Self-Determination and Indigenous Research: Capacity Building on Our Own Terms

by Dr. Jelena Porsanger

This presentation is on the theme regarding factors that enable or obstruct indigenous peoples' participation in development processes. I intend to highlight capacity building efforts that provide the necessary conditions for development activities. I argue that there is a need for qualified indigenous human resources in order to succeed in development processes which are conducted on the terms of indigenous peoples. There is also a need for negotiations about research protocols and parameters.

Although I have never been politically involved, I believe that indigenous research in general, as well as my research work in particular, have political impact. I consider indigenous research as a means of empowerment of indigenous peoples through production of knowledge and capacity building. Empowering capacity building means the development of indigenous human resources on our own terms and for our own purposes. These purposes are to continue as indigenous peoples with our own distinctive culture, languages, traditional knowledge, philosophies, and worldviews.
Indigenous research and research on, about and with indigenous peoples

Reading the text of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other documents related to the Declaration itself and the process of its implementation, I have discovered that indigenous research is not clearly emphasized as a means of self-determination. Indeed, research as such is not mentioned in the Declaration. This paper does not intend to analyze the reasons for this. Indigenous peoples have learnt that research has been one of the most powerful tools of colonization of our peoples and our territories.

In this context it is very important to differentiate between the concept of “indigenous research” and “research on, with and about indigenous peoples.” Indigenous research here means research done by scholars who develop indigenous theorizing, identify and use indigenous concepts, and build their projects on an indigenous research paradigm. Over the past few decades, indigenous scholars have brought to the academic world their indigenous perspectives on research. These perspectives were clearly described by Lester Irabinna Rigney, an Australian researcher from the Narungga Nation, who believes that indigenous peoples’ interests, knowledge and experiences must be at the centre of methodologies in the construction of knowledge about indigenous peoples. (Rigney 1999, 119; and in indigenous methodologies in general, see Porsanger 2004) This research paradigm is different from “research on, about and with indigenous people,” conducted by outsider researchers on their terms and for their own purposes or those of their institutions, regardless of how respectful and collaborative this kind of research might have been from their point of view.

In my view, indigenous research must produce new knowledge which our societies require and need for their development processes. The Western concept of development has been imposed on indigenous peoples and connected with modernization, industrialization, use of new technologies. On indigenous terms, development is related—among other things—to the strengthening of our societies, the use of our languages on different levels, including research and education, the incorporation of our traditional knowledge into resource management in order to secure sustainable use of natural resources, and the reproduction and further development of indigenous knowledge systems transmitted from generation to generation.

Development is connected to continuity, which is one of the characteristics of traditional knowledge. The use of the Sami concept of árbediehtu instead of “traditional knowledge” (árbediehtu is the North Sami term containing two interrelated parts: dichtu “knowledge” and árbi “heritage, inheritance”) clarifies knowledge as both the information and the process, and emphasizes different ways to gain, achieve or acquire knowledge. The concept indicates indissoluble ties between the past, the present and the future, which is validated by árbi, “heritage, inheritance.” The introduced Sami concept can be useful and applicable for academic discussions, regardless of local (indigenous or non-indigenous) contexts of tradition or traditional knowledge.

During the last centuries and even over the last few decades, indigenous peoples have been mostly re-active. By re-active I mean struggling and arguing against the views, explanations, and interpretations of our culture, identity, knowledge, philosophy presented by outsiders. The time of being re-active is seemingly over now. Indigenous peoples have trained their own academics who are not, in many cases, re-active any longer, not complaining or arguing, but suggesting and testing new solutions. They are pro-active. In my opinion, it is a start of a new epoch of indigenous capacity building borrowing Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s expressions “on our own terms and for our own purposes.”
Decolonizing Research Methodologies

Some 10 years ago scholarly discussions about decolonizing research were initiated. The most well known book, a must-read called Decolonizing of Methodologies by a Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has influenced the whole understanding of research paradigms in an indigenous context. According to Smith, the process of decolonization is “about centering our concepts and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (Smith 1999, 39). As I have argued elsewhere (Porsanger 2004, 106-107), “our purposes” are those of indigenous peoples, and “our own perspectives” are the indigenous approaches that allow indigenous scholars:

- to decolonize theories;
- to elaborate indigenous methodologies;
- to use indigenous epistemologies (theories of knowledge);
- to make visible what is special and necessary, what is meaningful and logical in respect to indigenous peoples’ own understanding of themselves and the world.

