

(continued from page 3)

important but highly neglected aspect. In fact the benefit sharing equation must include the costs otherwise the outcomes, in terms of benefits would be unclear.

Postponement of the Issue to a High Level or Subordinating the Regime to Other International Instruments

There is a propensity among some stakeholders to refer certain issues, of a proposed the regime, such as the protection of traditional knowledge (TK) to other entities such as WIPO or TRIPs Council of the World Trade Organization (WTO), etc. thus rendering a full and effective discus-

“Indigenous and local communities should have the right to benefit from the use of our resources and their traditional knowledge within the context of a legally binding legislative system”

sion under the Convention impossible. Such positions have developed when facing critical issues such as TK, products and derivatives. By referring these crucial issues to other international instruments the Convention itself is undermined and the issues are in danger of being transferred a higher level beyond the Convention. This has a lot of advantages to those Parties and Governments who are against a full discussion of these issues under the Convention and may result in the possible exclusion of critical aspects of an IR.

Conclusion

Every delegate participating in the CBD processes leading to the negotiation and development of the IR on ABS should be aware that they have a social responsibility not just to today's generation but to future

generations. In the process of the negotiations, tolerance and respect among participants is necessary to ensure the “others” (the marginalised) can add “their voices” to the process. All stakeholders should embrace the ideology of the “right to be

different” (Ferry 1995) meaning that the knowledge of marginalised groups such as women and indigenous and local communities should be respected in this process. Indeed, indigenous and local communities must effectively participate with the aim of ensuring that both the process and the end product(s) fully respect their rights. There should be a paradigm shift in which we conduct our business in the August House. Let us be recorded in history as men and women who despite being presented with a rare opportunity to help change the world for the benefit of both humanity and biodiversity, have sacrificed the integrity of biodiversity and the lives of indigenous and local communities,

in the quest for commercial and economic gain. We are all on a steep learning curve and hence we need to humbly accept our deficiencies and treat the negotiation and elaboration of an IR as a journey where the destination must be fair and just for all. □

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An Indigenous Knowledge Forum on Climate Change Impacts by Douglas Nakashima

Indigenous peoples have repeatedly voiced concern about their exclusion from ongoing climate change debates, most recently during the protests on 7 December 2007 at the United Nations conference in Bali.1 This predicament is alarming given that many rural and indigenous communities are finding themselves on the frontlines of climate change, suffering early impacts due to the particular vulnerability of their territories and their reliance upon resource-based livelihoods.



(Photo from wollombi/www.flickr.com)

In response to this outcry, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in partnership with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD), the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (SPFII) and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), will soon launch a grassroots climate change forum. This Internet forum will focus on the knowledge and experiences of indigenous communities and peoples living in small islands, the Arctic and other vulnerable environments. The goal of the forum is to seek community-level observations on climate change impacts, as well as local efforts to cope with and adapt to these changes. It will provide an opportunity for communities to voice and share observations, experiences and concerns, while heightening the profile of indigenous peoples and their knowledge in international climate change debates.

Frontlines of Climate Change

Indigenous peoples figure conspicuously amongst groups identified as particularly vulnerable to climate change. Many indigenous territories are located in areas where impacts from global warming are anticipated to be both early and severe. Such vulnerable environments include low-lying islands, the circumpolar Arctic, high altitude zones and desert margins. Indeed, climate change poses a direct threat to the livelihoods of many indigenous groups due to their traditional and continuing reliance upon resources harvested from their immediate environment. Indigenous peoples therefore deserve specific attention when considering this global threat.

For the same reasons that they are highly vulnerable to climate change, indigenous peoples may also be particularly well placed to observe environmental changes caused by this phenomenon. Attentiveness to fluctuations and alterations in the natural milieu is an integral part of their

ways of life, and remains of crucial cultural importance even in areas where lifestyles have been modified by colonialism and globalisation. Knowledge of specific localities may stretch back over many generations. When shared amongst elders and youth, this knowledge provides the basis for important comparisons between what is observed today, and what occurred in the past. Indigenous knowledge thus offers valuable insights into local changes in ecological processes. This knowledge can consequently supplement and add much needed detail and nuance to the broad-scale view offered by scientific research.



Cree hunter (Photo from Douglas Nakashima)

It is also important to keep in mind that indigenous groups have always been confronted with changing environments. Their strategies for coping with change have allowed them to successfully negotiate historical shifts in climate and environment, by modifying existing practice, shifting their resource bases or restructuring their relationships with the environment. While the environmental transformations engendered by climate change are expected to be unprecedented, this in-depth knowledge can nonetheless provide a crucial foundation for the new adaptation measures required to face up to this most recent chapter in global environmental change.

