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Indigenous Peoples: Development with Culture and Identity

Articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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**Indigenous Peoples Self-Determined Development &
Lessons from Kalimantan Credit Union Movement**

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“... the word “development” in its Pali equivalent means “disorderliness” or “confusion”. ... Ivan Illich once told me that the Latin word *progressio*, which is the root of “development”, can also means “madness.” ...”

(Sivaraksa, 1992:35)

Ever since the word “development” was introduced and frequently used as a new jargon in many international affairs and diplomacy after the World War II, it has become a dominant vocabulary with the effects perhaps comparable only to the spread of a religion. Development has been used by several dictatorship regimes such as Soeharto in Indonesia, to suppress any critics to his anti-democratic policies. Questioning any government projects or activities carried out in the name of “development” was then considered a subversive act against the state and the government and thus could end up in jail.

Experts all over the world have tried to define “development” and clarify what Ivan Illich believes “can also means madness”. Amartya Sen, the winner of 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Science, among others, suggests that we should accept “development as freedom” (Sen, 2000). On the other hand, “freedom without opportunities”, according to Noam Chomsky, “is the devil’s gift.” (Chomsky, 2000:135)

Taking the case of Indonesia as a token example, the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia recognizes the Indigenous Peoples (termed as “Customary-law Communities in the Constitution) under 4 conditions:

1. that they still exist;
2. that they are in accordance with the development of societies, times and civilizations;
3. that they are in accordance with the principles of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia; and
4. that they shall be regulated by law.

The recognition itself stated in the state constitution is undeniably an advanced “development” that has given Indonesian indigenous peoples some freedoms but at the same time, the conditional recognition have left them with no opportunities to exercise those freedoms. Therefore, the legal recognition, even when it is stated in the state constitution, becomes useless. It is after all a “devil’s gift”.

As indigenous peoples, we have been experiencing, witnessing and becoming victims of this so-called “devil’s gift” out from this Developmentalism. In the name of “development” our lands are taken over, our homes destroyed, our mother-earths are raped and ripped. In many places in the past, our brothers and sisters including women and children were even killed or tortured, kidnapped and brainwashed. Perhaps, the most recent shocking case is the one reported by The Guardian about “A Peruvian gang that allegedly killed people and drained fat from their corpseswhich exported the amber liquid to Europe as anti-wrinkle cream.”ⁱ“The gang have been dubbed the "Pishtacos" after an ancient Peruvian myth about white colonialists who killed indigenous people, quartered their bodies with machetes, before extracting the fat and turning it into a range of perfumed soaps.”ⁱⁱ A situation which is best described by Boris Pasternak as, “... the bare, shivering human soul, stripped to the last shred,...” (Pasternak, 1958:394)

However, the world has also been witnessing a constant and uncompromising commitment of struggle for change by indigenous peoples and non-indigenous peoples who have been supporting them. For more than two decades, our struggles have been able to achieve the most important thing a real “development” should be able to offer: “opportunities”. Opportunities that challenge us to exercise our “freedom” and thus bring us to the real fruit of “development”. The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on 13th September 2007 by the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly provides vast options of “opportunities” to exercise our “freedom” and our own “development” model—self-determined development.

However, besides an achievement of our struggle, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Declaration) at the same time also poses challenges. It is an undeniable fact that the Declaration was not supported by all member countries of the United Nations. It is obvious that the United States of America as the country with the most important roles being played in the present world affairs, together with Canada, Australia, New Zealand, (also known as CANZUS group) did not support the Declaration. At the national level, each of us is also experiencing a number of challenges although our government might be one of those who supports this declaration. While the issue of the “right to self determination” (Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) remains “a pain in the neck” for most of our governments, indigenous peoples welcomed it as the most important “opportunities” to push for the kind of development they want.

“Development with Culture and Identity”: Philosophies and Spirituality

Development with Culture and Identity, also refers to as Self-Determined Development, is based on the mandates received especially from the Article 3 and 32 of the Declaration. They are mandates “...for the development or use of their lands and territories and other resources.”ⁱⁱⁱ “Lands, Territories and Other Resources” are indeed the three most important elements which determine the indigenous peoples’ culture and identity. However, at the same time they also become the three most important in terms of interests and objects of “development”. And this has become the heart of the matter, the source of conflicts and the everlasting challenges for indigenous peoples everywhere in this planet, in the past, at present and in the future.

