

United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development 16, 7 May 2008
“Drought and its impact on hunger and poverty”

Introduction

Indigenous Peoples live in different environments around the world. They have adapted to live in numerous different locations such as deserts and forests. In living in such environments Indigenous Peoples have garnered unique local knowledge about their environment. However, they now face changes to their environment which are not of their making in particular the effects of development such as deforestation, displacement and degradation of their land. For example, approximately fifty indigenous communities living in the Amazon River region close to Iquitos have moved to the cities or other locations in order to find food and water because the river is now twenty meters below its normal flow.

For many Indigenous Peoples drought has become a new issue to deal with. Drought is commonly defined as a temporary reduction in moisture availability significantly below the normal for a specified period (FAO, 2007). It is the view of Indigenous Peoples that drought in their lands and territories has increased because of climate change, deforestation, industrial agriculture and degradation of their land. Such practices often bring a negative impact to indigenous communities contributing to displacement, loss of their traditional knowledge, loss of their biodiversity and ultimately the loss of their land and territories.

The causes of drought in indigenous communities are related to climate variability and non-availability of surface water resources. The main cause of a rainfall shortage is due to one or more factors including the absence of moisture in the atmosphere. These features involve changes in local, regional and global weather patterns. Increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have been suggested as causes of rainfall changes, which are in turn, attributed to climate change.

Drought and Indigenous Peoples

In the last decade the impact of drought has increased in Indigenous Peoples' land and territories. This has effected the culture of indigenous communities making them more vulnerable. It has brought the loss of traditional knowledge because Indigenous Peoples are forced to move to other places for food and safety. Many Indigenous Peoples have for centuries worked on their agriculture systems. They have developed their agricultural systems on the basis of their environment and weather conditions.

For example, traditionally the Yaqui Indigenous Peoples have used many different seeds according to their environment and climate. They have diversified their plants and animals with selective breeding by crossing the same species with different varieties to achieve desired characteristics.

According to Ms. Lucy Mulenkei¹ countries like Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya are predominantly made up of arid and semi arid lands with a vast population comprised of Pastoralists Indigenous Peoples scattered all around the region. The effect of drought is mostly evident in the Nomadic Pastoral indigenous communities' areas in countries like Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan and parts of Cameroon where due to the destruction of forests and heavy logging the number of people affected has increased significantly.

The existing impacts of drought are very clear to indigenous peoples' communities as they affect their economic, cultural and environmental relationships as peoples.

A – Economic

For centuries Indigenous Peoples have developed their own systems of agriculture and cultivation and they have also used agriculture as a basis for their own economies. Drought impacts Indigenous Peoples because of the reliance of indigenous agriculture on surface and groundwater supplies. Droughts frequently are associated with insect infestations, plant disease, and wind erosion. Indigenous Peoples also suffer losses in crop yields and livestock production. The frequency of forest and range fires increases substantially during extended periods of drought alarming both human and wildlife populations which are placed at higher levels of risk.

B – Environmental

The well-being of Indigenous Peoples will be reflected by identifying the variety of wild animals, plants, trees, and the natural and genetic resources that exist in Indigenous Peoples lands and territories. The loss of traditional animals, native trees and biodiversity in Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories undoubtedly leads to the loss of traditional knowledge, sustainability, and the loss of traditional practices. Many environmental effects remain for extended periods of time and may even become permanent. The wildlife habitat, for example, may be degraded through the loss of wetlands, lakes, and vegetation. The degradation of landscape quality, including increased soil erosion, may lead to a more permanent loss of biological productivity in areas which are more vulnerable.

C – Cultural

¹ Name Lucy's paper.

Cultural impacts involve indigenous peoples' food security, food sovereignty, safety, health, spirituality and their right to life. Indigenous Peoples migration to urban areas is a significant problem in many countries, often forced by displacement, lack of water supply, degradation of their lands and illegal logging in their territories. Rural Urban migration has increased, causing stress and poverty for Indigenous women, elders, the sick and children who are left in the rural areas. For example, among the Nomadic Pastoralists the lack of water and pasture for their livestock has caused conflict among the tribes as they compete for resources. When the drought has abated, the migrants seldom return home, depriving rural areas of valuable human resources. The drought migrants place increasing pressure on the social infrastructure of other areas, leading to increased poverty and social unrest.

Indigenous Peoples and their participation

Many policies have been discussed without any meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples regarding the adaptation and mitigation of issues affecting them. For example, the adaptation and mitigation measures discussion in UNFCCC has not considered the mitigation measures at the national and international levels.

The recognition and implementation of the adopted UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is imperative. Their ownership, permanent sovereignty, control and management of their lands, territories and natural resources must be established in legal frameworks at international and national levels. It is essential that government departments, policy makers, UN agencies and other related financial institutions recognize and promote the UN Declaration noting that the well-being of Indigenous Peoples relies heavily on the protection and sustainability of biodiversity, and the recognition of Indigenous lands for the well-being of present and future generations.

The fundamental rights of Indigenous Peoples such as rights to land, food and water, are directly related to agriculture, land, and drought including climate crisis impacts. The majority of States members' policies are either absent or not effective in protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, their lands and territories, air and water, biodiversity, food, culture, and sacred sites.

The majority of indigenous lands and territories have been used as sources of energy, industrial agriculture, related natural resource extraction and development activities which have frequently damaged and currently threaten indigenous subsistence, pastoral and livestock livelihoods, culture and traditional food systems.

Governmental agencies, financial institutions and the private sector have not acted appropriately in relation to the massive damage and degradation of natural resources that impact indigenous communities. They have failed to address issues of assessment, cleanup plans, the mitigation of natural resource damage, human health and ecosystem impacts, and other environmental problems on indigenous lands and territories.

Measures to strengthen Indigenous People's livelihood and adaptation strategies

We recommend the following measures to combat these issues we have raised.

- 1 Support and develop local technologies, including shallow wells, sub-surface dams, and water harvesting techniques, local seed varieties and the planting of indigenous tree species.
- 2 Support the marketing of local products
- 3 Document past and present adaptation strategies and supplement them with relevant strategies and technologies, and support local knowledge systems
- 4 Facilitate improvements of production systems adapted to normal climate stress, like pastoralism and indigenous tree products, through strengthening marketing infrastructure, veterinary services, research and development, processing and value adding.
- 5 Evaluate how infrastructure provision may affect the climate change vulnerability of the indigenous peoples for example water access for adaptation strategies
- 6 Encourage and recognize the drought circle management practiced and used by Indigenous Peoples