

THE WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATION (WGIP) GENEVA
23RD SESSION
BRIEF ADDRESS ON
DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS
TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

My name is Solomon Kiprugut Koyopel Cherongos representing an indigenous community called the Cherangany also known as Sengwer of Kenya. I am the Programme Coordinator of CHEMUDEP (cherangany multipurpose development programme) NGO organization.

It is sad that local communities have not benefited much from indigenous knowledge research and the resulting benefits. The enactment of policies to protect the knowledge would avert loss of local knowledge and traditional practices due to adoption of western values that erode the traditional base.

For decades, indigenous knowledge in Africa in particular remained clouded and obscured from the western thinking who often regarded such knowledge as backward and barbaric and even perceived the traditional medical practices as witchcraft and of no benefit since Africa itself as a continent has its problems of being a sleeping and hungry giant full of poverty and underdevelopment.

As advocated by scholars in this field, indeed without traditional medicine, primary health care delivery in Africa would be very difficult as first medical contact in most societies in the continent is the traditional healer. Despite increased awareness about the benefit of this knowledge in the health sector, little has been done regarding legislation of laws to govern the traditional practice though there are positive trends towards according indigenous knowledge, especially traditional medicine, the honour it deserves.

States and the international community require policies to protect indigenous knowledge currently faced with threats such as loss of vital information and piracy orchestrated by

some foreign scholars to regulate and protect indigenous knowledge and its related practices which are threatened by piracy and lack of documentation.

Taking a cue from the international community, the African Union declared 2001-2010 a decade for African Traditional Medicine which is a milestone in recognizing the importance of indigenous knowledge in the continent's health sector. This declaration has occasioned the formation of a number of traditional healers associations across the region, but are still far back to make an impact.

Though at the Global level, various regulations support the indigenous knowledge initiative for instance, the importance of this knowledge has been emphasized in the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) in Article 8(j). Through the article, the convention calls for participation of indigenous and local people in the conservation of biological diversity. Subsequently, programmes have been developed to support governments in conserving this knowledge and biological biodiversity in general, at the national level in many states who are reluctant in implementing international agreement and policies. But this is not the case on the ground.

The noble initiatives by whatever source even if by UN body if not put to use are but a dream since only a small fraction of the target groups are reached in good time which make the great potential for exploitation of the rich indigenous knowledge unfortunate for lack of awareness creation by the supposed entities like governments, hence making the indigenous knowledge information not to be well-documented and properly packaged to allow for dissemination. This has contributed to the massive loss of indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next, as the few remaining practitioners die with the knowledge.

The situation has been further aggravated by the fact that indigenous knowledge issues mostly in underdeveloped world: the third world countries have been rated of low priority due to the adoption of modern education, medicines and western cultures. The current development initiatives on Globalization and liberalization have tended to ignore local

knowledge and traditional practices of the affected communities especially in Africa and in particular Kenya while initiating community development projects. As a result, this approach has led to the failure of development initiatives due to ~~of~~ lack^{of} trust, sense of ownership by the communities and lack of local sustainability strategies. The local indigenous representatives through their indigenous organizations should be given the resources and capacity to address these issues in their midst by a UN arrangement so as to safeguard indigenous traditional knowledge for posterity.

This Brief Address Presented by Programme Coordinator
Chemudep (Cherangany Multipurpose Development Programme) Organization
Solomon Kprugut Koyopel Cherongos
P.O. Box 480
Kapenguria 30600
Kenya
Tel: +254 735 712758
Email: chemudep2004@yahoo.com