It is undeniable that “development” is a foreign concept for indigenous peoples. It is something we have to approach with extra care, with critical minds and determination for one simple reason: to make sure that it brings us the “freedom” it has and the “opportunities” it is capable to offer. We have to avoid accepting any form of “development” that initially or eventually brings the

opposite impacts: exploitations, destructions, appropriation of our lands and natural resources and cultural genocide of our indigenous identities, in most cases, for the sake of economic and political interests alone. Even with the concept of “Sustainable Development”, we always have to make sure that both the economic, ecological, social, cultural and spiritual benefits are taken into account. None of these benefits could be sacrificed or neglected for the sake of economic benefits alone because it is in contradictory with the real meaning of “sustainability”.

Drawing from the lessons and experiences in Asia, especially in Kalimantan (Borneo) indigenous peoples, I have summarized what I usually call the “Seven Fortunes” (Bamba, 2008:241-249) received by the Dayaks (Kalimantan indigenous peoples) that cover the main principles and philosophies of their natural resources management. The seven principles and philosophies could offer us with some criteria and indicators for our Self-Determined Development or Development with Culture and Identity concept. Unfortunately, these Dayaks principles and philosophies are often in direct opposite position against the activities of the “Global Development Model” implemented by most of the governments and developers around the world.

Those 7 principles and philosophies are briefly summarized below:

	Dayaks Self-Determined Model		Global Development Model
1.	SUSTAINABILITY (BIODIVERSITY)	versus	PRODUCTIVITY (MONOCULTURE)
2.	COLLECTIVITY (COOPERATION)	versus	INDIVIDUALITY (COMPETITION)
3.	NATURALITY (ORGANIC)	versus	ENGINEERED (UNORGANIC)
4.	SPIRITUALITY (RITUALITY)	versus	RATIONALITY (SCIENTIFIC)
5.	PROCESS (EFFECTIVITY)	versus	RESULT (EFFICIENCY)
6.	SUBSISTENCE (DOMESTICITY)	versus	COMERCIALITY (MARKET)
7.	CUSTOMARY LAW (LOCALITY)	versus	STATE LAW (GLOBAL)

1. SUSTAINABILITY (BIODIVERSITY) versus PRODUCTIVITY (MONOCULTURE)

Sustainability and Productivity is hard to compromise. Sustainability demands biodiversity resulting in relatively lower product outputs, while productivity

needs massive, large scale, single type of product to flood the market in order to generate cash incomes. The Dayaks' Rubber Gardens and Rice Fields are the two examples of how this biodiversity principle is at the top priority in their philosophies. The Rubber Gardens are very rich in biodiversity since the rubber trees are growing with other trees in the forests. They don't have to clear an area to plant rubber trees, thus reducing environmental loads and preserving the biodiversity. The priority for biodiversity is also reflected in the Rice fields where they grow hundreds of different local crops, not only paddy rice fields. Both Dayak Rubber Gardens and Rice Fields are under massive destruction from monoculture plantations such as palm oil and industrial tree plantations. The main argument of the government who are developing those huge monoculture plantations and adopting Global Development Model is that the Rubber Gardens and Rice Fields are "unproductive".

2. COLLECTIVITY (COOPERATION) versus INDIVIDUALITY (COMPETITION)

The philosophy behind this principle is that the world is home for all beings, not only humans, animal, plants but also the spirits. The inter-dependency and co-existence are not only among human beings, but also with the non-humans as well. Nature is managed by considering this co-existence. Opening an area for human interests and their needs should be done by considering and respecting the interests of other beings. Before the Dayaks open an area for their Rice Field, they perform a ritual to ask the permission and agreement from the spirits which they believe might exist in that area. Omens and auguries are their media of communication. On the other hands, working on a rice field, building a house, dealing with sickness, death and wedding are all done collectively by the whole members of the community. This is one of the reasons why the Dayaks live in longhouses. The Dayaks are not used to competition and working individually. They live in collective spirit and cooperation to manage their well-beings. That is why they are not the best choice for working in plantations or with mining companies because the companies complain that the Dayaks are less disciplined, less intelligent and lack of formal education to meet the criteria they require. So, the companies employ migrant workers and the more companies operate, the

more migrants flow into the Dayaks villages and territories. Indeed, indigenous peoples including the Dayaks are bad competitors and they are always left behind in the competitions over the natural resources utilizations.

