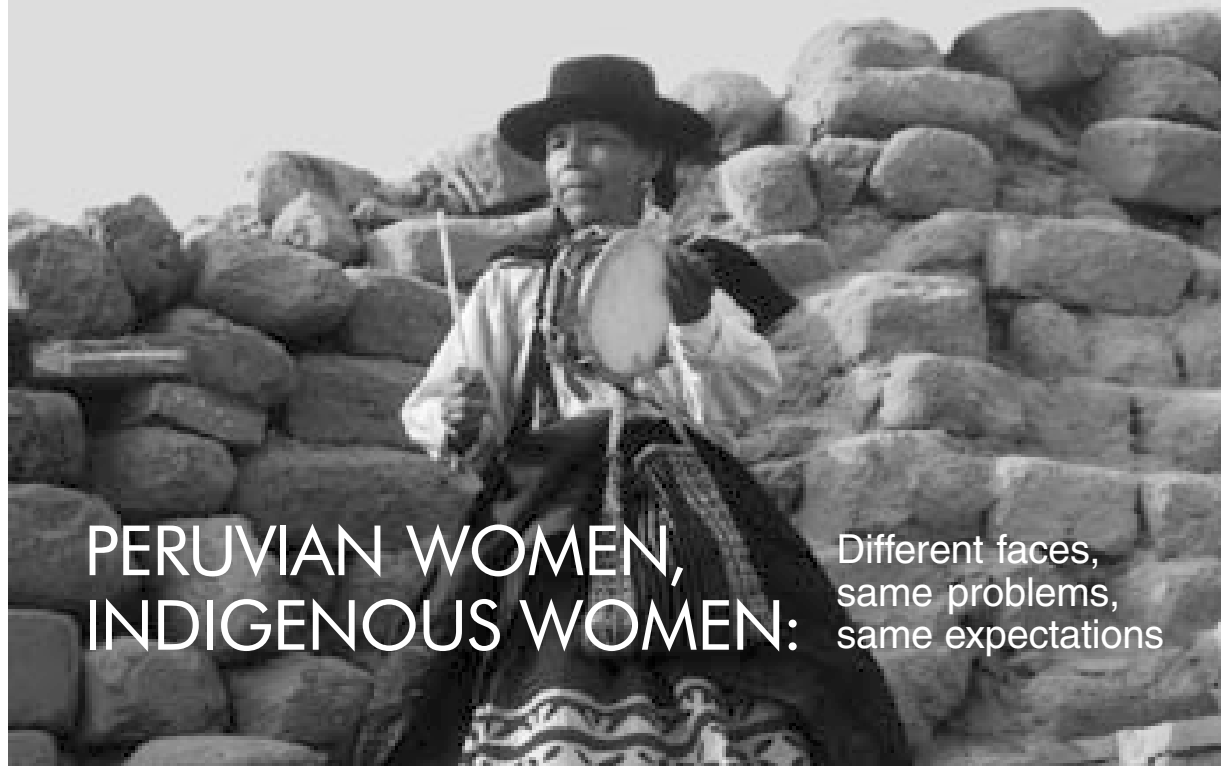
Debbie Stothard is the Coordinator of Altsean-Burma (Alternative Asean Network on Burma). It is a network of activist organisations from Asean member states supporting human rights and democracy in Burma in particular, and South East Asia in general. Debbie Stothard is Malaysian and is based in Thailand. She has been working on Burma issues for 12 years. □

By Tarcila Rivera Zea



Throughout my nearly 50 years of life, I have asked myself who we are, we Quechua speakers, who and what we are, we indigenous and provincial migrants to the capital. With the passage of time, my years and my experience, I have continued to wonder: who are we Peruvians, women and men, living both inside and outside of Peru, what links us, what is the common bond that joins indigenous, mestizo, black, Chinese, niseis and all those we call white, the middle class professionals, workers or rich Peruvians.

And so I look at myself, and at my Quechua-speaking brothers and sisters, at my Aymara brothers and sisters and at the more than 60 different Amazonian nationalities, the Mayans of Guatemala, the Mixtecas of Mexico, the Cree of Canada, the Navajo of North America, the Inuit of Greenland or Canada, the Maasai of Africa, at the indigenous nationalities of India, the Philippines and Hawaii, to name but a few, and I see myself reflected in each and every one of them.



PERUVIAN WOMEN,
INDIGENOUS WOMEN:

Different faces,
same problems,
same expectations



Indigenous women from the Altiplano, Peru. Photo: Diana Vinding

When, twenty years ago, people spoke of 'indigenous', we ran the risk of being considered members of the CIA or of "dancing the dance of the good savage", of having a social chip on our shoulder, frustrated and with a complex.

In these 20 years, we have progressed to the point of recognising ourselves as indigenous peoples and cultures with rights and obligations that must be exercised and respected, with territory and land to defend, with knowledge, technology and resources to share and recognise. We know that we are descended from civilisations that developed hydraulic engineering, and terraces on which to grow crops, that we looked after the forests, medicinal plants and animals for many thousands of years, using only what was necessary for our subsistence. We have reached the United Nations, where we have asked that we should not be known as tribes, minorities or ethnic groups but as **peoples and cultures**.

We have achieved the formulation of ILO Convention No. 169, which recognises the rights of indigenous peoples, and Peru is now a signatory to this Convention. *The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which the UN has been working on for more than 10 years along with indigenous participation, is now with the Commission on Human Rights; the declaration of the *UN Decade of Indigenous Peoples* has been achieved, and this runs until 2004. We are working on the creation of a *Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples* within the United Nations system¹, as well as on draft plans for the *Intellectual Property Rights and Traditional Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples*. Also underway is the *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. These are international instruments that will legitimise the rights of more than 50 million indigenous Americans.

In Peru, according to the official census of 1993, indigenous peoples and cultures make up 42% of the total national population of 22 million. We Quechua, Aymara and more than 60 other different Amazonian peoples consider that we make up 60% of the population as the census only relates to those living in communities and not to our migrant brothers and sisters living in marginal urban districts and working as labourers in factories or in the urban informal sector, or those who leave the country in search of opportunities and who work as unskilled labourers in many foreign countries. They, too, are indigenous.

Women in Peru

According to the official census of 1993, 50.39% of the national population are women, that is 11,098,981.

- 7,852,110 women live in urban areas due to migration or centralism, the capital alone is home to 3,243,782.
- Of the 50.7% of poor people in Peru, 14.7% of us live in extreme poverty, the mountain and rural forest areas accounting for 36.4% and 32.6% respectively.
- Those living in extreme poverty number 3,576,227, of which 15.6% consist of female-headed households.
- 23% of poor women have no education and 42% have some primary education.
- There are still 1,297,168 people considered to be illiterate in Peru, of which 73% are women. In Ayacucho, where I come from, there are 68,749 illiterate women.
- The rate of maternal mortality amongst women with no education is 489 deaths per hundred thousand births.²

Composition

This female population is made up of poor mestizo women, blacks, and largely indigenous and non-indigenous who migrate from the provinces in search of better conditions, firstly for themselves and later in the hope of an education for their children. They live in the poor districts, they are found in survival organisations, in the markets, on the streets as itinerant sales women, in the few factories that exist, in the service industry (business, restaurants, petrol stations), etc. In the last ten years, Peru has exported cheap labour in the form of poor and professional unemployed women for domestic service in Italy, Spain, Argentina, Chile and the United States due to the fact that there are virtually no job opportunities in Peru.

What is the common denominator amongst Peruvian women?

Being poor and being a woman: in spite of the personal efforts of a large number of women who struggle to gain some level of education or training, opportunities are few due to the unemployment that exists in the country, along with the exclusion due to gender and ethnic discrimination and the lack of professional qualifications.

There have been huge advances over the last 10 years in the dissemination of fundamental human rights and laws that defend women's rights, as well as in the strengthening of women's organisations, which have proposals to make for alternative socio-economic development that is appropriate to their reality.

The feminist movement has played an important role - along with NGOs, organisations, civil society, lawyers and intellectuals - in making progress with demands, seeking spaces for participation, influencing policy formulation, laws, visualising problems and seeking alternatives with which to improve the conditions of Peruvian women in general. All of this is significant progress.

Shipibo woman, Peru. Photo: Diana Vinding



Indigenous women

But in this context, we indigenous women have still not managed to gain recognition or respect with regard to gender, ethnicity or culture.

In our areas of origin, we provide sustenance to the household, the family and the community and we are responsible for passing on our culture but we still do not have the recognition or respect that we deserve as women, wives and people.

When our grandmothers tell us that we must not depend upon the will of men in order to dress better or eat better, we feel that they are passing on to us security, independence and capability that we can use in our daily lives, in our lives as couples, working together with the man, producing and reproducing. But we see that this contribution, this effort, is still neither truly recognised nor respected.

It has cost time and effort to understand that we are not just the product of man's rib, to understand what was a Mama Huaco (image of a woman soldier), that we have knowledge to share and that we do not want our fathers to continue to say who our husbands will be.

We do not want our husbands to get drunk and mistreat us. We no longer want them to decide what to do with the money that is the fruit of our labour.



Participants at the meeting "Indigenous Women on the Edge of the Millennium: an International Work Group" in Peru, 1999. Tarcila Rivera Zea is second from the right.

We do not want only the men to go to college, leaving women behind to do the household chores. We no longer want "all the children God sends us". We now know that illnesses known to be incurable in the community are not all down to witchcraft.

We do not want to make big efforts to gain an education for our children only to find there is no work, or efforts in our fields only to find the fruits of our joint labour have no market.

We do not want our daughters to end up as mere domestic servants or unemployed, nor do we want them to return to the capital ashamed of us, of our plaits.

