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**African Indigenous Women Organisation Central African Network
(AIWO-CAN)**

**The Mbororo) Social And Cultural Development Association
(MBOSCUDA) Cameroon**

Theme B

A Joint Intervention on Indigenous People and The International and Domestic Protection of Traditional Knowledge on the occasion of the 23rd United Nation Working Group on Indigenous Population in Geneva :

Presented by mrs Hawe Hamman Bouba President of AIWO-CAN and the womens committee of MBOSCUDA.

Dear mr Chairperson.

Indigenous representatives, Governmental and
non Governmental organisations representatives ,

It is a privilege for me to take the floor on the occasion of the 23rd session of the UN working group on Indigenous population on the above theme which is very dear to the Indigenous people the world over .

Indigenous peoples have as thier natural habitats lands endowed with natural ressources from where they derive almost all they need for thier existence like clothings, food and medecins for both themselves and thier animals and where thez can perform thier religious rituals . Thier culture is reach and thez got a distinct language from the main stream society . Yet the massive dispossession of Indigenous traditional lands is a constant threat to this rich and inestimable culture. Sending them out of thier lands mean depriving them of these cultural rights .

Not only do the states Government not recognize land ownership to most Indigenous people in Africa but encourage and also participate in the process of dispossession of these lands in favour of ambitious development projects which are destructive to the environment and its bio-diversity and therefore to the rich Indigenous Knowledge . Indigenous people are good preservers of biodiversity as thier whole life and culture is attached to thier environment and therefore losing the lands means losing thier Indigenous knowledge . Thez are uprooted and dispossessed of thier language , rituals, food , medicinal plants, clothing etc .

In the last 3 decades even where Indigenous communities leave on thier ancestral lands most of the Indigenous and tribal people are fast abandonning this valuable knowledge in favour of modern knowledge.

Very efficient medicinal and food plants , traditional dresssing, hair styles, language and rituals is fast or have totally disappeared .

This state of affairs recomforted the newly Independent African states whose policy was that of national intergration and assimilation rather than promoting cultural diversity which they saw as a threat to the fragile states . There was therefore no reason to promote or protect the Indigenous traditional knowledge by these very states

Indigenous traditional knowledge is not protected by domestic and International laws especially in Africa .

Non Indigenous people in the name of researchers have appropriated this knowledge and have succeeded to patent it as an invention as there are no laws at national or International level which recognises Indigenous traditional knowledge. while Indigenous people themselves are refused this collective protection rights of their traditional knowledge by the World Intellectual Property Organisation , its regional bodies and the different states on the pretext that it is not an invention .

The debate on whether or not Indigenous traditional knowledge should be protected by this world body is on for some years now and Indigenous people are activating and mobilising for recognition and protection of their traditional knowledge . How far has the debate gone in favour of the Indigenous people is the question .

However Indigenous people should stand up strongly to revive this valuable knowledge which is at the verge of extinction without which they may not have what to propose when the states and the International bodies will want to give it the recognition desired .

What perspectives for the survival of Indigenous Knowledge :

The Indigenous people through their respective organisations should put up a powerful lobbying network at the International levels as well as with their respective Governments for special measures to be taken towards the protection of the Indigenous Traditional Knowledge .The WGIP and Permanent Forum can serve such a purpose for such actions as the two forums are the most highly attended by Indigenous people .

Create museums and ethno-touristic sites for the preservation of Indigenous knowledge in the form of artifacts and medicinal and other useful plants .

A good example is the exchange centre in Olosoboi in the outskirts of Nairobi Kenya The centre which is run by a Massai Organisation has a museum which contains all their artifacts which are fast disappearing and an ethno touristic site where a good lot of their medicinal plants have been planted giving their various names and uses . The centre is impressive and can go a long way towards the recognition and protection of Indigenous knowledge .

Mboscuda had the chance to visit the centre and also initiated a project towards the realisation of a centre like that .

The project has been funded by the World Bank Grant Facility Program .

The project which will start before the end of this year will be completed by June next year and will serve as an exchange centre . The multiplication of such centres will go a long way towards the protection and encourage the Governments and the International world to recognise and protect this knowledge .

Indigenous People should promote their Indigenous Knowledge by reviving its usage and not stay and watch others steal it to make better usage and enormous benefits from it .

Thank you for giving me your attention .

Hawe Hamman Bouba