



Tebtebba Foundation

(Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education)
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"NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN"

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
First Session, 13-24 May 2002, New York
Agenda Item No. 6

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATING TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: Economic and Social Development

Victoria Tauli Corpuz, Executive Director

The dismal poverty situation prevailing in many indigenous peoples' communities is a testimony to the fact that the benefits of economic and social development did not trickle down to those who need these the most. This is not just the case with indigenous peoples in the developing or underdeveloped countries but also those in the developed world. Even if it is common knowledge that this is the situation it is not adequately backed by hard empirical data.

In this era of globalization the disparity between the poor and the rich within and between countries has exacerbated. Some case studies show that the poverty situation of indigenous peoples has worsened in the past five years. While more wealth has been created this got more concentrated in the hands of fewer countries, corporations and individuals. Bill Gates for instance earns \$700 a minute while there are more than 1 billion people who earn less than \$1 a day. Many indigenous peoples are in this category. Indigenous peoples are pushed to be integrated into the global market economy of which they do not have any control at all and in most cases they end up as the losers. This is because corporations are given more rights than indigenous peoples.

Mr. Chairperson, development, as we have seen so far, has been a key problem for many indigenous peoples' worldwide. The term development aggression was coined which means the destruction of indigenous peoples' lands and cultures because of large scale development projects brought in by the government or by multinational and national corporations. In most cases these projects are supported by the multilateral financial institutions, by Export Credit Agencies like the Japan Bank for International Corporation or the Overseas Private Investment Corporation of the United States of America and even by UN agencies and programs.

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development of its policy guideline called *Tribal Peoples in Bank-Financed Projects* in 1982 came about after the Igorot peoples successfully stopped the Chico River Dam Project which they funded. I am proud to say I was part of this struggle. This shows what we can achieve in terms of changing policies and paradigms.

On the issue of economic and social development my organization would like to propose the following two points.

1. The Permanent Forum may consider to be engaged in moving further the discourse on “Indigenous Peoples and Development”.

In the 80s, when the women’s movements initiated the women and development project, the UN bodies and even the World Bank got into this. Now the mainstreaming of gender has become a policy of many governments, the UN and the multilateral banks. Huge amounts of funds are coursed to gender and development projects and programs. If there is such a thing as Gender and Development, then there is no reason why Indigenous Peoples and Development could also be developed.

The right to self-determination of indigenous peoples includes our right to determine how development should take place in our communities. This provides the basis for an Indigenous Peoples and Development project. Our contribution in bringing about sustainable development to this world was acknowledged in Agenda 21 of UNCED. The Permanent Forum can create a small working group which includes some PF members, other indigenous peoples and some UN agencies to look into how it can be engaged in this endeavour.

2. The Permanent Forum may consider to come out with a regular *State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples Report*. This will include a chapter on the poverty situation of indigenous peoples and recommendations on how this should be addressed.

This was also proposed by Madame Daes in her speech at the first day. The UNDP has a *Human Development Report*, the UNEP has a *Global Environment Outlook*, the UNIFEM has the *World Women’s Statistics*, and so on and so forth. The Permanent Forum can also have its *State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples Report* in the future.

3. The Permanent Forum should endeavour to make guidelines for making corporations accountable and responsible in pursuing their operations in indigenous peoples’ territories. This should include the issue of compensation or reparations for damaged lands and waters as a result of their activities.

Mr. Chairperson, it may seem that with each intervention the burden of the Permanent Forum becomes heavier. However, as many have said we, indigenous peoples in this room and elsewhere will be there to share these burdens. But we have to be clear on what our priorities are. This is to ensure that the Permanent Forum will have adequate resources from the regular UN budget and it will have its own secretariat. With these, the possibilities of bringing about shifts in the development thinking and practice of the UN and the World Bank to become more indigenous peoples sensitive will be greater.