We do not want our children to grow up in slums and to become gang members, chicha sellers or criminals because they are not accepted, because they have no opportunities or because they are disadvantaged.

We want: to be recognised as women, Quechua, Aymara and Amazonian, with knowledge, capacities and aspirations. We have learnt that the fact that we speak Spanish badly should not be a reason for jokes or contempt. We have learnt to nurture a great number of seeds with which to feed ourselves, we know which plants are good for our health, we have learnt how to make our clothes, from sowing the cotton to making them with our own hands.

We have learnt that everything we have in our history, knowledge, resources and values is good for all human beings.

As indigenous women, we have made progress by joining with other women from other countries and we have found that we can also make a joint effort to defend the rights that other women already have but which we are still denied, due to our lack of knowledge or the ignorance of others.

Since 1994 we have met with people from the Andes and people from the Amazon in order to get to know and respect each other's cultural diversity, uniting as peoples,

as women and as poor women. We have learnt that it is not a natural condition to be discriminated, mistreated or disadvantaged.

Our common dream

We have learnt that all Peruvian women, rich and poor, want to be respected, want to be given a space to make our voices heard, want to be given equal opportunity of work, of salary, in order to be able to say what we want to be and do.

We all want to be educated, to say "I know how to do this" or "I know how to read and write", to have training in order to be able to undertake any job in any part of the country. We want to be listened to when we propose something good or have an opinion. We do not want our citizenship to be reduced to an electoral vote – we want to exercise our full rights as indigenous and Peruvian women. Our common dream as women, as Peruvians of all kinds, is that solidarity, equality and justice should cut across the gender barrier. The common dream of being respected, wanted, of being electors and elected, of eating well, dressing well, having work, of being able to exert our own free will, are dreams common to all human beings, both male and female.

The dream, in our specific circumstances, is that we will no longer be the sector of the population that lives in extreme poverty, that illiteracy will disappear, that we will not be the butt of people's jokes, mockery or scorn because of our cultural specificity, that our children – both girls and boys – will have opportunities in the areas of education, health and work.

Let us join together, women and men, indigenous and non-indigenous, to build a New Millennium based on equality, justice and humanity. Let nobody be left behind or be in front.

Notes

¹ The establishment of The Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues has been adopted by ECOSOC in July 2000.

² National Institute of Statistics and Information. National Population Census 1993.

Tarcila Rivera Zea is a Quechua, and President of Chirapaq, Centre for Indian Cultures. For more than twenty years she has devoted all her time to actions for the defence, recognition and appraisal of indigenous cultures in Peru. She has contributed with proposals for the development of indigenous peoples, promoting spaces for the advancement of women and children, mainly in Peru, but also through her contributions in international fora. □

INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN THE NORTH

The Struggle for Rights
and Feminism



By Jorunn Eikjok

"Circumpolar sisters" – Indigenous women representing different indigenous peoples in the Circumpolar area. Photo: Ola Røe

A few years ago, I was sitting talking with a Sámi girlfriend over a beer in a basement pub in Tromsø, a university town in North Norway. A male Sámi journalist came over to us and matter-of-factly asked what we "*rodstrømper*" ("women's libbers"), were busy with at that time. In the early 1990s, we still wore the label "*rodstrømper*". It seems this concept survived longer in the Sámi community than in the rest of the North. Perhaps it was because we Sámi "*rodstrømper*" were fighting so many battles at the same time?

In the early 1970s, a Sámi activist movement was started – the ČSV Movement. It was similar to many liberation movements around the world at that time, and there were just as many activist young women as men. Gradually, a number of us ČSV women also became engaged in Women's Lib. While fighting for our people's rights, we were also fighting for women's rights. Compared with our Sámi brothers and our Nordic sisters, we thus had an extra battle to fight.

“All women are equally oppressed”

In the 90s, we participated in the national and Nordic planning group for a large Nordic women's conference. Our task was to define the issues of Nordic women for the next millennium. When we, who represented immigrant women and indigenous women, expressed ourselves about *our* problems and *our* issues, our fellow sisters, who represented women's organisations in the wider community, called it politics. If we thought we could “drag in immigrant questions” and “discuss Sámi politics” in this forum, we had totally misunderstood the entire women's case! They perceived this as extremely provocative. We had to stick to what was *common* to all women. Themes concerning ethnicity, race and culture were not allowed in fora where women's issues in the North in the new millennium were to be discussed. In this way, we were prevented from bringing our experiences into this common forum.

We were unpopular among our Sámi brothers for introducing the women's cause into the struggle for our people's rights. We were unpopular among our fellow sisters in the wider community for bringing in our ethnic and culture identity as women. Our brothers ridiculed us because gender was irrelevant for them; our Nordic sisters rebuked and lectured us because the minority and indigenous question was irrelevant for them.

The women's struggle and the Sámi movement

The women's struggle dealt with creating equality with men; the Sámi movement concerned creating equality between our people and the Nordic community at large. It involved fighting against the oppression of our language, culture, human worth and dignity, and creating better alternatives for our people. The women's struggle had men as an adversary because we challenged the gender roles. The struggle for our people had the Norwegian community at a whole and the State as adversaries because we challenged old stereotypes and the inferiority to which we had been relegated. In other words, we Sámi women had a large arena to challenge and change in order to create a fair and just space for us as both Sámis and women. We constantly had to make obvious and redefine accepted truths about us, both as a *people* and as a *gender*.

We fought the Sámi battle with our brothers. It concerned creating a common unit outwards in relation to our demands. Our women's demands were regarded as a disturbing noise in the common voice. Our brothers, especially those of our own generation, perceived this as threatening.

We were ridiculed and virtually accused of being traitors in relation to our joint project within the Sámi movement.

The Sámi women's movement

In our Sámi ethno-political movement, until the late 1980s we said that Sámi women were not as oppressed as our Nordic sisters, that in the Sámi community, women and men were equal. Some environments in the wider community also adopted this understanding. We even counted our “gods” and “goddesses” within traditional Sámi mythology and discovered that there was *one* more female goddess than male god. This was interpreted as a confirmation of our equality with our men! Little did we understand then that this sphere has no significance for the worth of women in everyday society. It is an erroneous idea that in indigenous society, where Mother Earth or female goddesses are worshipped, women are more respected in everyday life.

Sámis have been surrounded by the wider community for several hundred years; we have always had to define ourselves in relation to the surrounding majority community. One way of doing this was by revealing the contrasts between us and the others. Sámi woman thus became one of the strongest symbols for distinguishing between what was Sámi and what was Norwegian. In this context, the Sámi woman was defined as an “all mother” or “cultural mother” for our people.

“The strong Sámi woman” was also a created image. We know from all societies going through serious change that women have a tendency to be ascribed such a symbolic value. It has more to do with a desire of how the society wants women to be, and woman as a symbol of security, than reality for the women themselves. The rhetoric that our men and people in the wider community used against us feminist Sámi women was to refer to this symbol and our alleged equality with men. That is, our own experience of our reality was repudiated or attempts were made to explain it away with these myths. Sámi women are, of course, different from women in the majority community; this is more related to the different adaptations and conditions than to our inherent qualities as Sámi women.

In the Sámi community and in many other communities there have been found – and there still are – remains of social organisations where there was/is a complementarity between women and men. These are mainly communities that had/still have a natural economy. The women have had a separate domain of power. The problem is simply that when the community changes, this domain loses its status.

The Sámi women's movement started in 1978. When one of our seminars was advertised on Sámi Radio, those supporting it were referred to as "rebellious women". We demanded equality with our men and that our participation in the community should be valued. The Sáráhká Sámi Women's Organisation was organised throughout Sápmi – Sámi land, i.e. Sámis in Norway, Sweden and Finland. In 1991, Sámi women in Russia were also included. In 1993, we all travelled to Lujávri/Lowosero, a Sámi village in Russia, to hold our annual meeting. This was an opportunity for Sámis in Russia to make their situation visible. The Sámi women's movement has undoubtedly meant a great deal for the democratisation process among the Sámi in Russia.

Over the past 10-15 years, we Sámi women have also actively participated in the international indigenous women's movement. We also participate in networks for indigenous women in the circumpolar region.

Sámi women have always been very active in the struggle for Sámi rights. Actually, the first major Sámi congress in Norway, in 1917, was organised by a Sámi woman, Elsa Laula Rensberg. The struggle for Sámi rights culminated with the Alta conflict 20 years ago. The Norwegian authorities planned to build a large hydroelectric dam in the heart of Sámi land. We Sámi lost the river system but won the case. The result was the organisation of Sámidiggi (the Sámi Parliament) in Norway in 1989.

The Vice President of Sámidiggi has always been a woman. The question is: when will the President be a woman? Today, there are 39 representatives, of which 27 are men. There are only 12 women representatives. During the last elections, women were systematically crossed off the election lists. This means that women in our community do not have the same political trust that is ascribed to men, not because they are worse but for the simple reason that they are *women*. The images of us as strong and cultural mothers are not adequate when we are going to fight for power with our men. When it comes down to it, being a strong and dominant mother is not one of the qualities that count in the modern Sámi community. Perhaps it is also precisely this image that prevents women's participation in politics?

In addition, we know enough now about the relationship between women's and men's influence at a global level, that women can be more than qualified but that they have problems reaching where the decisions are made because men will not give them more influence.

The Sámi women's movement has been concerned with strengthening women's economic opportunities and their right to their own economic activities, as well as fighting for our language and culture. A number of positive things have transpired in relation to opportunities for Sámi women in the establishment of industries. The rea-

son is largely that Sámi arts and crafts have achieved a generally higher status. It is still difficult for women to gain support for their own economic activities. This is related to the fact that those who apportion funds would rather support large-scale operations; their attitude is that women's ideas and businesses are too small and thus not worthy of support. It is still difficult for women to obtain support for their own economic activities.

