

POST 2015 DEVELOPMENT PROCESS: ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Many of the areas of highest biological diversity on the planet are inhabited by indigenous peoples. The current and accelerating climatic and environmental changes threaten indigenous peoples' basis for existence around the world. The post-2015 development agenda offers a unique opportunity to address indigenous peoples' key concerns and possible solutions for environmental sustainability beyond 2015. This briefing note has been prepared by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), in collaboration with Tebtebba, and is intended as an informative note for stakeholders in the post-2015 development process.



Many indigenous peoples are closely connected to the environment they inhabit and, for them, it is the basis for their subsistence. Using the environment sustainably is therefore an immediate concern for indigenous peoples. During the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, the States and peoples of the world made a firm commitment to implement a new vision of Sustainable Development. And yet more than 20 years have passed without any major changes in the fundamental relationship be-

tween human societies and the natural world. Our ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the rights of the indigenous peoples who depend on them for their physical and cultural survival, are more threatened and endangered than ever.¹

While indigenous peoples constitute approximately 5 per cent of the world's population, they make up 15 per cent of the world's poor and one third of the world's 900 million extremely poor rural people. Although most indigenous peoples' 'low-car-



bon" lifestyle contributes very little to climate change, their great reliance on access to natural resources makes them especially vulnerable to changes in the natural environment. The increasing scarcity of resources caused by climate change and unsustainable consumption and production therefore poses ever greater challenges to indigenous peoples' already vulnerable livelihood systems and their coping capability. This situation also puts added pressure on their right to land, territories and resources and to their self-determined development.²

Indigenous peoples' contribution to environmental sustainability

There is a universal need to change the way in which we use the environment - a reorientation of hydrocarbon and land use. Indigenous peoples, in particular, have much to contribute to this transition in the form of traditional environmental knowledge and customary resource management practices and in-

stitutions. Government maps and community participatory mapping show a stark overlap of key biodiversity hotspots (such as old-growth forests) and indigenous peoples' territories,³ which indicates a strong correlation between biodiversity conservation and indigenous peoples' sustainable forest management. Indigenous peoples can, however, only contribute to ensuring environmental sustainability if they are empowered to manage ecosystems and natural resources. In other words, indigenous peoples' right to self-determined development - to participate in the democratic process of governance and to influence their own future politically, socially and culturally -⁴ is a critical component of conserving and enhancing sustainable ecosystems.

Indigenous peoples' social organization, knowledge and livelihood strategies are tailored to the specific ecosystems they inhabit. Many indigenous peoples pursue traditional occupations such as pastoralism, small-scale farming, fishing, shifting cultivation and hunting / gathering and knowledge and practices refined over centuries can be key to developing more sustainable forms of natural resource management.

Indigenous land use as Sustainable Landscape Management: the example of the indigenous Karen people in Thailand

Indigenous communities throughout Southeast Asia practise land-use systems that can best be described as holistic landscape management. A community's territory is managed as a whole, and complex rules and regulations defining rights to own and use land and resources have been developed to ensure a secure livelihood for all community members and the sustainability of resource use. In Karen communities in Thailand, for example, valley-bottom land is intensively used for irrigated rice and held under individual ownership, while uplands are used for shifting cultivation of a broad range of field crops and are collectively owned. Upland fields are rotated in a strict cycle, ensuring sufficient fallow periods and thus sustainability of land use. Furthermore, there are rules for the use of particular forest areas and water resources. The need for cash income poses challenges to the system as the production of cash crops has to be integrated into the overall land-use system. The biggest challenge, however, is the State's failure to recognize land and forest rights, and thus its failure to recognize the holistic landscape management system of Karen communities.





