Empowering Indigenous Peoples

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Introduction

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Disempowering Indigenous Peoples

The term empowerment covers a vast landscape of meanings, interpretations, definitions and disciplines ranging from psychology and philosophy to self-help industry and motivational sciences. It can be construed to mean the promotion of self actualization and influence. Empowerment is also manifested in the processes of giving official authority or power. It also occurs through the improvement of conditions, standards, events, and a global perspective of life.

According to the UNFPA, Indigenous Peoples number around 370 million in some 70 countries. Their defining characteristic is their historical connections to their lands and territories, distinct cultures and identity and political, social and economic marginalization. The marginalization of indigenous peoples is manifested in the overt or covert trends within nation states whereby indigenous peoples are perceived as lacking desirable traits or deviating from the state norms. Consequently, indigenous peoples tend to be excluded by wider society and regularly ostracized as undesirables.

According to IFAD, Indigenous peoples constitute about 5% of the world's population yet account for about 15% of the world's poor. Indigenous Peoples have seen and continue to see, disproportionate levels of murder, suicide, violence, sexual abuse, prostitution, alcoholism, drug addiction, emotional abuse, homelessness, and poverty and the criminality that follows from all this. In the United States, more than half of children in the Tohono O'odham Nation and 42 percent of Pascua Yaqui children are impoverished, compared with 24 percent of all children in Pima County, Arizona. For children, growing up in poverty dims their chances of success as adults. The chaos that comes with unstable housing, spotty school attendance and limited access to nutritious food and health care make it more likely kids will grow up to be unemployed,

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2 http://www.unfpa.org/rights/people.htm
3 http://www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/index_full.htm
unhealthy and in trouble with the law.\(^4\) Poverty is deeply psychological. Contributing to cycles of dependence and hopelessness. According to Manley Begay, senior lecturer and associate social scientist in the American Indian Studies program at the University of Arizona, American Indian children have the highest suicide rate of any minority group.\(^5\)

Though there are efforts to address indigenous peoples issues especially over the last decade, there are still major challenges. In Latin America, there is tremendous improvements in the achievement of some social indicators. But little progress has been made with respect to poverty.

Governments and the broader civil society are often unwitting or enthusiastic participants in the marginalization of indigenous peoples. This is either through laws and policies they make and/or through the lack of implementation of laws and policies that address indigenous peoples issues. Before Indian tribes received federal recognition in 1975, native communities couldn't do anything without permission from the (US) government. This created, a pervasive sense of dependency. Governments knowingly or unknowingly push indigenous peoples into poverty.

Concepts like "terra nullius", "public domain", "national interests" among others drive the dispossession of indigenous peoples of their lands and territories and knowledge systems. And despite an impressive reduction of discriminatory laws and policies, concepts like "equality" "national integration", "unity" and "cohesion" among others are further fueling the continued marginalization of indigenous peoples because treating as equal people in unequal circumstances results in discrimination and injustices.

Across the globe, Indigenous Peoples experience diversion of life support systems like rivers, denial of basic services like schools, hospitals and roads. This denies them the means to pursue economic development and health. In Africa, agriculture oriented national economic policies are decimating pastoralist and hunter gatherer livelihoods, cultures and support systems. Rapid conversion of indigenous peoples territories into farmland also increases deforestation and consequently climate change and desertification. Some taxation polices and agricultural incentives also drive deforestation. This not only increases water stress, health complications and poverty, but also thwarts the attainment of intended food security objectives.

With disrupted cultures, patterns of livelihoods and communal support systems, indigenous peoples become unable to continue being self-sufficient and become dependent on charity, or welfare from governments, NGOs and other well-wishers. They lose their self-confidence and initiative. The opportunities denied them also deprive them of the pride of accomplishment which others, who have those opportunities, can develop for themselves. This in turn can lead to psychological, social and even mental health problems.