The rights of indigenous women

As women, we have fewer rights than men in the community. As Sámis, all of us, women and men alike, have fewer rights than members of the wider community. When you belong to a minority and are a woman, you systematically carry with you different opportunities for power, economic resources and knowledge compared with men and the remainder of the Norwegian population. Our opportunities and solutions as Sámi women are associated with the tolerance and general rights that the wider community is willing to give us as people. It is a matter of achieving collective rights for the self-determination of indigenous peoples to exist as well as individual rights for us as women. We do not want these collective rights to limit the Sámi women's individual rights to equality, security and development.

Our experience is that women's opportunities were not automatically strengthened with the establishment of Sámidiggi. In order to strengthen the rights of and opportunities for indigenous women in society, there must also be a separate women's politics in addition to indigenous politics in our political and administrative body. The fact that Sámi women have accomplished some things has more to do with the general improvement of opportunities for women in Norway during the last decades than because we have gained our own rights as Sámi women.

When indigenous peoples gain the right to self-determination it will, of course, also strengthen the situation of indigenous women. But this is not enough. Not until we indigenous women also have our own rights as women in our own community and in the wider community, can we say that our people have gained their full rights.

Indigenous women and feminism

To be a feminist is to be associated with white middle-class women. Feminism is perceived as very negative in the indigenous world; it has been reduced to being *anti men*, as opposed to being *pro women*. For me, being an indigenous feminist has more to do with a perspective of understanding and changing society than of feminism as an ideology. In the early years, when we in Sámi land started discuss-

ing women's rights, we were of the attitude that the wider Nordic community was to blame for Sámi women having fewer rights than men. In other words, oppression of women came from the outside. The women in our community had had a form of power. However, it related to the fact that, until the 1960s-70s, the Sámi community still had the character of a natural economy. Our community consisted

of households that were at that time the supporting economic unit in the community. The households were the women's domains, and they had a huge workload and responsibility. When the Sámi community was integrated into the modern market economy, the women lost the influence they had. This socio-economic change led to a change in women's roles. A number of us therefore asked the question whether Sámi women had really had so much power previously, if it had been so easy to lose it. Were there perhaps already enough women-oppressing mechanisms in the traditional community, and was it not just the wider community's fault?

To be an indigenous feminist is to be against the patriarchy, both in the Sámi community and in the rest of the world. The patriarchy is an exercise of male domination, a basic attitude that men are more valuable than women and thus have the right to dominate. Patriarchy prevails throughout the world, unfortunately also in the indigenous world. It involves men being raised to perceive women as being of less worth than themselves. This is why change strategies are also about changing these attitudes with our men. How can we strengthen women's opportunities and rights without taking this into account? The problem is that the patriarchy is an attitude that is so deeply anchored in the cultures that we *all* carry in our subconscious, both men and women. This system is oppressive, not only for indigenous women but also for our men and our indigenous societies.

Colonialism is an extension of the patriarchy, and forms its expression as the exploitation of women, indigenous peoples and nature. Colonialism carries with it destructive attitudes that have been introduced into our community in different ways. All of us, both indigenous women and our men, must always take into account these negative mechanisms within our communities and how they characterise us. We cannot simply place all the blame for oppression of indigenous women, our communities



Indigenous women from the Circumpolar area. Photo: Ola Røe

and nature on the wider community and outside systems. We must ourselves take a responsibility to secure human rights for our people, individuals and groups.

Therefore, in discussing self-government schemes for indigenous peoples, we must carefully evaluate *which* of our traditions are worth basing our community upon. Those of our practices and customs that steal human worth and

dignity and the opportunity to be a complete and valuable person, including oppressing groups in our community, should be tossed onto the scrap heap of history. Such traditions are no more exalted, even if we have inherited them from our foremothers and forefathers. Let us rather take care of and reshape our indigenous communities based on all the universal and humanistic customs and knowledge we have inherited.

We must be brave enough to have this discussion; it is certainly not an easy one. Those who dare to challenge accepted truths, particularly we indigenous women, are often given a negative label and can experience the sanction of our own people. It is very painful for those who experience it. It is also associated with the fact that we indigenous people are all too often forced to talk to the wider community with a common voice. That is why women's struggles for rights often become rasping in this uniform voice. This limits the right to diversity and the right to varied experiences in our public discussions.

My ambition as an indigenous activist and feminist is to work together with other indigenous peoples on all types of initiatives that involve the strengthening of human worth and dignity in our community. It will be about fighting against the patriarchy and colonialism, but most of all it will be about inspiring and strengthening each other in creating systems for self-government based on the power of our indigenous experiences and the values in our cultures that endure the light of the future.

Jorunn Eikjok is a Sámi from Norway. She has worked as a teacher and freelance journalist in the Sámi media. She lived in Greenland for two years and has a son, who is also an Inuit. Jorunn is educated as a social anthropologist and works with knowledge development and development projects in the Sámi community. She is leader of the Arctic Indigenous Women's Network, and is a member of the Board of the International Indigenous Women's Network. □

Lucy Mulenkei. Photo: Diana Vinding



AFRICAN INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By Lucy Mulenkei

As bells tolled and cheers rang out loudly, people came running to look at the sky to see a new dawn of a long awaited millennium. The African indigenous woman in her small hut in the thicket and silent night had nothing to cheer about.

Despite it being the turn of a century in which women from other parts of the world have made major strides in advancing their positions, African indigenous women continue to lag behind in development.

The main problems faced by African indigenous women are marginalization and discrimination. The African indigenous woman has not been given the chance to make any decisions on issues affecting her life. These range from health, education and decision-making to owning property and legal rights.

Believe it or not, among the Somali: "It's bad for men to travel in a car with a woman. You must add a stone so that the bad luck goes to it."

There is a lack of recognition of the different roles that she plays in society. An African indigenous woman's leadership skills are not recognized. In the Indigenous communities she cannot take up an administrative position such as that of a chief, even though it is a government appointment. A woman is regarded as one who cannot address a *baraza* (village conference), which is usually only attended by men.

Violence and lack of economic empowerment

Violence is a common occurrence and most indigenous women have come to believe that it is part of their daily life. Apart from domestic violence where her husband will beat the women in the name of disciplining her, there are also clan wars which have affected her security situation. Pressure on resources, such as diminishing grazing land and population pressure, has led to increased fighting among neighboring communities. It is the women who end up suffering the most when they are caught up in these circumstances. During the fighting and cattle raids, the



women are raped and, in many instances, widowed. Children are left orphaned.

The recent drought in most parts of Africa, especially in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia, has left indigenous women in the worst condition. Having lost their livestock due to the drought, many women such as those in northern parts of Kenya are migrating to urban centers. Here, they move around with their children because the men have taken the few animals left behind to neighboring countries in search of water and pasture. Suffering from lack of food and a consequent inability to obtain a balanced diet, the woman and her children suffer from health problems such as malnutrition. For instance, in north eastern Kenya, in a town called Wajir, over 1,500 Somali women have moved into the town center. Most of them have no less than six children each, and matters are made worse by the fact that accommodation is also a problem for them in this town. It is difficult for them to afford education for their children despite trying to do a little business, which may only enable them to put food on the table. There is a fear that soon some of these women will turn to prostitution. This has often been the alternative for women in such situations.

Indigenous women also lack economic empowerment due to lack of resources. Donors avoid funding projects in pastoral areas citing "security risks" as a hindrance. Easily accessible areas are prone to attacks by bandits and donors will not easily agree to go to these areas for fear of being attacked on the highways.

Ideally, what indigenous women need is training in how to manage their own resources. To try and get funding for an indigenous women's activity is a struggle and one has to look for donors from outside the continent, who seem to understand better. Indigenous women from all over Africa face this problem. It is hard for them to raise funds because the donors prefer to fund long existing feminist groups that have already made a name and established themselves.

One important thing to note is that African indigenous women have the strength but lack the capacity. "We have the strength and the will but we don't have the capacity," says Amina Mahadi Noor, chairperson of *Kulmiarwa Wajir*. Training on aspects such as leadership, lobbying, advocacy and project management could take a long time to be achieved. The women need to be actively involved in decision-making and be allowed to have opportunities in the social, economic and political arena.

First, African indigenous women must have a structure, which they are currently lacking. This body has to be legally recognized and be coordinated by Indigenous women themselves. With a legal entity, the organization will be able to fundraise and organize its activities effectively.

The many issues mentioned need collective coordinating in order to bring about change. Issues such as land rights cannot be easily dealt with by one individual. This is an issue that affects all indigenous women in Africa, who have no rights to land or property. Even if one is single, widowed or divorced, all the property belongs to a male member of the family.

It is, however, positive to note that despite all the general problems mentioned, a journey has begun. In August 1999, a meeting entitled the *Eastern African Indigenous Women's Conference* was held in Nairobi. After three days of deliberations, the indigenous women came up with recommendations that clearly show their requests and a need to follow-up issues of critical concern, not only to them alone but also to indigenous peoples in general. One such concern is the appeal for governments to ratify ILO Convention No. 169, among others. It is our hope that with the help of governments and the international organizations who are friends of the Indigenous peoples and the Indigenous peoples organizations and networks themselves, the recommendations can be implemented.

Recommendations from the conference

The following are recommendations from the conference:

1. Instead of waiting for dwindling external support, Indigenous women should promote themselves through basic (fundraising) systems. This should enable them to start income generating enterprises such as pot making, preparing herbal medicines, ornament and bead making etc. Viable projects, which can be easily adopted by women, should be given priority.

