



POST 2015 DEVELOPMENT PROCESS: ENERGY

Indigenous peoples face severe human rights violations and exploitation of their natural resources due to energy production. The post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a unique opportunity to address unsustainable energy development on indigenous peoples' lands and territories. Prepared by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in collaboration with Tebtebba, this note is intended as a discussion paper for stakeholders in the post-2015 development process. It focuses on indigenous people and energy-related issues and includes recommendations for the post-2015 development process and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Exploitation of natural resources and access to energy

Indigenous peoples' territories are resource-rich and often serve as the basis from which governments and corporations extract wealth but are, at the same time, the areas in which the most severe forms of poverty are to be found. Indigenous peoples suffer disproportionately from the adverse impacts of energy production and natural resource use e.g. coal mining, uranium mining and oil/gas yet are among those who benefit the least from these energy resources. Additionally, indigenous peoples have unequal control over, and access to, sustainable

energy and energy services such as nuclear power and hydro-power energy development.¹

Renewable energy- a viable alternative?

Fortunately, there is a strong feeling that this over-exploitation of the world's natural resources must be reined in and new alternative solutions are therefore emerging. Renewable energy



Oil spill on indigenous territory, Ecuadorian Amazon. IWGIA photoarchive



Olkaria Geothermal Project on Maasai land, Nakuru County, Kenya. Photo: Genevieve Rose/IWGIA

represents an important breakthrough; however, it is crucial to remember that these alternatives, if poorly planned and located, can have serious environmental and social impacts — particularly on local and indigenous communities.

Research shows that problems emerge when local and indigenous peoples are not involved or consulted in the development and implementation of alternative energy solutions.²

Hydro-electric power plants are one example of how renewable energy production can severely affect indigenous territories.³ A decade ago, the World Bank-sponsored World Commission on Dams concluded with a severely critical report on the record and potential of such projects to deliver their promised benefits. The report noted that dams have made a significant contribution to human development and considerable benefits have been derived from them. However, it also stated that, in too many cases, an unacceptable and often unnecessary price had been paid to secure those benefits, especially in social and environmental terms, by the people displaced, by communities downstream, by taxpayers and by the natural environment. The construction of large dams has already displaced at least 40 million people worldwide, many of whom are indigenous. The World Bank and others seem to have ignored the Commission's conclusions, turning a blind eye to the negative consequences these projects have on the rights of the indigenous communities affected.⁴

Indigenous peoples' distinct livelihoods depend on access to land and natural resources and sustainable development. Energy use is therefore an issue of crucial concern to indigenous peoples the world over. Indigenous peoples welcome a shift to alternative or renewable sources of energy, while at the same time being concerned that "green" development and growth, as they have experienced through other economic developments on their land, could pose a potential risk to their physical, social and cultural well-being and environmental knowledge. It is therefore of utmost importance to ensure indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources, as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).⁵ Any development likely to affect their lives and future must involve a consultation process based on indigenous peoples' right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent as specified in the UNDRIP, adopted in 2007.

Indigenous alternatives

Indigenous peoples acknowledge that energy is an enabling factor in terms of accessing clean water, food security, health, education, poverty reduction and sustainable development. They also believe that they can contribute to this with knowledge of alternative methods of sustainable energy development.

Although indigenous communities bear the least responsibility for human-induced climate change, they are very active in spearheading renewable energy initiatives in both the developing and developed world as a means of achieving energy self-sufficiency on their lands and territories.⁶ In the Arctic, a number of Sami have moved from using petroleum to using solar light technology in their nomadic reindeer camps. In Indonesia, the Dayak Pasar indigenous peoples have developed a project to install clean energy electricity from micro-hydro projects in an effort to ensure sustainable and community-based development and conservation. And, in Mexico, local communities have developed high-efficiency wood-burning stoves to reduce their reliance on forest products.