3. NATURALITY^{iv}(ORGANIC) versus ENGINEERED (INORGANIC)

“Naturality” here should be understood as a philosophy to interact with nature based on its laws and carrying capacity. The ethic and moral behind it are human beings should not exploit nature more than its capacity and natural beings no matter how sophisticated and mighty the technologies and knowledge advancements humans being have achieved, because human beings could not live without nature. The two key words are “to manage and to maintain/preserve” nature at the same time and the two actions are inseparable as pre-requisites for avoiding overexploitation and trespassing the limits of nature’s laws and capacities. This philosophy rejects over-exploitation, which is based on greed rather than mutual-benefits and co-existence. It rejects any form of genetic engineering both to human and non-human beings as well as green revolution that pollute nature with man-made chemical substances such as fertilizers and pesticides. Indigenous peoples believe that human sufferings in the form of natural disasters, the spread of new and incurable diseases, extreme hunger and poverty are the result of human’s failure to “manage and maintain” nature based on its capacities.

4. SPIRITUALITY (RITUALITY) versus RATIONALITY (SCIENTIFIC)

The spirituality is manifested in various rituals performed to maintain human beings’ connection with nature and other beings. By performing rituals regularly, human beings tell, teach and remind themselves about their interconnectedness and interdependencies with the nature. It also serves as a medium to enhance their capacity and understanding about “the way of the nature.” In the face of the Global Development Model, this is perceived as extravagant activities, irrationality and a sign of backwardness. In the face of Global Development belief, nature is to be conquered through advancement of science and technologies and rationality is glorified as the symbol of modernization and an educated-civilized society.

5.PROCESS (EFFECTIVITY) versus RESULT (EFFICIENCY)

The consistency in performing various rituals shows how “process” is a top priority for the Dayaks. Effective results are obtained through consistent process. The process sometimes goes through long and complicated steps to maintain the connection with nature and other beings. So, what is done should be effective. The effectiveness is determined by the process being carried out. In the Global Development belief, it is the results that matter. Results should be achieved as efficient as possible to boost production. No wonder why indigenous peoples’ natural resources management systems as well as their way of life are under massive attack and destruction all over the world by Global Development activities.

6.SUBSISTENCE (DOMESTICITY) versus COMERCIALITY (MARKET)

The Dayaks believe that living in prosperity means living in harmony with the nature. Over exploitation and mistreatment of nature will cause sufferings, miseries and disasters to human beings. So, wealth possession must have its limit. Money is a tool not the goal of life. The goal of life is the quality of life instead of quantity. There are four main needs of human beings on earth: survival, sustainable, social and spiritual needs. The management of natural resources should be limited to and fulfillment of those four basic needs. Life should not be based on and driven by greed. The choice of living a subsistent life where the use of natural resources is limited to domestic needs is the manifestation of this philosophy. Although some local products are also produced to be sold through barter with other villages, but the production is limited and controlled based on the principles and philosophies they believe. When commerciality is adopted to fulfill global market demands as demonstrated by Global Development system, over exploitation of natural resources is unavoidable and the earth’s carrying capacity is broken which result in one problems after another that the human beings should suffer from.

