

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION BETWEEN UNDP AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' EXPERTS GROUP ON DEVELOPMENT WITH CULTURE AND IDENTITY

New York, January 11, 2010

### *Highlights:*

*"Freedoms without opportunities are useless for indigenous peoples. In most cases, freedoms of indigenous peoples are conditioned by the priorities of the dominant and majority population"*

*"Development (or the predominant development paradigm) has been and is still a problem for indigenous peoples, not the solution"*

*"Indigenous peoples from different parts of the world have been promoting a different concept of development that is multi-dimensional, holistic, cyclical, regenerative, and sustainable. A good example is the indigenous concept of "Vivir Bien" ("Live Well") in Latin America"*

*"Human development should include cultural, traditional, and spiritual elements"*

*"Empowerment is not something that can be granted; rather indigenous peoples must own it, feel it and grab it"*

*"The experts are the people who live a situation, not the ones who study it"*

*"From an indigenous perspective, human development should be defined **by** indigenous peoples, for indigenous peoples, and for indigenous peoples. This is the essence of self-determination, its collective dimension and the recognition as peoples by the UN General Assembly"*

*"The current global crises offer an opportunity to provide an alternative model of development, inspired or building on the resilience and traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous peoples and their communities. This opportunity should be utilized to challenge the dominant development paradigm that contributed to the crises in the first place"*

*"Indigenous peoples have identified two main indicators: (i) status and trends of land use in indigenous peoples' territories; and (ii) status and trends in the practice of traditional occupations. Both indicators address the key aspect of cultural integrity"*

*"The question on human development and the review of 20 years can be turned around to reflect about the losses:*

*-how much has been lost due to development projects?*

*-how much land has been lost?*

*-how many languages have disappeared?*

*-how many forests have been destroyed and how much natural resources depleted?"*

## **I. Background and framework for the discussion**

The focus group discussion between UNDP and Representatives of Indigenous Peoples' Expert Group was organized by the UNDP Civil Society Division in the Partnerships Bureau with the purpose of exchanging views on human development from the perspective of indigenous peoples and to identify ways in which indigenous peoples can play a greater role in the MDGs and climate change efforts in the coming years. The consultation was convened as part of Platform HD2010 (launched by UNDP in February 2009 as a special initiative under the MDG Achievement Fund), a UNDP programme that seeks to strengthen civil society and civic engagement in human development and multilateralism.

Opening the meeting, Bruce Jenks, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the Partnerships Bureau in UNDP, underlined the critical importance of a strengthened engagement between UNDP and civil society and indigenous peoples in light of current global challenges. The UNDP "Platform HD2010 - Towards a New Multilateralism", an initiative funded by the MDG Achievement Fund, supported by the Government of Spain, presents UN(DP) with a strategic opportunity to rebuild and strengthen partnerships with civil society actors. It will be very important that UNDP follow up on the recommendations of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), particularly on data disaggregation and this data can send a very powerful message on the need to address the specific concerns and challenges faced by indigenous peoples as they pursue their human development.

Mr Jenks emphasized key upcoming opportunities that UNDP should explore with indigenous peoples:

- Strengthen the concept of Human Development as a catalyst, particularly for indigenous peoples.
- Use the MDG review process in 2010 to look at the way in which data can help in assessing what is happening to indigenous peoples and the way forward.
- Review the multilateral architecture to ensure it addresses the interests of the most marginalized and impoverished people.

## **II. Twenty years of Human Development Reports**

Eva Jespersen, Deputy Director of the Human Development Report Office (HDRO), presented a brief history of the Human Development concept and the Human Development Report (HDR). The original definition as coined in 1990 is: "Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical ones are to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and self-respect."

Over time, the human development concept became focused on health, education, and GDP. The thinking about human development and the availability of data has progressed since then. The diverse and ambitious themes explored since 1990 have led to an understanding that the concept of human development could be enhanced to reflect experiences and new knowledge.

