

**IPACC Regional Statement on Agenda Item 3
6th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues
LANDS TERRITORIES AND NATURAL
RESOURCES**

**Presenter: Mary Simat, Chairperson of the Indigenous Peoples
of Africa Co-ordinating Committee (IPACC)**

15 May 2007

Dear Madame Chairperson;

Members of the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee (IPACC) Executive Committee met in Bujumbura, Burundi from 16-19 April 2007. The leaders are elected by IPACC's 150 member organisations. They came from 10 African countries to spend four days in Burundi learning about the United Nations three conventions on Biological Diversity, Desertification and Climate Change and planning a strategy to organise indigenous peoples' approach to protecting and managing natural resources.

The meeting was opened by the Honourable Minister of Land Management, the Environment and Tourism of the Republic of Burundi, Mme Odette Kayitesi. Burundi is the only African country to formally recognise indigenous peoples and include them in the national parliament and senate.

The Burundian Minister praised the efforts of IPACC and emphasised that indigenous peoples are important stakeholders in protecting Africa's natural heritage and traditional knowledge systems. She encouraged other African governments to value the contribution of indigenous peoples.

Some of the topics that were discussed included the destruction of grazing lands, deforestation, drought, access to safe water, destruction of plants and animals, and the displacement of indigenous peoples. A major concern was how to help protect and promote how indigenous peoples pass knowledge from one

generation to another. All of the leaders noted that their knowledge systems are at risk and needs urgent attention.

In an exercise on analysing why grazing lands are being destroyed, the IPACC team discovered that the underlying problem in Africa has a **policy root**. Using a logical framework technique, the indigenous leaders, both pastoralists and hunter-gatherers, recognised that there needs to be a marriage in Africa between **national Environmental policies** and recognition **and participation of indigenous peoples** and their knowledge systems.

Central African delegates put the emphasis on protecting forest biodiversity. Indigenous leaders from Burundi, Gabon and Rwanda all noted that the pharmaceutical companies want to have access to their knowledge about medicinal plants. They need to learn more about how to protect their rights, and use traditional knowledge to help their communities and their countries.

North and West African delegates were concerned about climate changes and increasing drought. They felt that old knowledge of water management in pastoralism and arid area agriculture needs more attention and recognition. The rush to modernisation in agriculture has put aquifers at risk now that the climate is changing.

In East Africa, hunter-gatherers and pastoralists expressed their concern about how privatisation, land invasions and protected areas are causing strains on natural resources. There are new mechanisms to study traditional knowledge but these need to be linked to environmental management.

Southern Africans also expressed concern about climate change and unsustainable land use by agricultural communities.

The workshop recommended plans of action for each sub-region of Africa. The action plans includes more training on the three Rio Conventions, building up strategic partnerships with other civil society groups, pilot projects which help show how traditional knowledge can play a role in protecting the environment and monitoring climate change. An Africa Regional Action Plan will be produced and circulated to indigenous peoples in English, French, Swahili and Afrikaans.

We make the following recommendations:

- PF has an important role to play in improving UN agency programming which links national and subregional environmental programmes with the traditional knowledge system and full participation of indigenous peoples;
- Our primary concern is that UNESCO, CBD, CCD, FAO, UNEP and UNDP work more closely on pilot projects which link traditional knowledge with natural resources management and protection of the environment.

- The UN has taken important steps on recognising pastoralism as a sustainable livelihood, more attention is needed on the hunting and gathering as sustainable alternatives to agriculture.
- Indigenous peoples are still experiencing victimisation and displacement in protected areas. The UN has an important role to play in helping conservation scientists understand the value of traditional knowledge in sustainable management of natural resources.
- We recommend more national forums to create dialogue between the UN, national governments and indigenous peoples, such as the experimental efforts of UNIPACK in Kenya;
- We recommend that African states propose Indigenous Peoples as Major Groups, with appropriate status in the COPs for the Convention to Combat Desertification and the Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- The spokesperson for FAO has said they are conducting Regional Consultations. We invite you to Africa to meet with pastoralist and hunting-gatherer indigenous peoples and our representative structures