There is a need to promote barter trade among indigenous peoples in different areas and countries. For example, Turkana baskets can be exchanged with Maasai beads of the same value through trade-offs.

2. Lack of and poor transport has seriously affected Indigenous women. Living in the most marginalized areas, Indigenous women face constraints in their transport. They walk long distances to reach grinding mills or health centers. They also walk long distances with heavy loads of firewood and water.

The transport burden should be reduced by key access interventions such as improvement of tracks and foot paths, maintenance of road standards and development of low cost intermediate modes of transport i.e. drawn carts, bicycles etc. This should



ensure accessibility to goods and services /socio-economic amenities i.e. schools, health facilities etc.

3. ILO Convention No. 169 should be translated into local languages for the Indigenous peoples to understand fully. The ILO Project for the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples should follow-up and work closely with the Indigenous Peoples of Africa in order to ensure that the recommendations are implemented. The ILO Project for the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples together with the African Indigenous Women's Organization (AIWO) should continue working together and following-up the conference at the country level in order to allow more Indigenous women to participate.
4. All communities should be encouraged to protect and safeguard their biodiversity and traditional medicine for future use. Indigenous women, who are educators and the main users of Indigenous knowledge, should educate, sensitize and encourage communities to protect and preserve their natural resources.
5. Pressure should be put on governments to establish laws and policies on land that respect and protect the land belonging to indigenous peoples, giving them access to use natural resources freely and to protect them from external effects (e.g. exploitation by outsiders and natural disasters).
6. To promote the education of girls, there is a need to set up a girl-child watch in villages - to identify the causes, effects and solutions of various educational problems facing girls. This should target both boys and girls in monitoring education in order to minimize child discrimination. There is a need to educate girls to the highest levels possible, as they are the future mothers.
7. Since indigenous women are victims of wars and conflicts, they should be involved in peace initiative meetings.
8. There is a need for literacy classes in order to teach the women simple book keeping. In the adult education program, teachers can work hand in hand with communities. One example of this is Samburu in Baragoi in Kenya where, after shepherding, they go to school - this promotes writing and reading skills.
9. There is a need to promote health by organizing seminars and workshops on health matters such as HIV/AIDS, family planning methods and to introduce mobile health services. Indigenous people should not be used as guinea pigs; hence the government should be accountable and provide them with information so as to avoid risks.
10. Land laws should be repealed and Indigenous women should participate in managing natural resources such as the land. To avoid rampant selling of land, there is a need to encourage other income generating activities. Indigenous women should be informed of their right to give consent to selling land through the local council board. Awareness should be created so that if customary law is used positively.
11. Indigenous women should participate in the political process i.e. constitutional reform forums/advocacy to eradicate the cultural, legal and political obstacles to women attaining economic independence and equality before the law. Raise public awareness and systematically engage in gender sensitive and gender responsive advocacy in poverty, governance and technology.
12. Exchange visits between groups of different Indigenous women should be encouraged in order for them to obtain first hand information. This should involve women's groups within and outside a given country. Policy makers, politicians and various stakeholders in development are to be involved in such visits in order to gain insights into the geographical areas and to see the plight of rural indigenous women.

African indigenous women agreed that AIWO should reinforce solidarity at sub-regional and international levels and put in place a development policy for African Indigenous peoples.

It should also ensure institutional and organizational development so that the organization can be effective in influencing policies and development for the benefit of African indigenous women and men.

The women called upon AIWO to organize training for indigenous women in social and economic issues by strengthening local cross visits between indigenous organizations and later on, external, national and international visits.

AIWO must assist in instilling leadership skills in indigenous African women and encourage indigenous women's organizations to mobilize local resources and raise additional funds from other international organizations.

Indigenous women should be given a chance to be heard directly. They should be involved in formulating local/national policies and in rectifying international charters. Dialogue with indigenous women and men should be based on mutual respect so as to ensure that their opinions and aspirations are considered in the decision-making process.

There is a need for participatory mechanisms when deciding upon issues affecting indigenous women. There is a need to listen to Indigenous people and understand their situation within the society or communities in which they live. Societal structures should not alienate indigenous women and their organizations but rather be viewed as partnerships. Men need to be sensitized if anything positive is to be achieved.

Beijing + 5 meeting in New York

Indigenous women have already put themselves on the map and one good example was the participation of four African indigenous women in the Beijing +5 meeting in New York in June 2000. Among more than 4,000 women gathered in New York City from 1st–9th June 2000 for a meeting to reflect on Beijing +5 there were 100 indigenous women from different parts of the world. The International Indigenous Women's Forum met as a forum from 1st–2nd June, in preparation for the United Nations Beijing +5 meeting.

The main objective of the two day forum was to introduce the participants to the Beijing process and link it with other United Nations processes that Indigenous Peoples are engaged in. It was a challenge to ensure they



strengthened their networks and discussed issues of great concern.

It was also an occasion for the few who have been closely following the Beijing process and other UN processes to share their knowledge and experiences. The participants came from various regional and national Indigenous Networks that were born before and after the Beijing Conference. The African Indigenous Women's Organisation (AIWO) sent representatives from the Maasai of Kenya, the Batwa of Rwanda, and the Tuareg of Burkina Faso.

The Forum was organised by the International Indigenous Women's Steering Committee, which was formed in Lima, Peru, in November 1999, and co-ordinated by the Assembly of First Nations. It was sponsored by the Canadian Development Agency (CIDA), the International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWIGIA), the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (CANADA), the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, the Global Fund for Women, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada.

High on the list of concerns was globalisation and increasing poverty among indigenous women. Trade liberalisation has brought about the dumping of cheap highly subsidised imported agricultural products from rich countries. These compete with the traditional crops, which have been developed and nurtured by indigenous women.

Indigenous sustainable livelihoods and small-scale farms and businesses are eroded or destroyed. Thus the promise that liberalisation will bring forth economic growth and lessen poverty has not taken place in many Indigenous people's communities.

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MARGINAL LIFE IN THE MARGINAL LANDS OF KENYA:

The Impact of Drought on the
Laikipia Maasai Community
with a Specific Focus
on Women and Children

By Johnson ole Kaunga

This article explores the cultural identity and historical and continued alienation and dispossession of the ancestral lands of the Laikipia Maasai in Kenya. It also analyses how these sustained negative forces contribute to the serious impact of the drought on the lives of the Laikipia Maasai community, especially women and children.

The Laikipia Maasai community currently occupies the Mukogodo Division (1,100 sq. km) of Laikipia District (app. 10,000 sq. km) in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya. The total District population according to recent census figures is 331,000, of which the Maasai form a mere 10% (33,000 persons). They occupy 10% of the total district (ironically named after the community!) land despite the historical reality that this was their original ancestral land prior to the dominating and alienating treaties of dispossession that the British colonial rule manipulated in Kenya in 1904 and 1911.

In 1904, the spiritual Maasai leader, Lenana, was manipulated by the British colonial authorities into signing the infamous treaty in which the Maasai community was required to move to the southern Maasai reserve (Ngong'), and the Laikipia (northern reserve) with the aim of freeing up the most fertile land for the British settlers (these areas occupied by the white community were re-





named the “white highlands”). The treaty states that the Maasai freely and willingly agree to vacate their tribal territory in favor of the crown. In the whole of the recorded history of British imperial rule in East Africa, the Maasai was the only community to sign such a treaty with a colonial Government. The agreement read thus:

“We, the undersigned, being the Laibon and chiefs of the existing clans and sections of the Maasai tribes in the East African protectorate, having this day 9th August 1904, met Sir Donald Stewart, His Majesty’s Commissioner for East Africa, have, of our own free will, decided that it is in our best interests to remove our people and herds into definite reservations away from the railway line, and away from any land that may be thrown open to European settlement... We undertake to vacate the whole of the Rift Valley, to be used by the Government for the purpose of European settlement. Agreed that reasonable compensation will be paid for the Maasai cultivation at present existing near Nairobi, we bind ourselves and our successors, as well as our people, to observe this agreement. The settlement now shall be enduring as long as the Maasai as a race shall exist. This agreement has been read and fully explained to us and we hereby set our marks against our names.”

This was an injustice perpetrated against a community that was not in a legal position to understand, and had no legal capacity or basis to interpret, the implications and consequences of the treaties. It should be noted that none of the signatories of the treaty (representing the community) were literate. When the community wanted to challenge the agreement in court, they were defeated with the argument that the complainants were subjects of the crown.

In 1911, the Laikipia reserve was cancelled and all the Maasai were required to move to the southern reserve forming the current Kajiado and Narok Districts. This is where the Laikipia Maasai identity crisis began. As the treaties were already signed, it was mandatory for the

Laikipia Maasai to move but they, nevertheless, refused. If they were to move to the southern reserve they feared for their lives as this area was dominated by the Purko-Kisongo Maasai section. The Laikipia Maasai had suffered severely in the late 1880s due to a conflict with the Purko-Kisongo Maasai (in fact, history records that the Laikipia Maasai became extinct) and the epidemics of the early 1900s, and the few kinsmen who survived the holocaust and internal strife feared for their lives if they should move. So to avoid being moved, the Laikipia Maasai had to deny their identity.

A group of elders went to the governor in Laikipia. They denied that they were Maasai and identified themselves as ‘Ndorobo tribe’ - meaning they were hunter-gatherers - and they won the case. Following this petition, the colonial government created a special reserve by the name of Mukogodo reserve. This reserve forms the current administrative structure of Mukogodo Division. In 1972, a group of elders challenged this identity before the authorities, denying the “masquerade identity” of being hunter-gatherers and proclaiming their original identity of Maasai, and the Mukogodo Maasai title was accepted just as Kajiado or Narok Maasai. Today, the community is fighting for its original name, which is Il-Laikipiak Maasai.