7.CUSTOMARY LAW (LOCALITY) versus STATE LAW (GLOBAL)

Customary laws (*Adat Laws*) serve as the basis for controlling and safeguarding the harmonious relationship among human beings themselves and their relationship with other beings and the nature. Customary Laws do not only involve penalties and sentences to the wrongdoers but also a process of reconciliation and healing the disturbed relationship with nature due to the breaking of the commitments to the principles and philosophies. Therefore, customary laws are not universal laws and do not deal with universal norms and values. Therefore, it is regulated based on local context and driven by local necessities. On the other hand, State Laws is not only meant to protect national interests but also influenced by global interests. Some state laws on Forestry, Investment, and Trade tend to protect the global interests rather than the people's interest in a country are fine examples how State Laws are not dependent. However, customary laws also have their weaknesses. When an authoritarian ruler is in power, justice will be in the hand of the ruler or Chieftain. Non-members of the specific community or outsiders also tend to underestimate customary laws. Since the fines of customary laws are relatively low, non-members tend to undervalue them, on the other hand some members of the community could also commercialize them for their own benefits, leaving the moral value of punishment of customary laws neglected.

The above seven principles or philosophies are under massive attacks by the Global Development System and may soon be found in history books at school and university libraries only. As we are witnessing and experiencing from day to day in our own community, the struggle is like "the elephants and the ants". Most governments are supporting multi-national corporations and financial institutions to take over the natural resources management from the indigenous peoples with full support of the police and military forces. Three major development activities are now found in indigenous peoples' territories: monoculture plantations (for biofuels and pulp/paper), mining and loggings. The "ants" have to continually fight against these "elephants".

However, as opportunities are opened up now for indigenous peoples through various achievements especially at international level, the concept of Self-Determined Development Model could be continuously explored, promoted and exercised. Borrowing the above seven principles and philosophies from the Dayaks in Kalimantan, we could clearly see how Self-Determined Development differs from the Global Development Model. These philosophies could be further enriched with the richness of knowledge and experiences from other indigenous peoples in the world.

Dayak Credit Union Movement: Empowering and Liberating

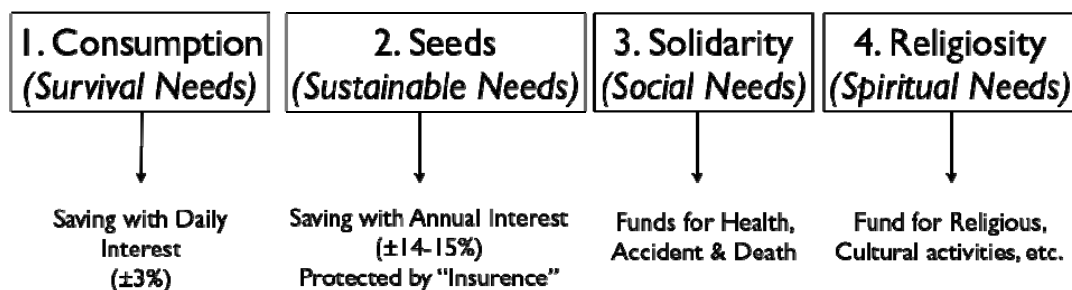
Self-Determined Development could only be materialized if it is rooted and emerged from the indigenous peoples themselves. It is an initiative undertaken by, from, and for the indigenous peoples themselves. Outsiders could support by offering alternatives, shared experiences or facilities. A fine example of this harmonious collaboration and initiative is the Credit Union Movement developed by the Dayak in Kalimantan since 1987. The movement has grown impressively and spread to all over Indonesia while various groups from overseas have also come to learn about this movement.

Similar to the Development itself, Credit Union are not originally a Dayak concept. As its widely knows, the urban Credit Union was first developed in Germany by Franz Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch in 1852, and the rural Credit Union by Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen in 1864 who is also known as the Father of Credit Union^v. The Dayaks only borrowed the Credit Union's financial management system to create their own model based on the Dayaks cultural values and principles. Credit Unions was first introduced to the Dayaks by the Catholic Church in early 1970s. In 1975, there were 95 Credit Unions established all over West Kalimantan but only five remained in operation after one year! The Credit Unions during this period were based on its original model and the Dayaks had to adapt to it. The failure of the first Credit Union Movement in 1970s shows how foreign development model has a slim chance to succeed when introduced and implemented without considering the local culture and identity.