UN Declaration as a basis for empowering Indigenous Peoples.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) provides the basic framework for empowering Indigenous Peoples. A non-binding declaration of moral import, UNDRIP provides essential standards for the recognition and protection of indigenous peoples rights internationally by providing both policy makers and indigenous peoples the framework to mitigate the disadvantages experienced by many of the world's 370 million indigenous peoples.\(^6\)

UNDRIP does not confer new rights. It affirms the social, political, economic, cultural and political rights recognized by other international instruments which most countries have ratified. Indigenous Peoples rights are not therefore special rights but an articulation of universal human rights as they apply to indigenous peoples\(^7\). However, many countries still remain reluctant to take proactive steps to actualize the rights enshrined in UNDRIP. By refusing to recognize, protect and promote these rights, many states are not only missing the opportunity to address issues of poverty that affect the most impoverished sections of their populations, but are also perpetuating the continued impoverishment of their citizenry.

The idea of self determination in UNDRIP isn't geared towards putting asunder what history put together. Rather, it should be approached as an opportunity through which indigenous peoples take charge of their own destinies. Self determination encourages proactivity and the pursuit of prosperity. The idea of self-determined development is being practiced in Indian reservations in USA and is manifested through tribal enterprises that indigenous peoples have established, with the support of the federal government, and are using to generate incomes supporting community services like health, water, scholarships among others. Last year, Arizona tribes collected nearly $2 billion in gross gaming revenues and gave $85 million to the state to fund public education and trauma care, among other services. The Tohono O'odham Nation is among the city's top-15 public employers, providing the equivalent of 4,350 full-time jobs. More than 1,200 of those are at their Desert Diamond Casinos. The Pascua Yaqui's Sol Casinos runs two casinos in Tucson, with the equivalent of 1,300 full-time jobs. A 2011 expansion added a $130 million resort, spa and convention center, recently designated a Forbes Travel Guide Four-Star Award winner.\(^8\)

With self determination, Indigenous Peoples right to Free, Prior and Informed consent (FPIC) will then serves a dual purpose of not only safeguarding indigenous peoples rights and interests but also ensures that "greater common good" projects enjoy the widest support and benefits for everyone along the project chain. Indigenous peoples right to FPIC becomes a facilitative


process rather than a confrontational, time consuming unnecessary expense. In the many cases around the world where indigenous peoples rights to FPIC has been operationalized, the projects have tended to be rather successful as opposed to those projects that these right has been ignored.

In the pursuit of self determined prosperity, the idea of cultural appropriateness becomes important as it builds on the known to the unknown. Indigenous peoples need partnerships with states, the private sector and the society at large. It is therefore critical that the partnerships are forged on the basis of shared visions.

**Indigenous Peoples and Decent work**

There is no specific policy document on Indigenous Peoples employment and decent work. The International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 of 1989 (ILO 169) makes considerable effort to overcome discrimination of indigenous peoples. The Convention covers issues of employment, vocational training, education, health and social security, customary law, traditional institutions, language, religious beliefs and cross-border cooperation. This are all crucial components of the wholistic empowerment of indigenous peoples. However, the Convention does not cover issues of indigenous peoples in the work place as indigenous peoples are not part of its membership. Work on this area needs to be initiated.

ILO 169 makes it the duty of the state to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples. It lays emphasis on coordination and systematic government action through the establishments of mechanisms for coordination among several government institutions and branches as indigenous peoples issues are cross-cutting. Coordinated and systematic government action towards indigenous peoples issues in currently lacking in Asia and Africa. Unfortunately, ILO 169 is one of the least ratified conventions, with only 22 ratifications to date. Only one country has ratified the Convention in both Africa and Asia while the most ratifications are from Latin America.

Arguably, indigenous peoples may be found engaged in decent work in many countries. Some may even hold very high office. But comparatively, they constitute an insignificant minority among indigenous peoples and in the broader labour force. In many instances, it often times necessary for indigenous peoples to be connected to the political and economic elites for them to secure decent work. Indigenous peoples lack this high level, diverse networks.

In Africa, indigenous peoples enjoying decent work are at various stages of disconnectedness with their cultures and traditions. Some are in the forefront driving the "change" agenda. Rather

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10 Central Africa Republic
11 Nepal
12 [From Disadvantages to Success? Indigenous Entrepreneurship in the urban market place](http://sociology.arizona.edu/content/school-sociology-hosts-dr-rochelle-r-côté-special-brownbag-lecture); Rochelle R. Cote, Phd. Ongoing post-Doctorate study, Department of Sociology, University of Arizona.
than exploring avenues of fitting indigenous cultures, livelihoods and knowledge systems into a globalizing world, they work hard at shoving globalization down their communities throats! They have been totally assimilated into the mainstream.