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the HDR is an opportunity to reflect on the human development concept, including on what it means to indigenous peoples and other stakeholders. The HDR2010 aims to explore different forms of advancement since 1990: advancement of people, advancement of ideas, new opportunities and new and old challenges. The key question then is, how can we create institutions that can effectively deal with these old and new challenges? Existing institutional structures at the national or international levels have the tendency to operate in 'silos' and to ignore the interests of the most vulnerable groups.

The HDR2010 aims to explore the inclusion of three new concepts, namely:

- Empowerment (participation);
- Equality (social justice);
- Environmental sustainability (globally, nationally, locally)

The HDR 2010 process will also address the possibility of introducing additional indicators to measure inequality in human development and the sustainability of human development.

A key question: is it time for a restatement of human development? For example:

*"Human Development is a process of expanding people's real **freedoms** – their valuable capabilities – and empowering people as active agents of equitable development on a shared planet. People are both the beneficiaries and the agents of long term, equitable human development, both as individuals and as groups."* Alkire, 2010

### **III. Indigenous perspectives on human development**

Indigenous experts from various regions and areas of expertise related to development actively participated in the discussion and shared their insights. Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues stressed that the discussion on human development from the perspective of indigenous peoples is very timely since indigenous peoples can share valuable perspectives on the concept of Human Development, particularly against the backdrop of the lingering economic crisis and the frustrating experience of the climate change negotiation in Copenhagen, COP-15.

#### **a. On empowerment:**

- From an indigenous perspective, human development should be defined **by** indigenous peoples, from indigenous peoples, and for indigenous peoples. This is really the **essence of self-determination**, its important collective dimension and the recognition as peoples by the UN General Assembly with the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples need to maximize this understanding and their agency to operate in policy spaces that influence how development is understood and operationalized. New perspectives on several terms/ concepts should be strengthened and developed. In particular, the concept of "groups" (or sub-groups) can be very problematic for indigenous peoples.

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- Freedoms without opportunities are of no use to indigenous peoples since the freedoms of a few are always conditioned by the priorities of the majorities. In many countries, the constitutional, legal and policy framework recognizes freedoms, but see the interests of indigenous peoples as an obstacle to the well-being of the rest of the population.
- The empowerment of indigenous peoples with respect to human development must be measured through assessment of structural *and* outcome impacts.
- It is important to note that “development” is not a word that exists in many indigenous languages although there are terms that include the concept of sustainability, which has been a focus included in the life ways of many indigenous peoples. (A closer but still problematic term may be “sustainable development”). Cognizant of this reality and pitfalls of the predominant development paradigm, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has put forward the concept of “Development with Culture and Identity”.
- It is difficult for indigenous peoples to talk about and explore development concepts when development has been so alien to indigenous peoples and actually contributed to their impoverishment. For instance, (mega) projects of extractive industries have clearly caused a devastating impact in indigenous communities. Any measurement of human development should look into the negative impact of private corporations.
- Indigenous peoples from different parts of the world have been promoting a different concept of development that is multi-dimensional, holistic, cyclical, regenerative, and sustainable. A good example is the indigenous concept of “*Bien Vivir*” (“Live Well”) in Latin America, which should be noted in the HDR through a text box in the report. This is something that is being used more and more by governments (e.g., the Governments of Bolivia and Nicaragua), and may significantly contribute to the concept of human development for all, not only indigenous peoples.
- Human development should include cultural, traditional, and spiritual elements. For instance, it is important to evaluate the quality of education (not only looking at enrollment rates), and the ways modern health practices have impacted traditional healing practices.
- For indigenous peoples, human development is embedded in the vibrancy of their cultural life ways. *Life ways* are rooted in history and cultural identity, whereas *lifestyles* are a matter of choice. Indigenous peoples’ life ways and collective rights depend on strong traditional institutions. The understanding of this collective dimension and other indigenous peoples’ issues requires capacity-development efforts that need to be two-way: focused on the capacities of both indigenous peoples to engage effectively with national and multilateral institutions and those of governments and UN staff, especially in UN country offices.
- It is important to highlight that indigenous peoples can contribute with their knowledge towards holistic development and a better relationship with nature.