Finally, there is growing awareness that indigenous peoples may find themselves not only on the frontlines of climate change impacts, but also of impacts due to rapidly ex-

lands to make way for hydrological development, large-scale tree planting schemes and biofuel cropping, all of which are being pushed ahead with the justification of reducing or compensating for greenhouse gas emissions. As pressures to mitigate climate change continue to grow, it is essential that actions that aim to combat a phenomenon largely generated by the industrialised world are not carried out at the expense of indigenous groups who contribute little to the creation of this environmental hazard. Meanwhile, in northern Australia, recognition that traditional Aboriginal fire management practices serve to reduce the frequency and extent of late season wildfires, and thus reduce carbon emissions, has opened avenues for the revitalisation of this traditional practice as a climate change mitigation measure. This demonstrates that culturally appropriate mitigation plans can serve to acknowledge and enhance indigenous practices. These positive and negative consequences of climate change mitigation serve to further underline the need for indigenous peoples and communities living in vulnerable environments to play an active role in ongoing climate change debates.

Climate Change Forum

The Internet-based forum aims to encourage indigenous peoples, small island communities, and other peoples living in vulnerable environments to share their observations and experiences of climate change impacts, and their efforts to cope and adapt to sea level rise, climate variability, the increased intensity and frequency of extreme climatic events, accelerated melting of circumpolar or high altitude snow and ice, and other climate change related events. Of equal interest will be local level reporting on the negative impacts of mitigation measures, such as the expansion of tree plantations, increased production of biofuels, and the resultant loss of access to lands and resources, as well as positive effects on traditional practices through carbon trading or other climate change mitigation strategies.

(continued from page 5)

“The Goal of the forum is to seek community-level observations on climate change impacts, as well as local efforts to cope with and adapt to these changes”

panding efforts to mitigate climate change. Themes such as the gender, human rights and ethical dimensions of climate change will also be highlighted and discussed.

To stimulate debate and encourage inputs, a thought-provoking lead article, addressing a particular theme related to climate change, will be circulated by email. Highlights from the responses received will then be compiled and distributed in a series of subsequent postings at regular intervals. All responses will eventually be organised in a global database of local observations, experiences, practices and coping strategies. The forum will operate in three languages (English, French, Spanish), with possible expansion to other languages in the future.

Through the forum, UNESCO, SCBD, SPFI and OHCHR aim to deepen international understanding of the ways this global process is impacting at local levels. This will not only help to build awareness of this complex issue among and between indigenous and other rural communities, but will also provide a channel through which indigenous communities can communicate their experiences and needs to the wider international policy and research community. It



Mayangna (Photo from UNESCO)

may also provide a channel whereby communities who have been largely excluded from climate change debates gain recognition for their knowledge and practices, while drawing attention to the evolving negative impacts of climate change and/or mitigation measures on their livelihoods and territories.

If you are interested in participating in this indigenous peoples and climate change forum, please send an email to: links@unesco.org.

1 see: Indigenous peoples protest at Bali Conference, New Consumer, http://www.newconsumer.com/news/item/indigenous_peoples_protest_at_bali_conference/

Indigenous people lash out at Bali climate change talks, AFP <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM-5jGxLdAvLk2yB4MQ8D97kKBRHkl6w>

Facing the Future: Acting to Minimize the Consequences of Global Climate Change

by Edna Maria Costa e Silva



Ecosystems, which support the social-economic and cultural livelihood of traditional communities and the conservation of local biodiversity, are currently being used in a disordered, unplanned and unsustainable manner.

Environmental impacts caused by interventions undertaken without consideration of main local ecosystems such as fluvial, estuarial and coastal and of its people, have permeated all ecosystems that make up the Para state territory (Bra-

zilian Amazon). Environmental impacts have, for instance, affected water quantity and quality and have interfered with the biological diversity of mangrove and riparian vegetation, thus diminishing the natural environment for a lot of species.

There is a link between environmental impacts and the movement and migration of traditional communities and of the deterioration of their quality of life and food security. All this is detrimental to the preservation and conservation of systems that support environmental interactions and subsistence, for instance, riparian populations, fishermen, small farmers and indigenous people. Unsustainable use and over-occupation have lead to a critical situation of local lands and waters regarding social and environmental quality, which has worsened even more so due to climate change effects in recent times.



Brazil (Photo from lautsu/www.flickr.com)

“A relation society-nature, based in the exploration of natural resources and in social exclusion exceeds the limits of sustainability”

Deforestation is among the main activities that have contributed to the reduction of biodiversity, which is in reality one of the strongest elements in fighting global climate change. These actions carried out by all land users, without due care to the preservation of forest areas for the future have not taken into account the long-term impacts nor the social, ecological and cultural costs to the traditional communities and future generations.

These social and environmental consequences include, but are not limited to:

- Soil impermeability and slopes erosion
- Reduction and extinction of habitat for numerous species