In 1987, an NGO called PancurKasih established their own Credit Union with totally different approach and philosophies. Credit Unions was seen as a tool and as it is a tool, it should be “fixed” according to the needs of the users and the purposes to be reached. PancurKasih believe money is not the goal of the Credit Union. It is the human beings (the members of Credit Union) that become the target. Credit Unions are seen as a tool for empowerment and liberation of the Dayaks from so many serious problems they are facing such as poverty, lack of education and healthcare, as well as investment for their own and future generation.

The philosophies adopted in PancurKasih Credit Union are drawn from the Dayak farmers themselves. According to AR. Mecer, Founder and Chairperson of PancurKasih Movement, they are based on four main obligations that the farmers must do in order to secure their livings in their community (GPPK, 2009: 127-128). First is to secure the daily basic consumption needs (Survival Need), secondly is to secure the seeds for the next season (Sustainable Need), thirdly is to perform their solidarity (Social Need) with their fellow farmers and fourthly is to perform rituals as an obligation to the nature and other beings who co-exist with them (Spiritual Need). The Dayaks believe that these 4 obligations are the four basic needs that no one should avoid in order to live safely and peacefully. These Four Needs are then implemented through various products of services they provide in Credit Union as seen in the following figure:

“THE WAYS OF THE FARMERS”



However, the question remains: Why Credit Unions? Why should it be something originally from Germany? A quick and simple answer to these questions is

because Credit Unions offer “freedom” and “opportunities” to the Dayaks. It gives them freedom to exercise their cultural knowledge, explore new possibilities in order to respond to new challenges and at the same time giving them opportunities to manage their resources independently and collectively. In the Credit Union, the Dayaks find a way to exercise their self-determined development model based on their own culture and identity. Although they are using foreign systems of organization and management, they have the freedom to choose which ones are beneficial and contribute to their empowerment and at the same time gain independency in altering the model to suit their needs and local context.

Within the PancurKasih Movement, Credit Unions are all about making changes. Changes from the circle of impoverishment, desperation, feeling of helplessness and hopelessness, and from dependencies to outsiders as the results of centuries of oppression and marginalization. And the changes have to be done from changing oneself with the help of others. Through this effort, a better quality of life could be achieved and when it happens, it is a liberating and empowering process in the community.

So, Credit Unions are about managing people. By changing oneself, it contributes to the changes of situation. It is done simply by helping oneself first (1st Principles: Self-Reliance); by helping him/herself, a person is also helping others (by not becoming a burden to others) and will be capable of helping the others (2nd Principle: Solidarity). No matter how small the potential a person has, when it is collected together with others, it could gradually become a powerful force to make changes. When this struggling process is started, grown by, controlled through and dependant on EDUCATION (3rd Principles: Education), the changes are sure to happen sooner or later. In the education process through various training and discussions, the community tries to change their mindset (that they are hopeless), false belief (that they are too poor and uneducated to take actions)

and mentality (of dependencies) so that they will start taking concrete actions together.

As a result of this struggling process, the PancurKasih Movement Credit Union alone has reached nearly 100,000 members by the end of 2008 with a total assets of more than US\$6m(PKCU, 2009). When it was first established in 1987, this Credit Union only had 61 members with the assets of US\$16. However, PancurKasih Movement Credit Union is not the only Credit Union developed and facilitated by the PancurKasih movement. By the end of 2008, a total of 54 Credit Unions has been established all over Indonesia in 13 Provinces in 9 islands. The total members of those Credit Unions combined together is close to 500,000 (496,007) with a total assets of US\$313m (BKCUK, 2009).

The success of PancurKasih Movement Credit Union is clearly seen not only from its total numbers of members and assets but also from its comparison with other Credit Unions in Indonesia (non PancurKasih Movement Credit Union). By the end of 2008, there are 851 Credit Unions all over Indonesia with a total of 1,154,208 members and assets of US\$575m (CUCO-Indonesia, 2009). Although PancurKasih Movement Credit Union are only 54 (6.3% of all Credit Union in Indonesia) but almost half of all the Credit Union members in Indonesia are in those 54 Credit Unions and 54.43% of all the assets are from PancurKasih Movement Credit Union.

