

## **INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND THEIR RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT**

**Intervention by Lena M. Davids at the 20<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, held in Geneva from 22 to 26 July 2002.**

The rights of women, and in particular the indigenous women, needs the same protection like any other right. The personhood and dignity of indigenous women should be respected. Their lives need to be freed from harmful cultural practices and traditions.

Most women in Namibia work for very low incomes as domestic workers, in the informal sector where they sell food or some produce, or as subsistence farmers. With these low incomes they have to support their children and keep them in school, as many are also single mothers. Low incomes have negative consequences like adequate food security, inadequate housing, alcohol abuse, crime, violence and sexual abuse. Low income also result in women become more and more economically dependent on men as they have greater access to and control over economic resources.

More girls are in school, but some factors such as teenage pregnancies are still preventing girls from completing their schooling. Despite marriage equality legislation, many women are still not seen as equal partners in decision-making at family level. This condition is more visible in our traditional lives. Women do not have the right to decide on number of children to raise.

Educating indigenous women about their rights surrounding certain cultural practices such as being submissive to their husbands is important. The scourge of HIV/AIDS further worsens the scenario.

Involvement in projects should not only be aimed at providing an income, but should give them a feeling of fulfilment, self-esteem and recognition for their worth and contribution to the family and community development

The development of the resources, the skills that indigenous women posses and leadership among Khoe women would enhance their position in the social and economic development as well as participation in the country.