Pastoralism as a sustainable method to adopt in the drylands of Africa

Pastoralism plays a critical role in the ecological sustainability and economic prosperity of drylands worldwide. In Africa, drylands make up about 40% of the land area, with pastoralism representing the main livelihood system for more than 200 million people. These many millions of pastoralists in Africa have, over centuries, survived in and sustainably managed the harsh drylands of Africa – lands which have sparse vegetation and are frequently hit by drought and which thus cope with other production systems only with difficulty. Pastoralists sustainably use the drylands of Africa by practising carefully planned mobile pastoralism whereby people and livestock move across the drylands in accordance with seasons and available vegetation and water sources. Mobility and access and rights to their traditional grazing lands are a critical condition for the continuation of indigenous pastoralism as a sustainable and productive environmental management system in the drylands of Africa. Furthermore, sustainable development and biodiversity conservation can be achieved by recognizing the important role of pastoralism in cultures, traditions, livelihoods and the provision of ecosystem services. For example, maintaining vegetative cover through sustainable pastoralism can contribute to the provision of many ecosystem services both for pastoral people and their livestock and for surrounding land users.⁵

Indigenous peoples' concerns

As the most recent report from the International Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) states, climate-related hazards have negative outcomes for livelihoods, especially for people living in poverty.⁶ It is not only poverty but also their direct and total dependence on fragile ecosystems that makes indigenous peoples among the most vulnerable⁷ to the impacts of climate change hazards.⁸

Indigenous peoples are concerned with the sustainability of their natural environment since the impacts of climate change and the loss of biodiversity disrupt their productive cycles and threaten the ecosystems they depend on, i.e., their lands, forest, waters and related resources. These adverse impacts may eventually undermine their cultural practices, traditional knowledge and social cohesion and deprive indigenous peoples of their rights to natural resources.

In the global South, 60 per cent of the population live in rural areas. Among indigenous peoples, this percentage is believed to be much higher, as the majority of the approximately 370 million indigenous people live off the land. However, rural life is rapidly changing across the world, including changes to customary resource management and sustainable use systems. Indigenous livelihood systems are under stress, with only limited support forthcoming from governments for local economies and livelihoods. As a result, many – especially the young – are forced to leave their communities to find work in cities or abroad. They become detached from their homelands and communities and risk losing part of their culture and identity. This exodus of the young and their labour power negatively impacts on the resilience of indigenous communities.

Some of the strategies adopted by the global community to halt the consequences of climate change potentially pose additional threats to indigenous peoples. Ill-conceived forest protection policies, biofuel plantations or hydropower development, for example, may further undermine indigenous peoples' control over lands and resources, lead to forced evictions and the destruction of resource management systems and related traditional knowledge, livelihoods and cultures. They may lead to food insecurity, severe health problems, increased conflicts with the State and private corporations, and shifts of power over land and forests away from indigenous peoples to the political and economic elites.⁹

Inter-linkages and key priority areas for environmental sustainability in the SDGs

As the above clearly shows, environmental, social and economic issues are interlinked and should not be treated separately when aiming for sustainability. This conclusion was also reached by an international global online consultation on environmental sustainability, which underscored the link between environmental sustainability and inequalities.¹⁰ Throughout the global discussion on sustainable development that has taken place since the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, States and stakeholders, including indigenous

peoples,¹¹ have worked constructively to link the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development. Moreover, there has been an overwhelming call, especially from the Major Groups and other stakeholders, not only to fully integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development but also to embrace equality, human rights, cultural values and resilience in order to achieve the multiple benefits of improving human well-being within planetary boundaries.¹² For indigenous peoples, it is crucial that these good intentions are reflected in the goals,

targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs.

The SDGs must adhere to the principle that protection and respect for indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, resources and territories is a precondition for sustainable development. This must be reflected in all types of measures taken to ensure environmental sustainability, including adaptation and mitigation to climate change, environmental conservation, protection of biodiversity and ways of combating desertification.

Some recommendations and key priorities include:

- The SDGs have to recognize indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, territories and resources as well as the right to self-determination, which are fundamental to their collective survival and development based on their distinct identities, cultures, spirituality and socio-political institutions.
- As enshrined in the Rio zero draft (2012)¹³ and the Alta Outcome Document (2013),¹⁴ indigenous peoples recommend that States include a comprehensive human rights and ecosystem-based approach in all climate change measures and initiatives. States must also recognize and value indigenous world views, including knowledge systems, technologies, innovations and practices, customary institutions and indigenous governance, lands and resources, in all climate agreements, by means of enforceable safeguards.
- One of the key preconditions for the sustainable use and management of natural resources is secure land tenure rights. This has already been explicitly recognized in a number of international processes (such as REDD+). The recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to land and resources is the basis for rights-based and sustainable development across the world.
- Transformations in good governance will need to include creating an enabling policy environment for cooperation between governments, the private sector and civil society, and with indigenous peoples and their organizations.¹⁵ Only a broad multi-stakeholder participation that respects the right to full and effective participation on the part of indigenous peoples and other marginal sectors of society will ensure that legal and policy changes reflect their needs and aspirations and uphold the principles of human rights and social justice.
- Documenting and sharing best practices and lessons learned from community-based sustainable development and conservation projects is an effective way of encouraging and supporting local initiatives for transformational change.