If established appropriately, renewable energy projects can enhance and maintain traditional livelihoods and also foster local employment. In North America, for example, the increased demand for renewable energy — in the form of wind, hydro and solar power — is making indigenous lands and territories an important resource for such energy. If Indigenous Peoples' rights to land and FPIC is ensured, then replacing fossil fuel-derived energy both reduces greenhouse gas emissions and creates economic opportunities for indigenous peoples.⁷

The Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya, notes in his recent report⁸ that the model by which indigenous peoples themselves initiate and control resource extraction in their own territories, in accordance with their own development priorities, has been gaining ground in a number of countries where indigenous peoples have developed the

relevant business and technical capacity. The IPCC report from 2014 recognizes indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge as an essential contribution to climate change adaptation.⁹ For example, some indigenous communities in Australia are using their traditional knowledge of fire management to reduce carbon emissions.¹⁰ In Western Arnhem Land in northern Australia, for example, Traditional Owners are engaging in the carbon offset market through traditional savannah fire-burning practices, resulting in significant economic and other benefits for the communities involved. Research focused on other parts of Australia has examined the feasibility of Traditional Owners engaging in the future carbon market through reforestation.¹¹

Key issues and recommendations

For the SDGs to be successful in their energy goal or targets, they must grasp this opportunity to change the way current energy policies and practices are being executed by fully endorsing the human rights framework for all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, in order to protect indigenous peoples' livelihoods and rights. Policies must be based on the principle of a rights-based, people-centred approach to sustainable energy generation that relies on decentralized and democratically-controlled energy generation and use. Good practice in terms of strengthening capacity building for states is at hand, via fiscal policies and the use of public budgets for decentralized production, management and delivery of energy (i.e. gender budgets).



Indigenous community, Laos. Photo: Chris Erni/IWGIA

The SDGs must ensure more equitable access to energy, with the aim of meeting everybody's fundamental energy needs while reducing excessive energy consumption at the same time.¹²

Some of indigenous peoples' key recommendations are therefore the following:

- Indigenous peoples must have the right to self-determined development and to have control over their natural resources and environmental management.
- All energy development must respect the rights of indigenous peoples as enshrined in the UNDRIP.

- States must support community-owned and managed, decentralized,¹³ clean and environmentally-friendly, sustainable renewable energy systems that directly address the basic needs of the people in terms of food production and processing, lighting, cooking, communication, livelihoods, light industry, and other basic energy needs.¹⁴
- States must protect and promote indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge as a contribution to national energy solutions. ○

Notes and further reading

- 1 Global Justice. At: http://globaljusticeecology.org/indigenous_rights.php
- 2 Energy innovation and traditional knowledge. UN University at: <http://our-world.unu.edu/en/energy-innovation-and-traditional-knowledge>
- 3 International Rivers at: <http://www.internationalrivers.org/resources/hydro-electric-dams-in-par%C3%A1-and-two-serious-legal-offenses-omission-and-leniency-8179>
- 4 World Commission on Dams http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/attached-files/world_commission_on_dams_final_report.pdf
- 5 UNDRIP at: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf
- 6 Weathering Uncertainty: Traditional Knowledge for Climate Change Assessment and Adaptation (2012) at: http://www.ipmpcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Weathering-Uncertainty_FINAL_12-6-2012.pdf
- 7 Energy innovation and traditional knowledge. UN University at: <http://our-world.unu.edu/en/energy-innovation-and-traditional-knowledge>
- 8 Report to the Human Rights Council. James Anaya. 2013 at: <http://unsr.jamesanaya.org/study/report-a-hrc-24-41-extractive-industries-and-indigenous-peoples-report-of-the-special-rapporteur-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>
- 9 IPCC summary for policy makers. 2014. At: http://report.mitigation2014.org/spm/ipcc_wg3_ar5_summary-for-policymakers_approved.pdf
- 10 The Solution Journal. Indigenous Australians fight climate change with fire. At: <http://www.thesolutionsjournal.com/node/1006>
- 11 Climate Change Mitigation Workshop. Carins. 2012. At: <http://www.unutki.org/downloads/File/Publications/Meetings/CCMLCIP-2012-Cm-3-Report-Final.pdf>
- 12 Global Justice at: http://globaljusticeecology.org/indigenous_rights.php
- 13 IPMSDL at: <http://ipmsdl.wordpress.com/>
- 14 An example of this is micro-hydro power which is planned, designed, managed and controlled by an indigenous community through their community organization. At: <http://intercontinentalcry.org/support-cordillera-indigenous-peoples-resistance-destructive-renewable-energy-projects/>

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