The argument herein is that the network of problems being currently experienced by the community cannot be detached from this historical process of alienation and dispossession.

The current drought situation

Driving from Nanyuki to Dol Dol (65km) in Mukogodo one can observe the severe drought and suffering of the Maasai pastoralist community. This area is part of Kenya’s marginal lands (also known as ASAL- arid and semi-arid lands), which have been persistently experiencing tough and tragic droughts given that both the short and long rains have failed over at least the past two years. The communities who depend upon livestock and livestock products for their livelihood now find their very survival threatened. While no official national survey has been carried out on livestock mortality, it is estimated that 50% have died. The fragile terrain has been overgrazed, most of the boreholes have dried up or are giving decreased water output.

Various incidences of resource (pasture and water) and survival-related conflicts have become part of the daily life of pastoralists in different parts of the country due to the stress on diminishing resources, and most of the pastoralist groups are moving towards the south-Laikipia and Mount Kenya region.

The Samburu and the Pokots have moved to Laikipia, and out of desperation and left without choices or alternatives, they have, with the Laikipia Maasai, jointly invaded the commercial and predominantly white-owned ranches.

They drove their emaciated livestock onto the ranches to demand the attention of the government, policy makers, local and international media. Their voice was heard and various leaders supported the call for pastoralists to be given back their ancestral Land. The conflicts that followed the invasion created much tension and a confrontational situation leading to an appeal for understanding from the President during his public address to the Nation on Kenyatta Day.

A high-level negotiation involving senior government officials and pastoralists led to an express decision to allow pastoralists to graze their remaining stock on the slopes of Mt. Kenya. However, as Mt. Kenya is a high altitude zone, the already weak livestock became prone to disease. In barely two weeks, an estimated 10,000 cattle died from a combination of diseases, thus creating another uproar from the now organized pastoralists. They put forward another demand to the Government, that unless it sent in veterinary specialists and supplied veterinary drugs they would move onto the white-owned ranches. This was immediately agreed, with the support of the Hon. Francis Ole Kaparo - Speaker of the House, a senior and respected dignitary who is a pastoralist himself.

In the neighboring Isiolo District, a resource-related conflict between Borana/Samburu pastoralists and Somali clansmen led to the killing of at least 60 people, including senior police officers. Nobody can comprehend the trauma of drought, death and displacement experienced, especially by women and children.

Conflicts between the pastoralists and agricultural communities continue in the mountain region.

Food and water shortage

Main streams, water pans and boreholes have dried up, leading to the closure of schools, and women have to bear the brunt of walking at least 30 km to fetch water for both their families and their emaciated livestock. Parents are incapable of raising school fees, which has led to a drop-out rate of more than fifty percent of the schoolchildren, predominantly girls. The price of food has gone up while that of livestock has fallen drastically. Most shops have closed and those that remain are almost empty.

The pastoralists are now severely affected by acute malnutrition, the aged, children and women being affected the most. Emergency food supplies have to be swiftly dispatched and any delay means death. Unfortunately, it has not been documented as to how many starvation-related deaths have occurred over the entire pastoralist-occupied area. But people were most definitely dying until the relief efforts of the World Food Program and other organizations started in mid-July. Among the Laikipia Maasai, at least 10 aged people have fallen victim to the drought and miscarriages amongst

both livestock and human beings have been reported among pastoralists in Laikipia.

In Mukogodo, 95% of the population have moved to look for water and pasture. The terrain is highly degraded, most trees have withered and any remaining ones have been cut to feed the goats. Carcasses of dead livestock dominate the stock routes, with the stench pervading the environment, and emaciated cows - now too weak to move - lie by the side of the road without water or pasture.

The pastoralists have survived the threats for so long but now there is no choice available other than to succumb to the demands of nature. Now, the Government is faced with the challenge of saving human life and re-establishing the dignity and confidence of the pastoralists as a people. Simply put it remains a sad future for a proud and determined people.

The national community admits that this is the worst environmental crisis ever witnessed, rendering an estimated 70% of the population destitute, with grave consequences for women, the aged and children. According to statistics from the Laikipia research program, the drought cycle strikes approximately every 10 years (1960-61, 1973-78, 1982-84 and 1994). The usual prejudice against pastoralists - that they keep too many livestock and thus contribute to the degradation of the rangeland - is being applied by planners and policy makers to put the blame on an innocent people whose survival strategies have been totally disrupted by a combination of factors.

Factors contributing to the increased impact of the drought

Annexation of ancestral lands and land resources

At the turn of the century, colonial land annexation by the white settlers deprived the Laikipia Maasai of their strategic and quality grazing zones. Creation of commercial beef and later private game ranching in most of the Laikipia plains meant that 70% of the original grazing land was taken away from the Maasai community, which was then left to live in a smaller area without access to water points. With the steady growth of both livestock and human population, and with no alternatives or options, the problem of degradation and inadequate pastures has become serious. This has made the livestock more vulnerable, leading to impoverishment of the community, especially women and children, who depend upon this livestock for their sustained livelihood. At the moment, white-owned/multinational-owned ranches constitute 65% of the total Laikipia district whereas Laikipia Maasai pastoralists only occupy 10%.

Reduced mobility routes

The stock routes originally used by pastoralists to get to dry season pasture areas have been closed and the hold-



Women's group from DolDol, Kenya. Photo: Diana Vinding



Dead animals lie along the roads. Photo: OSILIGI

ing grounds created by the colonial government, and later adopted by the Kenyan government, to enable pastoralists to move their stocks strategically have been re-annexed to become part of the commercial ranches. A solar-powered perimeter fence erected from the border of Isiolo District and cutting across the Mukogodo Division up to the border of the Samburu and Baringo Districts straddles all the white-owned ranches. Ironically, the electric solar fence was partly financed by EU funds channelled through the Kenya Wildlife Service when Dr. Richard Leakey was a director. This has frustrated the pastoralists, as their livestock has to trek along bare vehicle roads, which have neither water nor pasture. This has greatly contributed to food insecurity, which in turn leads to acute malnutrition, destitution and death, especially among women and children.

Lack of adequate policies focusing on livestock development as an economy

Limited representation in decision-making and policy formulation circles on the part of the Laikipia Maasai almost always means they are the losers. Market incentives and outlets do not exist with which to encourage the community to undertake strategic and emergency de-stocking at decent prices. This is unlike, for instance, the coffee growers, who benefit from the Coffee Board of Kenya. The Kenya Meat Commission was closed down long ago and lies idle and stands with an imposing derelict image. The collapse of the government extension services further indicates central government's lack of concern. Pastoralism is not a priority for the Kenyan economy. But the truth is that pastoralism is the kind of economy that has and can be sustained over time in the dry lands of Kenya, not to mention its direct contribution to the mainstream Kenyan economy, even without any supporting policy structures.

Women contribute very significantly to the improved livestock economy as they provide the labour and participate in its management. Due to the lack of an enabling policy environment, or incentives and opportunities for livestock development, productivity has dwindled with time, resulting in lower prices at the market, less milk and diminished ability for women to provide food security, let alone a balanced diet to their children. Households cannot raise enough money to get their children to school. As in most pastoralist communities, boys are

first and foremost given the education opportunities. Girls get married at an early age, and this is one of the reasons why they continue to be disadvantaged and discriminated against, for they do not get the chance to realize their opportunities within the community.

Over extraction of water from the main rivers by large scale multinational horticultural irrigation corporations

The Ewaso River and its tributaries are an important source of water for the pastoralists in various Districts of Kenya - Isiolo, Laikipia, Samburu and Garissa. The river originates from the Aberdares in the Nyeri District, which is a highly agricultural area. Its tributaries emerge from Mt. Kenya, which is also dominated by the commercial for profit irrigation schemes of various international horticulture companies such as Homegrown. Over extraction of huge volumes of water from the river on the part of irrigation companies has rendered "the river of God" dry - a situation never experienced by the pastoralists since time immemorial.

This has further created social stress among the community as they have to move upstream for water without necessarily accessing pasture. Women walk for longer distances to access domestic water for cooking and other daily chores and this also raises the risk of water-related diseases, which seriously impact on children and women. Women and children, mostly girls, are subjected to walking long distances to fetch water. The Ministry of Water and Natural Resources, which has a mandate to regulate the issuing of water licenses, has not played its role as expected, leaving powerless communities at the mercy of multinational companies who are driven by a blind and inhuman thirst for profit at the expense of indigenous people's survival. This further alludes to the reality that the right to self-determination among the Laikipia Maasai - as among most pastoralists - is far from being experienced, let alone granted.

Political patronage and corruption

Sound planning and management values have been totally ignored by our political leaders, leading to a situation of indiscriminate pauperization, misappropriation and misallocation of resources at the expense of communities not strongly represented at the policy level. It is also a fact that, in Kenya, tribal identity does influence the manner in which the authorities respond to critical problems such as the ravaging droughts. A community like the Laikipia Maasai, that has been and continues to be dominated by other tribes at the district level, is ever a victim and a villain in the game of modern development. Out of sheer ignorance, the government has not considered the use of early warning systems to respond to emergencies. As long as a white minority hidden behind powerful political clout occupies 2/3 of the total district (Laikipia) land at the expense of the poor, more conflicts will be anticipated

and this brings me to my next point. The Kenya Meat Commission remains a non-starter and it is a shame that billions of Kenyan shillings have been lost in dead livestock while we, as a Nation, continue to proudly borrow loans from the World Bank and IMF. The regime has not implemented any legitimate project to support and help sustain the pastoralists' economy in its 22 years of rule. It is not recognized as a worthy identity at all.