Potential targets for environmental sustainability, climate change and protection of biodiversity

- Ensure that the traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous peoples with regard to environmental and biodiversity protection are recognized, respected and duly incorporated into sustainable development plans at international, national and local level;
- Ensure a sustainable use and management of resources in indigenous peoples' communities and territories that respects equal access, human rights and environmental sustainability;
- End and prevent uncontrolled, unmanaged and unsustainable industrial practices, including extractive industry and agribusiness activity on indigenous peoples' territories;
- Stop all forms of environmental pollution of indigenous peoples' territories, such as storage of hazardous waste, promotion of the use of toxic chemicals, etc., and provide redress for victims of environmental harm;
- Recognize the centrality of the cultural and ethical values that underpin environmental sustainability for all societies. ○

Notes and references

- 1 UNCSO/Rio +20 Conference 2012, Submission from Indigenous Peoples Major Group for the Zero draft of the Outcome Document of the UNCSO/Rio +20 Conference. At: file:///C:/Users/ida/Downloads/1111_269_ip%20key%20messages%20for%20rio20.pdf
- 2 UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), 2010. State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, at: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/SOWIP_Press_package.pdf
- 3 UNCSO/Rio +20 Conference 2012, Submission from Indigenous Peoples Major Group for the Zero draft of the Outcome Document of the UNCSO/Rio +20 Conference. At: file:///C:/Users/ida/Downloads/1111_269_ip%20key%20messages%20for%20rio20.pdf
- 4 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), 2007. at: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf
- 5 Convention on Biological Diversity. A Good Practice Guide – Pastoralism, Nature Conservation and Development, 2010. At: <http://www.cbd.int/development/doc/cbd-good-practice-guide-pastoralism-booklet-web-en.pdf>
- 6 Field, C.B., V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, T.E. Bilir, M. Chatterjee, K.L. Ebi, Y.O. Estrada, R.C. Genova, B. Girma, E.S. Kissel, A.N. Levy, S. MacCracken, P.R. Mastrandrea, and L.L. White (eds.) 2014. IPCC. Summary for policymakers. In: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, pp. 1-32. at: http://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/IPCC_WG2AR5_SPM_Approved.pdf
- 7 UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), 2007. Indigenous Peoples and the MDGs - We Must Find Inclusive and Culturally Sensitive Solutions. UN Chronicle No 4. at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/MDGs%20article%20in%20UN%20Chronicle.pdf>
- 8 J. Carling, K. Wessendorf, and B. Feiring. 2013. Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change – a human rights challenge. The Danish Institute for Human Rights, at: http://www.iwgia.org/iwgia_files_news_files/0853_Concept_note_Indigenous_Peoples_and_Climate_Change.pdf
- 9 G. Oviedo, A. Fincke. 2009. Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). At: http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/european_parliament_study_on_indigenous_peoples_and_climate_change.pdf
- 10 The World we Want. Online Consultation of: Environmental Sustainability and Equality. April 15th-May 26th 2013. At: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/sustainability2015/equality>
- 11 During the UN Conference on Environment & Development (UNCED) in 1992 in Johannesburg, popularly known as the Earth Summit, nine Major Groups were established.
- 12 United Nations Development Group (UNDG). 2013: A Million Voices - The world we want. at: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/bitcache/cb02253d47a0f7d4318f41a4d11c330229991089?vid=422422&disposition=inline&op=view>
- 13 See endnote 1.
- 14 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. 2013. Alta Outcome Document. at: <http://wcp2014.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Adopted-Alta-outcome-document-with-logo-ENG.pdf>
- 15 United Nations Development Group (UNDG). 2013: A Million Voices - The world we want. at: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/bitcache/cb02253d47a0f7d4318f41a4d11c330229991089?vid=422422&disposition=inline&op=view>