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- Indigenous peoples have achieved major accomplishments through the multilateral system, most notably, the establishment of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as a space for dialogue, the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the creation of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples. These spaces and mechanisms have helped indigenous peoples to articulate their visions of development. However, they lack such opportunities at the national level.
- The Human Development paradigm has helped to balance the focus on economic growth with other aspects of well-being, such as social needs. Unfortunately, the HDRs have not clearly reflected the situation of indigenous peoples (e.g., Canada and Australia would score very differently in the Human Development Index if the situation of their indigenous peoples was adequately reflected). The disaggregation of data is therefore critical. While data has been produced in a number of countries in Latin America, it is not easily available in other regions. Statistics are culturally and ethnically blind.
- The framework for collecting information on indigenous peoples is flawed, and there should be ways of doing so outside traditional governmental bodies. Empowerment and participation of traditional indigenous bodies and mechanisms should be emphasized, as these structures are still in place in families or tribes that are cross-boundary, but are invisible to data collection mechanisms.
- Indigenous peoples have taken the initiative and produced their own State of the World's Indigenous Peoples Report, the first report of its kind prepared and launched by the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which will be formally presented in a few days and will hopefully contribute to the analysis of human development and the HDR 2010.

**b. On equality (or lack of, and measurement)**

- The Human Development Report has not reflected very lucidly or adequately indigenous peoples' perspectives or concerns. Aggregating national averages does not necessarily reflect indigenous peoples' reality, as pointed out repeatedly by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Many of them may be impoverished and living in extreme poverty even if national averages say otherwise.
- In many countries, data condemns indigenous peoples and their realities to invisibility, which in turn perpetuates marginalization and inequality.
- There have been discussions about developing an "indigenous index" that would emphasize the aspects of culture and self-identity. The self-determination of indigenous peoples could be one key indicator. However, it should not only be up to governments but also indigenous experts to produce and analyze data.

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- Income levels have been increasing economic opportunities for indigenous peoples but sometimes the human cost has been enormous. For instance, on American Indian land, people do obtain labour wages, but at a huge sacrifice to quality of life. Alcoholism, drug abuse, and splintering families are increasing, along with crime. These forms of correlation should be included and measured at the local level rather than on a national, aggregated level.
- The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues has repeatedly recommended that the UN system support the disaggregation of data. Some recent workshops on indicators have been organized by and with indigenous peoples' organizations. Two indicators have been identified prominently: (i) status and trends of land use in indigenous peoples' territories; and (ii) status and trends in the practice of traditional occupations/livelihoods.
- Indigenous peoples often do no benefit from 'development projects' especially when extractive industries undertake activities on indigenous peoples' lands. Some of the new indices being developed should reflect **how poverty has actually increased with the introduction of commercial activities in indigenous peoples' lands**. For instance, in Russia, indigenous territories are shrinking, being taken over by the private sector, and suicide rates among indigenous peoples are increasing.
- A key indicator for indigenous peoples could be the effectiveness or robustness of their own traditional institutions, examined along a spectrum that includes recuperation, revitalization, empowerment and agency (since so many traditional institutions have been affected by or disappeared with processes of colonization and imposed development).
- There are some good practices that the HDR should consider with the help of indicators responding to questions such as: "in which processes/structures are you participating? What structural adjustments have been required to enable your effective participation? Are these participatory processes being made possible through institutional reforms that include traditional institutions?" Such good practices could be extracted from national human development reports.
- It is critical to examine human development from the perspective of indigenous peoples' food security and food sovereignty as it has cross-country comparability. It should be possible to have indicators for cross-border indigenous peoples; since a number of indicators related to and incorporating gender have been developed, it should be possible to do the same for indigenous peoples.
- Some indigenous peoples have made important advances in the area of human rights, especially those that relate to land rights and access to resources. These gains should be included in indicators to demonstrate the successes of justice systems.
- There is currently a discussion about establishing a monitoring tool for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which provides a comprehensive and powerful framework to work towards the advancement of economic, social, cultural,

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civil and political rights of indigenous peoples. The Declaration and a future monitoring tool could contribute to measuring human development. Many of the rights contained in the Declaration are key for empowerment and equality, for instance, on political participation, control over indigenous territories and resources, and collective rights.