Insecurity and the continued emergence of conflicts in the Laikipia District

Banditry and cattle rustling are part of daily life on the periphery of the Mukogodo division, particularly on the border of Isiolo, i.e. Tura, Ng'abolo and Leparua, which have seen loss of life as a result of the competition for pasture and water. Children and women have, on several occasions, been the victims of abduction and rape and they are, in fact, easy targets for cattle rustling. For sure the Government's role in maintaining a peaceful coexistence among the pastoralist communities has been doubtful. There have been increased conflicts between Laikipia Maasai pastoralists and various other interest groups like the agricultural communities, white commercial ranches and wildlife conservationists.

Poverty and destitution

It is a great tragedy that drought is ravaging a community which is already identified as impoverished and where half of the population live below the poverty line, as documented in the Kenya Poverty Eradication Plan (1999 to 2015). Most households have lost all their livestock, and out of frustration the men have left for the urban centers to look for jobs (leaving their wives and children unattended). The illiteracy rate is 98%, and as a result most of them only manage to get jobs as watchmen and cannot even earn enough to maintain themselves let alone to share with their families back home. One man committed suicide when, after tracking his 70 emaciated cows throughout the whole of the year, the last one died on the slopes of Mt. Kenya - the last destination of hope. A resource sustained under hard conditions and sacrifice was wiped out just like that and he could no longer stand this unkind scenario.

Increased incidences of single mothers, and problems such as prostitution and diseases (HIV/AIDS) are anticipated as a result of a desperate attempt for survival. More than ever before, the girl child faces a threat as school records already indicate increased dropout rates, especially for girls - most of them may never come back to school again.



Laikipia Maasai children. Photo: Diana Vinding

Thousands of emaciated cows are dying. Photo: OSILIGI



The way forward

We need to avoid the tragedy of losing more human lives - it is painful, immeasurable and unrecoverable. The Government has made an international appeal for emergency food aid and has appointed an 11-member crisis committee to deal with famine. Whether the team has the emergency response skills and credibility to win the support of donors is another matter. If the Government is serious about the destiny of pastoralists it should allocate funds to undertake strategic de-stocking and operationalize the Kenya Meat Commission (KMC) in order to save the pastoralists from further agony and death of livestock. The KMC should be able to can/tin the meat and tan the leather. The canned meat can be given as part of the food aid to the pastoralists instead of grain alone. The livestock marketing policy needs to be improved in order to create incentives with which to motivate pastoralists to sell cattle and the KMC can certainly take on this responsibility, just as it did in the past.

Pastoralists are not simply die-hards, nor are they irrational - as alleged by certain prejudiced environmentalists. They are human beings who, above all, have dignity and respond to pressures and opportunities - just as any other community.

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THE FIJI COUP OF MAY 2000 AND THE INDIGENOUS QUESTION

By Steven Ratuva





Fiji chiefs in traditional attire. Photo: Diana Vinding



The attempted civilian coup of May 19, 2000, was the culmination of months of ethno-nationalist protests against what was perceived to be an Indo-Fijian-led government of Mahendra Chaudhry. Over thirty members of the one-year-old coalition government were held hostage for more than two months by rebel leader George Speight, a failed businessman, and his nationalist supporters, together with the army's elite Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRW).

The hostage-taking followed a huge nationalist protest march in the city of Suva, Fiji's capital. The march degenerated into riots and looting. Indian shops were attacked by indigenous Fijian youths in a well-orchestrated orgy of destruction, as part of the general agenda of destabilization on the part of the nationalists. In the two months following the takeover, Fiji was virtually without any recognizable State. Parliament had been violently overthrown on May 19, the President could no longer exert his authority, his life having been threatened by the armed rebels, and the police - who were unarmed - could not contain Speight's armed thugs, who were terrorizing civilians around Suva. But the last bastion of State authority, the military, had to intervene in a dramatic way to maintain law and order and sustain State authority.

The military asked the President to step aside and proceeded to impose martial law. The sequence of events that followed was almost reminiscent of the 1987 military coup, when the largely indigenous Fijian military abrogated the Constitution and declared itself the ultimate authority in the land. The only difference was that the military intervention in 1987 was on behalf of the indigenous Fijian nationalist interest but in May 2000 it was on behalf of the national interest, against a group claiming to represent indigenous interest. Politics in Fiji since then have been very complex, particularly in relation to the way in which ethnic politics has come to be subsumed within an intra-indigenous Fijian power struggle between various fractions of competing chiefdoms.

In the end, as this article is being written, after weeks of fruitless negotiations between the military and the rebels, intense psychological warfare and seemingly endless stand-off, the military resorted to force in order to take control of the situation. The rebels were arrested, lawlessness was brought under control and the process of political 'normalization' was set on track. Ironically, the swearing in of the new government was the final legitimizing act for the 19 May attempted coup. The behind-the-scene supporters of the coup now dominate the cabinet line up, whilst Speight and his group of 'front men' are imprisoned on a paradise island off Suva, awaiting their trial for treason and recovering from the scars of the army's physical vengeance on them.

To fully understand the coup in Fiji, we need to examine some of its multi-dimensional aspects, some of which are 'hidden' while others are overt. The remainder of this article briefly examines some of these aspects.



1997 Constitution and indigenous rights

The 1997 Fiji Constitution was hailed by many experts as being one of the most democratic and progressive in the world. This was because its promulgation was the result of world-wide and nation-wide consultations and the inclusion of important aspects such as the bill of rights and an encompassing compact. Importantly, it entrenched indigenous Fijian rights in relation to land and customs, while providing for equal rights for all other ethnic groups such as Indo-Fijians, Chinese, Europeans, part-Europeans, other Asians and Pacific Islanders. The constitution was an attempt to concretize the notion of 'the politics of compromise' or, in political science jargon, consociationalism. The Constitution provided for a multi-party coalition and, in the context of Fiji's ethnic-based political parties, this meant that, under the 1997 Constitution, any government had to be multi-ethnic in nature. The first government under this constitution was thus a coalition of four political parties: the multi-ethnic but still largely Indo-Fijian Labour Party, the indigenous Fijian-based Fijian Association Party (FAP), Western indigenous Fijian-based Party of National Unity (PANU) and the European/part-European/Chinese/other ethnic groups-dominated General Voters Party (GVP).

However, there was, in the context of Fiji's ethnically volatile politics, a difficulty. The government coalition was dominated by Labour, which won all the Indian seats - both Communal (intra-ethnic voting) and National (inter-ethnic voting) seats. Labour totally eclipsed its rival, the Indian-based National Federation Party (NFP), which had formed a coalition with the indigenous Fijian-based *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT), led by Major General Rabuka, leader of the 1987 military coups. Labour's dominance of the coalition provided its leader, Chaudhry, with the 'legitimacy' to approach the President, Mara, for appointment as Prime Minister, without consultation with the other coalition

partners. This angered his opponents both within and outside of the coalition, who would have preferred an indigenous Fijian Prime Minister. The seeds of conspiracy to overthrow Chaudhry were sown and the plot thickened as time progressed.

Because it was the result of political compromise, the 1997 Constitution was only workable in the context of moderate, middle of the road politics. The 1997 Constitution came into being as a result of the review of the unpopular post-1987 coup 1990 Constitution, which provided indigenous Fijians with ultimate political superiority over other ethnic groups. The review was only possible as a result of the historic partnership and reconciliatory relations between the then PM, Rabuka and Reddy, the Indo-Fijian Leader of the Opposition. Chaudhry rejected this partnership and accused Reddy of being too close to Rabuka and for being a 'sell out'. Chaudhry also condemned Reddy's address to the Great Council of Chiefs, accusing him of trying to score points with the Fijian leadership. In his address to the chiefs, where some chiefs wept openly, Reddy pleaded for reconciliation, saying that indigenous Fijian chiefs were not only chiefs for the Fijians but also for the Indo-Fijians. Chaudhry's reputation as being incapable of inter-ethnic reconciliation became a source of irritation for moderate indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians who saw the Rabuka-Reddy middle of the road partnership as the way forward for Fiji.

The Reddy-Rabuka partnership reflected the middle ground ideological position of the constitution itself. However, Chaudhry's election victory and ascent to prime ministership, based on an uncompromising ethnicist political platform, shifted the center of political gravity away from the center. This 'shift' immediately created the conditions for the re-surfacing of ethno-nationalist forces, which saw Chaudhry's ascent to power as a direct threat to their aspiration to keep political leadership in Fiji in Fijian hands.



A Fijian family. Photo: Diana Vinding

Young warriors during a traditional welcome ceremony, Suva, Fiji. Photo: Diana Vinding



Ethno-nationalism and the indigenous Fijian question

While the 1997 Constitution was hailed as a near perfect legal document, it, however, failed to fully address the indigenous Fijian ethno-nationalist question, especially when the grievances which inspired the 1987 coups had not being fully resolved. For instance, the pro-indigenous affirmative action policies prescribed under the 1990 Constitution were watered down; one example was that the designated beneficiary groups were extended from 'Fijians and Rotumans' to include other 'disadvantaged' groups. The political tensions that characterized the post-1987 coup, especially with regard to indigenous Fijian ethno-nationalist demands, were ignored and, instead, a makeshift political compromise was reached by the Reddy- Rabuka deal. This compromise largely marginalized Rabuka's original followers and contributed to the hardening of their nationalist resolve. These nationalist tensions came to the fore following Chaudhry's victory and ascent to national leadership.