Credit Union Contribution to Poverty Reduction and Strengthening of Indigenous Peoples' Rights

A two-decades of existence of the Credit Union Movement in Kalimantan has brought very significant changes to the way the Dayaks perceive themselves in term of their own potential and capabilities to make changes. It has opened up new confidence that a self-determined development is possible. Through the Credit Union, they have been experiencing a new process of development that could empower and liberate them from previous desperate conditions without destroying their identity and culture as Indigenous Peoples. The Credit Unions have supported them both financially and non-financially as they experience through the following benefits.

1. Financial Benefits

Credit Unions have given indigenous peoples the opportunity to secure their future through their investments as members both in shares and non-shares investment with reliable productive income from the dividends up to 15% per annum. As members of Credit Unions, they are now have direct access to financial sources that they can use to fulfill their needs for better health-care, education, as well as productive activities to secure incomes for their family with low and reasonable interests (2% sliding or 1.5% flat interests rate). Through the spirit of togetherness and working in groups, they have more opportunities now to manage community projects to provide better public facilities such as roads, electricity, clean water, etc. The Credit Unions also allow them to manage Community Funds to be used for their cultural and religious activities.

2. Non-Financial Benefits

By having access to financial sources in the Credit Unions, the communities have found better solutions to solve their immediate and emergency needs. Before there were Credit Unions in their areas, people used to turn to the only asset they had to fulfill their need for immediate cash: LANDS. Credit Unions have significantly help reduce the selling of communities' lands as well as extractions of natural resources such as timbers to fulfill their needs for cash. As the Credit Unions prioritize the continuous education of their members to be able to have sound financial management, the communities are protected from gambling and consumerism. The universal and non-discriminatory values attached to the Credit Unions have promoted peace building and reconciliation in conflict-prone areas while multiculturalism and pluralism are implemented in concrete actions within communities. These and other contributions that the Credit Unions are able to deliver have strengthened the safety, unity, and solidarity of the members of the communities where they are operate and eventually contribute directly to achieve the dignity and sovereignty of indigenous peoples.

Conclusion

Credit Unions are only one example of a possible self-determined development model that have been implemented by the indigenous peoples in Kalimantan which at the same time also brings empowering and liberating impacts. It shows how a “development” model, which is originally come from outside indigenous peoples culture, could be implemented and transformed in accordance to the local culture and identity. It might not be a perfect example and time will still have to test it. The development of this movement for more than two decades in Kalimantan and Indonesia in general has at least taught us a number of lessons, which could become valuable experiences to be shared with indigenous peoples in other parts of the world.

However, as with other development models coming from outside indigenous peoples, Credit Unions should also be implemented wisely and carefully. In places where the communities have been so disorganized and lost their collectivity due to continuous marginalization and oppression, the establishment of a Credit Union perhaps should be done as the last step. Therefore, there are a number of challenges that have to be faced by those who decide to implement it in their communities. Experiences have taught us that the biggest challenge is how to manage a Credit Union within the principles, philosophies and spiritualities of the Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, Credit Union Movements should be supported with strong community organizing efforts, cultural revitalization and transformation as well as strengthening natural resources management. Credit Unions are dealing with capital and when the principles, philosophies and spiritualities are replaced by greed and get-rich-quick mentality, Credit Unions could also become a very powerful destroying force for indigenous peoples as it opens its mask and shows its real “development” face which many have warned as capable of creating “disorderliness”, “confusion” and even “madness”. However, when the community is able to manage a Credit Union within their wisdoms, knowledge and philosophies, it could become a powerful tool to foster changes to bring the real empowerment and liberation for the indigenous peoples.

End Notes:

ⁱ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/20/peru-gang-killing-human-fat>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/peruvian-gang-killed-farmers-to-extract-fat-for-antiwrinkle-treatment-14571889.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Article 32, point 1.

^{iv} The term “Naturality” is used here instead of “Naturalism” to avoid it being associated or misunderstood with “Fatalism” which is perceived as “...living in harmony with whatever fate it delivers.” See: Darrow.L. Miller, “The Development Ethic: Hope for A Culture of Poverty, University of the Nations.” <http://www2.gospelcom.net/uofn/kona/resources/worldview/devethic.html>

^v http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Credit_union 12/18/09 2:27:45 PM

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