Policies shift

In efforts to empower indigenous peoples, a more focussed, inclusive but culturally appropriate policy shift is need. Such a shared vision cannot be possible without with some key ingredients that include;

**Recognition** - the key question is "how do you empower that which you do not recognize"?

While giant strides have been achieved in the recognition of indigenous rights at the international level as evidenced through the establishment of the three UN mechanisms on Indigenous rights - the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, many countries, especially in Africa and Asia are still unwilling or reluctant to recognize indigenous peoples in their territories. Often times, valuable time is wasted on arguments of definition, then identification, then implementation even where regional bodies, like the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights have consistently addressed and communicated with states on the issue of indigenous peoples.

**Two-way capacity building** that will enable not only policy markers but also indigenous peoples understand each others positions and priorities becomes a priority. Most capacity building initiatives are often targeted indigenous peoples. Policies that destroy indigenous cultures, livelihoods and traditions are made, advocated for and pursued. On the other hand, indigenous peoples view governments with distrust. To indigenous peoples, any government initiatives are attempts to grab their lands, territories and resources. This much change. Two way capacity building will enable **Dialogue for prosperity on the basis of a shared common future**. Capacity building efforts must also be targeted at UN country coordinators especially in Africa. Building greater understanding of indigenous peoples issues at this level will spur greater UN system wide programs on Indigenous People in the respective countries.

**Development of Indigenous Peoples by states and UN agencies** is critical in efforts to empower indigenous peoples. It is unfortunate that despite the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples having been adopted by the UN General Assembly, binding UN agencies, the existence of UN Development Group Guidelines on Indigenous Issues, and the existence of an interagency support group (IASG), many UN agencies are yet to develop policies on indigenous peoples. Further, most states also do not have policies and laws on Indigenous Peoples. It is ironical that some government nominates representatives to indigenous mechanisms but still

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remain reluctant to recognize or develop policies on indigenous peoples. However, recent developments indicate a slow but encouraging shift towards recognition of indigenous peoples. Republic of Congo has formulated an Indigenous Peoples law, Kenya has constitutional language on indigenous peoples while Central Africa Republic and Nepal have ratified ILO Convention 169. They are many other positive examples. Support for the development and implementation of indigenous peoples focussed policies should be accelerated.

Strategies for empowering indigenous peoples

1. **The development of a collective, shared vision** between Indigenous Peoples, Governments and the UN system will be an key step towards the empowerment of indigenous peoples. The shared vision will create excitement and allow everyone to work together for a shared objective and purpose. It creates a common identity and a sense of purpose and will encourage new ways of thinking and acting. The high-level plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, to be known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), that will be held on Monday, September 22 and Tuesday, September 23, 2014, at the UN headquarters in New York, USA presents an opportunity for concretizing a such shared vision. It is important therefore for Governments, UN system and indigenous peoples participate in the national, regional and global preparatory processes leading up to the World Conference. The discussions towards the post-2015 development agenda and goals also provide another opportunity. The Department of Public Communication should collaborate with the UNPFII to design a communication strategy.

2. **Accelerated recognition of rights will reduce marginalization ensuring** increased, deliberate inclusion in political spaces. The close interrelationship between indigenous peoples livelihoods, cultures and knowledge systems with their environments demands that Indigenous Peoples rights must be recognized as a strategy to empower them. In countries where indigenous peoples rights have been recognized, indigenous peoples have been able to organize themselves politically and economically. According to IFAD, ending the marginalization of indigenous peoples could bring about the expansion of the national economies of Bolivia (by 37%), Brazil (by 13%), Guatemala (by 14%) and Peru (by 5%).

3. **Provision of quality education to indigenous children should be pursued decisively** from the primary level to university. Quality education should target both students and teachers. Provision of learning materials and continuing education for teachers is key. However, education should enable children to reconnect with their roots and cultures not detach them.

