

IWGIA'S WORK ON THE CONCEPT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN ASIA





Indigenous peoples' self-organising and empowerment through the regional Indigenous Community Organizers and Leaders Training (ICOLT) Programme is an important part of IWGIA's work in Asia. Photo: Christian Erni



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IWGIA's programme strategy for Asia identifies the following as thematic priorities: 1. self-organising and empowerment; 2. self-determination and constructive agreements with the state; 3. land and resource rights; and 4. policy advocacy and public awareness raising. IWGIA currently supports projects in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.

When choosing partners in Asia, and in its advocacy work for indigenous peoples' rights in Asia, IWGIA has from the start been confronted with the question of how indigenous peoples in this part of the world are to be identified. With the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the issue of identification of indigenous peoples in Asia has become even more urgent since, in order to promote the implementation of the Declaration, indigenous organizations and their supporters (such as IWGIA) have to be able to convince the generally rather reluctant - if not defiant - Asian governments that the concept of indigenous peoples is also applicable to their countries. In order to help indigenous organizations and leaders develop their arguments further, IWGIA and the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) jointly organized a regional workshop on "The Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia", which took place from March 1 to 3, 2006, in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The participants concluded the workshop with a declaration on experiences and issues that are common to indigenous peoples in Asia and which can therefore be used as guidelines for identifying indigenous peoples in this region.

Later this year, IWGIA will also publish a resource book entitled "The Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia". This is a compilation of a number of previously published and unpublished articles that will help the reader to develop a deeper understanding of the Asian controversy around the concept of indigenous peoples. The articles are complemented with the key results of the workshop organized by Asian indigenous organizations in Thailand in March 2006, including experiences and issues identified as being common to indigenous peoples in south, southeast and east Asia, and country profiles identifying indigenous peoples based on these commonalities. □

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