- Current educational opportunities are not related to the ability of indigenous peoples to further their customs, languages, and culture. Accessing education that makes use of indigenous cultural institutions is very important, but this concept has been pushed into a larger “multi-cultural” issue. When education data is assessed, it should be remembered that these indicators demonstrate education and development in English or other dominant languages, emphasizing entry into mainstream economic systems, and does not further indigenous institutions or systems.
- Good documentation demonstrating the effects of climate change on indigenous peoples already exists; less well documented are the effects of the financial crisis, and also how the predominant paradigm of development has affected and violated indigenous peoples’ rights. Indigenous peoples are not really participating in the processes that cause so much impact. They are not taking decisions on initiatives and processes that seriously condition their communities’ chances to survive and live with dignity.
- In Africa, religion is the primary disseminator of knowledge and cultural movements, but discussing indigenous religions is not welcome due to their lack of conformity with Judeo-Christian traditions, and racism is generally an issue faced by the indigenous peoples.

**c. On environmental sustainability**

- Environmental sustainability is very important, but should not be the sole focus of development. Governments often assess sustainability issues from an environmental perspective, followed by a strong economic dimension, and the issue is rarely viewed from a holistic, indigenous perspective; one in which human beings interrelate and are part of the mother earth and where both human beings and nature are important.
- Indigenous peoples are the ones who have least contributed to environmental changes and the erosion of biological diversity, but are the ones who are experiencing the worst effects of these changes, a situation of double jeopardy.
- Indigenous peoples have done a great deal of work to further the cause of environmental sustainability, and this activism has presented them with a great opportunity to voice their views at the international level and in global negotiations.

**IV. The Millennium Development Goals and the MDG 2010 Review Process**

Garry Conille, Director of the MDG Support Team in the UNDP Bureau for Development Policy, presented an overview of the MDG 2010 review process. Key points from the presentation included the following observations:

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- When talking about the Millennium Development Goals there has been a historical tendency to convey information in aggregates. Examples in Latin America have showcased how averages may vary greatly between specific groups within a country. This insight has led UNDP to argue that the 2010 review process should not be “business as usual” and that the MDGs should focus on people, not aggregates.
- A “new framework” for collective action to accelerate progress in the remaining five years should be based on robust evidence, especially as it relates to Least Developed Countries.
- Broad and meaningful participation of civil society, including indigenous peoples, must be included at all levels (global, country, regional) if the outcome document is to reflect the evidence provided.
- The first entry point should be national consultations in which all key stakeholders are present. UNDP’s role is to build this evidence, engage and build coalitions, and catalyze collective renewed action.
- There is a need to localize MDGs through making greater use of disaggregated data. This process of “localization” was seen as a necessary measure if the report is to highlight the disparities between groups within countries.

**Indigenous Perspectives on the MDGs and the MDG Review Process**

- Primarily because indigenous peoples were excluded from the process of developing the MDGs, a general concern exists that indigenous peoples’ understanding, perspectives and approaches to development do not correspond with the goals. It is necessary to elaborate the MDGs further and enhance specificity with regards to indigenous peoples (education, yes, but for what? Cooptation or empowerment of indigenous communities?).
- *Participation:* There was general agreement that the MDG review process must take indigenous peoples’ issues, views and contributions into account. However, there was concern that at present there is no structure (neither in the UN at the country level or among indigenous peoples) to identify entry points for meaningful participation and the inclusion of indigenous perspectives. Where to start?
- *Aggregate information:* There was broad consensus amongst participants that the use of aggregate data has a tendency to hide information on what is happening to indigenous peoples. Viet Nam was presented as a country example in which impressive poverty reduction data at the national level hid drastic inequality and the continuing hardships faced by its indigenous communities.
- *Participation/Evidence Gathering:* More defined criteria for participation of indigenous peoples and evidence gathering must be fostered. Institutionalized structures for engagement and participation must be created. The concept of “environmental sustainability,” which can lead to indigenous peoples being evicted from their lands, was raised as an example of how *a lack of indigenous participation* in the consultation and