4. **Partnerships for development** that address a spectrum of issues that include education, health and economic development among others, are critical. The partnerships should based on appreciatively inquiry what is working in a particular indigenous peoples territory and building on it guarantees community interest and commitment. Greater coordination will be necessary to maximize the use of scarce resources and avoid duplicity. Every effort must
made towards the recognition and utilization of traditional knowledge inline with the principles of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. Recommendation 12 of the Programme of Action of the Second Decade of the World’s Indigenous People states that “culture should be integrated as a prerequisite for any development project design in order to build development with identity, respecting people’s way of life and building sustainable human development”. Shared experiences will foster partnerships.

5. **Indigenous Peoples entrepreneurship programs** should be promoted, developed and supported. Indigenous Peoples have plenty but still in poverty. Tribal enterprises in the US can provide best practice on how community enterprises can be formed and managed. They will also provide good experiences of benefit sharing. The first step then would be processes aimed at indigenous peoples mapping resources in their territories both as a means of securing and entrepreneurship development. Government must be willing to invest in community enterprises as a way of addressing poverty issues. Community enterprises should be driven by culture and traditional knowledge. There is a pressing need for financial literacy training for indigenous peoples. Majority of indigenous peoples have no idea how the money economy works and cannot therefore take advantage of it. Aggressive market access should then be pursued for indigenous peoples products.

6. **Mechanisms for the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples should** be built and/or strengthened. Best practices can be drawn from the UNREDD program and World Bank Forest Carbon Facility program where indigenous peoples participation is not only designed into the program documents but constitutes key components of REDD+ countries advancement. Indigenous Peoples seat in the highest decision making bodies to the two programs. The programs have also established indigenous specific capacity building funds with significant amounts of money. It is important to realize that Indigenous Peoples are often diverse in a country and many instances, they decision making processes are collapsing. Strengthening indigenous peoples decision making process therefore becomes part of empowerment. The right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is an enabling right that allows indigenous peoples to agree or not to agree on projects. These curtail the exploitative liberties of states and ruling elite that includes the private sector. The right to FPIC is key in the empowerment of indigenous peoples. However, the right to FPIC should not be seen as an obstacle to development. It should approached as facilitative process that secures investments in the long run. The negotiation power of the community should be strengthened. Effective mechanisms for participation imply that indigenous women, youth and persons with disability are involved throughout programming cycles and strategic planning processes, as well as consciously and proactively undertaking all efforts to ensure that their rights are respected, promoted and strengthened as part of the programming and project activities.
7. Good governance Governance is at the heart of most development and poverty reduction efforts today, including those aimed at realizing the Millennium Development Goals. As UN walks towards the Post-2015 Development goals, it is critical good governance is put at centre of the discussion. Drawing lessons from the failure of the MDGs to lift indigenous peoples out of poverty will be important. Useful lessons can be learned in 13th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues that will held in May 2014. The theme of the session will be "Principles of good governance consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: articles 3 to 6 and 46 (3). The Programme of Action, Second Decade of the World’s Indigenous People recommended that indigenous organizations should establish committees at the national and local level to monitor the implementation of the programme of action … [and] that Governments should establish national focal points on indigenous issues and on the Second Decade and intensify coordination and communication at the national level among relevant ministries, agencies and local authorities. This should be actualized in the post-2015 development agenda.

8. New forms technology and social media are critical in creating awareness, spreading opportunities and simplifying processes. "MPESA" an innovative money transfer service by a telephone company in Kenya is spearheading pastoralist livestock in Kenya through ensuring transactional security, speed and efficiency. It has also contributed to high mobile phone penetration and created thousands on jobs in the rural areas. Apps being developed by Nokia, Apple and Google Translate e.g enduring voices project where National Geographic, Google Translate and You Tube creating New Talking Dictionaries aimed at saving indigenous languages from disappearance. Saving language saves a knowledge system. This should be well thought out. Maasai villagers in the Mara, Laptop for schools program where teachers have no computer knowledge. Participatory 3 Dimensional Mapping Exercise and other geospatial technologies are strengthening indigenous peoples claims to their lands territories and resources.