Indigenous Fijian ethno-nationalism needs to be understood in relation to three dynamic and interrelated components. Firstly, it has a socio-cultural basis. In this respect, the traditional socio-cultural and chieftain system (or *vanua*), reinvented and crystallized during the colonial era, has been used to provide the social symbolism, primordial appeal and cultural sentiments that formed the ideological basis for nationalist mobilization. Secondly, this form of socio-cultural mobilization has been deliberately deployed as a tool for ethnic differentiation and ethnic hegemony. Thirdly, it has also been mobilized to serve the political interests of certain individuals or groups, be they chiefs or nationalist political demagogues. Thus, Fijian ethno-nationalism could manifest itself either in relation to the quest for indigenous Fijian supremacy or an intra-Fijian power struggle. Both of these levels of tension are linked in a dynamic way. What may start off as demand for ethnic rights can evolve into intra-communal struggle over claims to power and vice versa. Political tension oscillates in a dynamic way between the two levels.

The May 2000 coup manifested some of these complexities. The consolidation of the 1997 Constitution was meant to create a new national spirit, a unifying multi-ethnic 'nationalist' discourse for the country but this was subverted by sectarian indigenous ethno-nationalism. George Speight and his group of rebels made use of the indigenous Fijian socio-cultural symbolism, primordial appeal and cultural sentiments associated with the *vanua* to legitimize their quest for power. This quest for power had an underlying commercial agenda and we shall look at this next.

Commercial interests

Some of the most important players in the coup were members of the emerging Fijian bureaucratic middle class, which was consolidated after the 1987 military coup and the subsequent affirmative action policies. The primary beneficiaries of affirmative action and the privatization drive by the Rabuka regime were indigenous Fijian middle class individuals who had links with the State bureaucracy and financial institutions, such as the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) and National Bank of Fiji (NBF). Shares and control of the privatized State corporations were in the hands of the emerging indigenous Fijian bourgeoisie. To this group, nationalism was the ideological and political means by which they could legitimize and protect their economic privileges. To them, Indo-Fijians were both economic competitors and political adversaries who needed to be contained. In this way, neo-liberalism and globalization became the allies of ethno-nationalism.

Chaudhry's attempt to roll back indigenous affirmative action and privatization was seen as a deliberate attempt to subvert the economic aspirations of indigenous Fijians. The educated Fijian middle class cried foul and quickly aligned themselves to the extremist nationalists, calling for the overthrow of Chaudhry's government. Chaudhry's lack of political tact, refusal to consult his own party colleagues and trade union-type confrontational arrogance simply aggravated the situation. Clearly, Chaudhry's personality and professional disposition were not cut out for prime ministership in a situation of ethnic complexity and volatility, a situation which needs delicate political balancing, as in Fiji.

Some Fijian middle class victims of Chaudhry's policies began to openly campaign for non-extension of land leases for Indo-Fijian farmers after they expired. Part of the plan was to 'privatize' Fijian land (including the Native Land Trust Board) and convert it into large-scale mechanized sugar plantations. The advocates of these schemes were believers in the neo-liberal policies of deregulation and structural adjustment. They were some of the direct beneficiaries of Rabuka's privatization and deregulation policies.

Some key supporters of Speight had huge debts owed to banks as a result of business failure. To them, control of the government was necessary in order to escape prosecution or to use State resources to settle their debts.

Speight himself had a business interest in forestry, amongst other business ventures, and had close business associations with some leading Fijian politicians and businessmen who were opposed to Chaudhry's government. Speight was being investigated by the Chaudhry government for receiving money from an American company, Timber Resource Management, while Chairman of the government-run, Fiji Hardwood Company. The company had made a bid to process the

US\$1 billion worth of mahogany in Fiji but the bid went to a different company. Speight's supporters later burnt down the Fiji Hardwood headquarters in order to destroy possible evidence relating to Speight's alleged shady business deals.

The indigenous Fijian commercial elites saw Chaudhry's government as a barrier to its enrichment and was happy to see its speedy demise by whatever means. After the attempted coup, this group provided political, technical and intellectual advice to Speight, and this included the blue print for a new government, called the 'Deed of Sovereignty'. The political ambition of this group was short-lived after the military arrested Speight and his followers and a new interim government was set up.

The military

The role of the military in the May 2000 attempted coup is of great significance because it was different from the military intervention in May 1987. The intervention in 1987 showed the army's 'political' character. It staged two coups on behalf of the 'indigenous Fijian interest'. In May 2000, it intervened on behalf of the 'national interest' by ensuring the security of the State against a civilian group that claimed to represent the indigenous 'cause'.

The military (which consists of about 99% indigenous Fijians) took over power after the President could no longer enforce his executive authority, under threat by Speight's terror techniques. The imposition of martial law enabled the military to take total control of the security situation in Fiji.

However, the military was faced with a number of dilemmas. Firstly, there was a potential split in the army itself due to divergent political and traditional loyalties. A number of senior officers had already joined Speight's camp, apart from the members of the elite Counter-Revolutionary Warfare unit (CRW) who were directly involved in the attack on Parliament and hostage-taking. Other army officers loyal to Speight were involved in a mutiny in the Labasa army camp on the northern island of Vanualevu. The army later stormed and retook the camp. Other army officers were involved in isolated terrorist activities, including the takeover of Korovou and Levuka towns. However, the military central command remained a united entity and eventually took control of the situation. The second and related dilemma was the question of whether the largely indigenous Fijian military was in a position to confront, even shoot and kill, indigenous Fijians. During the anti-government nationalist demonstrations prior to the 1987 military coup, the army expressed its fear of having to confront and fire at indigenous Fijian demonstrators, and was thus compelled to support the political agenda of the demonstrations themselves. This time, the military maintained its political commitment and crushed the rebellion after three months of failed

negotiations. The allegations relating to the army being 'ethnically biased' were put to rest, at least for the time being.

Effects of the coup and potential for reconstruction

The overthrow of the elected government and the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution marked the end of an era of democratization, which had started in the mid-1990s. The coup shattered the fragile shell of democracy once more. The Fijian State has been weakened considerably and a culture of political violence has more or less become a feature of the political system. From now on, the process of reconstruction will be even more difficult. The State needs to be reconfigured and human rights abuses need to be addressed.

After the 1987 coup, Fiji recovered quite dramatically, both economically and politically, within a few years. This time, the damage is quite deep, the pain more unbearable to many and the process of reconstruction more difficult. Within two months of the coup, the economy had contracted by approximately 25% and the decline was 2-3 times worse than in 1987. The tourism industry had a free fall, hotel occupancy rates dropped to less than 10% (from an average of 70-90%) within days and many hotel workers (most of whom are indigenous Fijians) lost their jobs. The economic decline was aggravated by the threat of a trade boycott on the part of Australia, New Zealand and the European Union and exclusion from the Commonwealth.

Fiji's political future rests on its ability to reach a fine balance between ethnic equity and political stability. The latter may mean making more concessions to Fijian demands, but this should not be done at the cost of undermining the interests of other ethnic groups. While it is important to address the outstanding grievances of indigenous Fijians, it is also important to guard against attempts by individuals and groups with a commercial and political agenda who use the notion of 'indigenous Fijian cause' as an ideology with which to mobilize political support to serve their own parochial interests.

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WHAT'S IN THE PIPELINE FOR THE BAGYÉLI OF CAMEROON?



By The Forest Peoples Programme

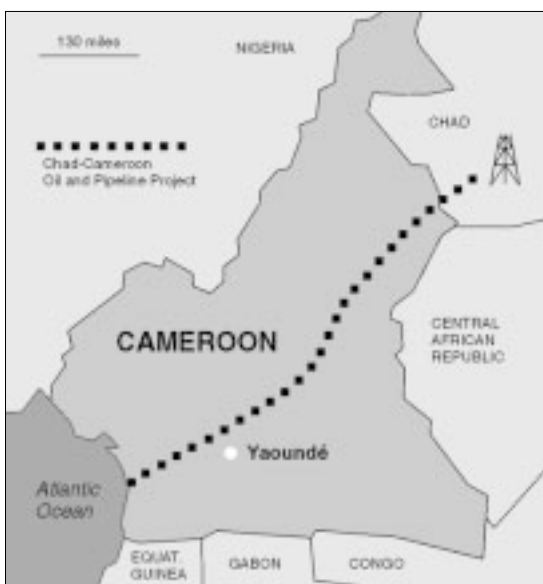


*Bagyéli woman with son and granddaughter.
Photo: Karen Biesbrouck*

Bagyéli indigenous communities in south-west Cameroon will soon be faced with the environmental and social consequences of an oil pipeline passing through their territories. The controversial Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline project was approved by the World Bank on June 6th 2000. It has a total cost of US\$3.5 billion, of which US\$1.6 billion is for the exploitation of the Doba oil fields in Chad and a further US\$1.9 billion is for the construction of a 665 mile pipeline to transport oil from Chad through Cameroon to port facilities at Kribi on the Cameroon coast. The project will be implemented through a consortium comprising US-based companies Exxon (40%) and Chevron (25%) with Petronas of Malaysia (35%) and the two governments. ELF and Shell, which were members of the consortium, withdrew in November 1999. The World Bank is supporting the project with loans of US\$240 million. World Bank support was considered essential by the oil consortium to secure the project against political risk.



Three generations of Bagyéli. Photo: Karen Biesbrouck



Source: *The Chad - Cameroon Oil and Pipeline Project: Putting People and The Environment at Risk*. ASTPDDHC, CED and EDF, 1999

Many aspects of the project have been the subject of controversy. NGOs allege infringements of at least five of the World Bank's policies¹, including the Indigenous Peoples policy. A persistent lack of consultation and participation has been noted throughout the project's preparation². Among the broader concerns about the project raised by NGOs are the following: ongoing repression and intimidation of Chadian NGOs and local communities affected by the project; the likelihood that benefits will be siphoned off by corruption; inadequate compensation and resettlement plans; excessive power given to the pipeline consortium; inadequate environmental impact mitigation measures.