review process can lead to negative outcomes for indigenous peoples. Bolivia and Ecuador were pointed to as possible country examples that may provide entry points on how indigenous peoples can participate in the review process.

- *Capacity development and empowerment:* These were highlighted as being key requirements for indigenous peoples. There was general consensus that this should focus on the strengths of indigenous peoples, with participants noting: "the experts are the people who live a situation, not the ones who study it." There was also the understanding that empowerment was "not something that was granted," rather indigenous peoples must own it, feel it and take it.

## **V. Climate change, human rights and indigenous peoples: challenges and opportunities**

Olav Kjørven, Assistant Secretary General and Director of the UNDP Bureau for Development Policy, and Charles McNeill, Practice Leader of the Environment and Energy Group, reflected on challenges and opportunities of UNDP engagement with indigenous peoples' vis-à-vis the issue of climate change. Key points from Mr. Kjørven's presentation included the following:

- Climate change can spark drastic weather changes resulting in severe floods, droughts and worsening disasters. The results can be particularly acute for indigenous peoples.
- Climate change offers both challenges and opportunities. While indigenous peoples will be disproportionately impacted by climate change, the crisis offers an opportunity to provide an alternative model of development inspired or building on the resilience and knowledge of indigenous communities. This opportunity should be utilized to challenge the dominant development paradigm.
- The UN-Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Programme (UN-REDD) provides an opportunity for indigenous peoples to become key stakeholders in the management and protection of their lands. Indigenous peoples have been integrated as direct partners in the decision-making body or policy board.

### **Indigenous peoples perspectives on climate change and human rights**

- An essential element for indigenous peoples to play a positive role on climate change is the recognition of the customary governance of their lands and territories. Achieving respect for and recognition of traditional indigenous knowledge and governance systems by governments and UN agencies/programmes remains a challenge that requires further documentation and awareness-raising to highlight indigenous communities' contributions in the fight against climate change.
- While there are benefits to the UN-REDD programme, these benefits come about and may be maintained only if indigenous peoples' rights are recognized and respected, and if local capacity is built and strengthened.
- Opportunities can only arise if indigenous peoples engage in the policy process at both international and national levels. The recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples by

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the UNFCC was a result of dedicated and engaged efforts and should therefore be seen as a lesson in the power of engagement.

- Conflict between indigenous peoples' groups and others is increasing due to environmental degradation, shrinking arable land, and the loss of food security. It is critical to develop capacity for dialogue among various civil society groups to mitigate possible conflict.

**Observations on the role of UNDP in the area of indigenous peoples:**

The capacity of UN(DP) at the country level to foster proactive engagement with indigenous peoples is a key challenge. At the country level, indigenous leaders and groups do not get the kind of support they require from UNDP staff, who need to improve their knowledge of indigenous issues. Furthermore, any consultation with indigenous peoples regarding UNDP projects or processes affecting their lands and territories needs to be guided by the principle of free, prior, and informed consent, and in particular should include participation by indigenous peoples' traditional authorities in all stages of the consultation.

In conclusion, UNDP re-stated its genuine commitment to enhance collaboration with indigenous peoples, despite the fact that, in some circumstances, it may not be an easy path, due to the intergovernmental nature of UNDP and the need for the organization to work with other UN Agencies constituting UN Country Teams. UNDP needs to come to a deeper appreciation of how engagement with indigenous peoples can be strengthened at the national level.