The pipeline will cross the forests of south-west Cameroon, transecting the traditional territory of the 4000 or so *Bagyéli* (Bakola) – a so-called "Pygmy" people who mainly live by hunting and gathering, some farming, and by working as occasional labourers in Bantu villages.

An 'Indigenous Peoples Plan' prepared in 1999 to comply with the World Bank's policy on projects impacting on indigenous peoples (Operational Directive 4.20) was deficient and only proposed ways of mitigating likely health and educational problems. It did not address fundamental issues required by OD 4.20, such as the legal recognition of indigenous rights including rights to land, Cameroonian government policy on indigenous peoples and institution building, or the establishment of mechanisms for indigenous participation in the full project cycle. The plan underestimated the likely impact of the project on Bagyéli livelihoods through disturbance of forests and associated fauna. It also failed to identify the most obvious threats to the local population from the influx of pipeline workers, notably increased drinking, violence, prostitution and AIDS [all these consequences have been recorded for other pipelines]. Over half the document is devoted to suggestions for the proposed Endowment Fund to be set up within the project in order to carry out development projects with affected Bantu and Bagyéli groups over a period of 30 years. The governance structures and types of health and education projects that could be envisaged are elaborated but do not make adequate provisions for Bagyéli participation, training or capacity building. The probability is that benefits will accrue unequally to dominant groups³. The proposed endowment of \$600,000 appears woefully inadequate compared to the \$500 million that Cameroon is expected to derive from the pipeline (3 percent of the national budget).

In April 2000 the Bagyéli organisation *Comité de Développement des Bagyéli des Arrondissements de Bipindi et Kribi* (CODEBABIK) and the Cameroonian environment and development NGO *Planet Survey* carried out a survey of 11 Bagyéli villages within 10 km of the course of the pipeline. The aim of the survey was to evaluate the effectiveness of the



Bagyéli man prepares net-hunting. Photo: Karen Biesbrouck

consultations held by the pipeline project with local communities. The survey found that 55% of those interviewed had no knowledge of the project while only 20% had superficial knowledge⁴. Only 8% had a good understanding of the risks and advantages of the project. These people, predominantly Bantu, saw the advantages in terms of compensation and work opportunities. The study concludes that consultations during project planning and preparation with local communities, especially the Bagyéli, were inadequate.

The study further reveals that the Bagyéli are indeed a highly marginalised and vulnerable group. They are not recognised as Cameroonian citizens, have no identity papers, never participate in local elections, have no land rights under either national law or Bantu customary law and have no recognised property rights. They are thus marginalised in all local decision-making. They have not been well informed about the implications of the project for their future. Little or no information has been provided by the government. No proper baseline studies have been carried out and only one meeting with some of the village chiefs has been held. Meanwhile surveying teams have been active in the area without providing information to the communities. No mechanism has been established for the effective participation of the Bagyéli in decision-making and there are no government agencies actively protecting their interests or promoting their welfare.

Not surprisingly, the Bagyéli feel alienated from the pipeline project, which they believe will bring them many problems but few benefits. They foresee a loss of access to their forests, game, herbs and medicines and other non-timber forest products as well as immediate damage to

huts and small cultivated areas. Compensation, which has been paid to Bantu villagers for loss of crops, land and buildings, has not been paid to the Bagyéli. Disputes about compensation have led to a number of court cases, most of which are still pending. Even where compensation has been allocated to Bagyéli, it has been siphoned off by the dominant Bantu groups.

The CODEBABIK/PlanetSurvey study recommended baseline studies, clarification of Bagyéli rights, particularly regarding land, the creation of effective mechanisms for Bagyéli participation in decision-making and the provision of alternative means of livelihood or paid employment for those who will be dispossessed by the project. In a follow-up letter to the World Bank in May 2000, CODEBABIK's programme coordinator, Jacques Ngun, asked the World Bank to ensure that before commencement of the project:

"a) full participative consultations with the Bagyéli communities are carried out again, by a team independent of the local elite, in a culturally appropriate manner so that the Bagyéli are fully informed of the negative and positive impacts of the pipeline; b) the Cameroonian government is educated about the general situation of Pygmies in Cameroon; c) the Cameroon government formally regularises the land tenure situation of Pygmies and allocates land to them; d) measures are put in place to combat the inequalities which exist between the Bantu and the Pygmies, facilitate access to schooling, health services and help Pygmies to obtain official documentation such as birth certificates and identity cards."

CODEBABIK concluded

"All of these actions are necessary to enable the Pygmy communities to take control of their own destiny. The Cameroonian government should support the existing initiatives of Pygmy organisations for their development and self determination."

The Bank's basic approach appears to have shifted from the blueprint for projects as envisaged under OD 4.20, which would deal with fundamental political issues relating to indigenous rights, to one of gradual capacity building to increase the ability of indigenous peoples to advance their own agenda over the long-term. In the case of the Bagyéli, indigenous organisations and support groups argue that this institutional strengthening approach is welcome but is not sufficient on its own to protect this vulnerable group from the soon-to-be felt impacts of the construction phase. What are needed are adequate institutional and legal frameworks to safeguard the land and resource rights of the Bagyéli and overcome discrimination.

Crucially, the Bagyéli themselves must decide what "benefits", compensation and mitigation measures are

appropriate to safeguard their rights under the Indigenous Peoples Plan. As CODEBABIK's letter indicates, the first essential step is to develop and implement a *culturally appropriate* strategy to make the Bagyéli aware of the potential risks of the pipeline. Such a strategy must take account of the decentralised, collective and consensual decision-making processes in Bagyéli culture. It must therefore be implemented within an adequate timeframe to facilitate effective informed participation as required by OD4.20.

Human rights activists, indigenous people's organisations, religious leaders in Chad, Cameroon, Europe and the USA campaigned hard to try and persuade the World Bank to reject this controversial project until adequate protection for human rights and the environment could be guaranteed. Intense lobbying of Executive Directors and Bank management was successful in delaying the project for several years. Although the international campaign failed to block the project, it forced the World Bank Board to recognise publicly the high risks associated with the pipeline and the need for special procedures to monitor compliance with safeguard policies. To address the concerns, the Board accepted civil society proposals for an Independent Advisory Group (IAG) to report regularly to the Board on the progress of implementing this project. There are also indications that a revised and fully costed Indigenous People's Plan will be elaborated.

In the meantime, the Bagyéli, NGOs and citizens' groups are awaiting further details on the next stages of project implementation and are pressing for updated information so that revised plans can be examined. Above all, campaign groups are requesting that the IAG be established in an open and collaborative way with civil society and are asking the World Bank to ensure that the IAG is set up as an effective *independent*, accountable and transparent tool to monitor the investment and detect violations of the Bank's operational directives.

Despite the World Bank's stated commitment to ensuring that the project will be adequately monitored, and the fact that the concerns of the Bagyéli people have reached the highest levels in the Bank, it remains to be seen what's in the pipeline for the Bagyéli. Until the new documentation becomes available, there are important questions that remain unanswered: will the project provide a means of addressing the fundamental problems of discrimination and powerlessness facing the Bagyéli? Will the investment bring them sustainable livelihoods, rights and equality? The crucial outstanding question is how will the project managers and the consortium eliminate the risks of increased impoverishment and marginalisation of the Bagyéli people?

The huge effort by the Bagyéli and their supporters to highlight the concerns of indigenous peoples affected by the pipeline means that the project is under an intense spotlight of international public attention. Members of the Bank's Board have confirmed that they view the project as a case that



Bagyéli harvesting honey. Photo: Karen Biesbrouck

will test the World Bank Group's ability to deliver poverty reduction and safeguard the rights of indigenous peoples. Indigenous rights campaigners are therefore resolved to work with the Bagyéli to continue pressing the Bank to adhere to its Indigenous Peoples policy in accordance with existing and emerging international standards. Past experience of lobbying the World Bank shows that this will require vigilant and continuous support from all sectors of civil society both North and South.

Those interested in tracking the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project should contact the Forest Peoples Programme at 1c Fosseyway Business Centre, Stratford Road, Moreton-in-Marsh, GL56 9NQ, UK Fax: 44 1608 652878, Email: info@fppwrm.gn.apc.org

Notes

- ¹ ASTPDDHC, CED and EDF (1999) *The Chad Cameroon Oil and Pipeline Project: putting people and the environment at risk*. Association Tchadienne pour la Promotion et la Defense des Droits de l'Homme, Chad, Centre pour l'Environnement et le Developpement, Cameroon and Environment Defense Fund, Washington DC.
- ² Biesbrouck, Karen and Guy Patrice Dkamela (1998) *The Oil Pipeline Project in Cameroon: with or without local populations?* Friends of the Earth Netherlands (Milieudefensie), Amsterdam.
- ³ WRM (1999) *Letter to Jean Louis Sarbib: World Bank Vice President for Africa*. 1 April 1999; Downing, Theodore E (1999) *Comments on Chad-Cameroon Pipeline Project's Impact on Bakola Pygmy Indigenous People's Plan*, May 1999. www.azstarnet.com/~downing/bakola.html
- ⁴ CODEBABIK, PSEDD and Planet Survey (2000) *Rapport de L'Enquete sur le Degre d'Implication des Peuples Autochtones dans le Cycle du Projet Pipeline Tchad-Cameroon*. Unpublished draft report.

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