This whole process allows indigenous research to break free from the frames of Western theories of knowledge, which are in most cases very different from indigenous ones and are, indeed, suited to Western academic thought. Western theories of knowledge are mostly foreign to indigenous ways of thinking (Porsanger 2004). What is needed in indigenous research is to put into words, to describe and analyze: what is really different, and why it is so. Theorizing about our own knowledge will give us arguments in discussions about research which disempowers indigenous peoples.

Self-Determination and Power Relations in Research on Indigenous Issues

If indigenous peoples do want to decide about their present and future (right to self-determination), they need access to their own knowledge. All indigenous peoples know from their philosophies as well as from their experiences of colonization that knowledge is power. Research processes nowadays show very clearly that colonization is not over in the field of research. Indigenous scholars have challenged the hegemony of research done by outsider scholars. Challenging this hegemony, indigenous researchers have, in many cases, changed power relations. However, the indigenous academy is small, indigenous theorizing is young and requires knowledge of both “traditional academic” and indigenous academic thinking (so-called “both-ways” knowledge) in order to be argumentatively strong and to speak “the language of theory,” which is understandable by the traditional academy. At present, power relations in the academy are still in favor of traditional Western researchers. What can be done in order to change the imbalanced power relations? My answer is indigenous capacity building.

Many indigenous scholars will surely recognize themselves in the following picture: when entering academic discussions, they must explain their belonging to an indigenous people, argue that they are not subjective, and have to refer to the most well known facts about their indigenous peoples in order to contextualize their research. For indigenous peoples themselves such generalized information is worth almost nothing, because we have our internal diversity and our own criteria for describing the peculiarities of our cultures. This knowledge is advanced and requires quite detailed explanations and the use of indigenous concepts and arguments. Such information is too advanced to be background information to contextualize a research project. In the academic view, this information will often be labeled as subjective. Most of the outsider anthropologists will certainly argue that they know our culture in detail and understand our internal diversity; there is nothing new or too advanced
for them in our explanations.

However, we, indigenous researchers, must be—once again—pro-active in such discussions. We do not need to continue arguing and defending the peculiarities of our knowledge. We need to produce new knowledge which is based on new approaches, concepts that derive from our own cultures, and theorizing on the basis of these concepts. Such indigenous research will be capable to compete with the traditional academic research, and even more, will give a fresh breath and indeed enrich the academy. But this requires the development of our own theorizing, which in turn is possible if and when we achieve intellectual independence.

Many of my colleagues and I myself have experienced that indigenous researchers in a way do not belong to the same clan as “researchers” in general. We are always labeled as “indigenous.” In many cases this implies that this kind of research is different from a “normative,” traditional research which is claimed by the academy as being neutral and objective. It is important to mention that traditional research is also institutionalized. An appellative “indigenous” emphasizes that our research is different, and in many cases is considered as dubious by the academy: naïve, illogical, subjective. That is why we must always defend our research practices and outcomes. Undoubtedly, both outsider and indigenous researchers are supposed to think critically about their processes, their relationships, and the quality and richness of their data and analysis. However, academic power relations often give privilege to and provide funding for outsider researchers, even if she or he is lacking important skills.

If we ask a Western researcher, who is doing her or his research on, for instance, Sami culture, whether she or he commands the Sami language, most probably we will get the following answer: “I’m sorry, I don’t speak Sami, but my research can be complemented in the future by some other scholars in the field who do command the language.” What is unfair and shows imbalance in power relations, is that it is very easy for the academy to accept such apologies and to give funding for such research projects. I cannot imagine any indigenous scholar apologizing for not having basic academic skills and getting funding for her or his academic research project.

The situation is even more complicated when we take natural science as example. A Norwegian ornithologist who was once investigating a special kind of bird in a certain area was confronted by a traditional Sami man who asked if he knew what the weather was like during the spring time of the year of investigation. The researcher could not answer this question, and furthermore he did not even consider it as related to his research issue at all. However, according to traditional Sami knowledge, the quality of spring weather has a great influence on the behavior of birds in the area (most of the birds come in spring to the Arctic area from the South).

These two examples show that indigenous knowledge is not a prerequisite of “traditional” academic research but rather complementary knowledge. Indigenous knowledge can be an exotic addition to the “real” and objective research. Scholars involved in this “objective” research gain the authoritative status in their research field despite of the lack of important skills. From the point of view of traditional knowledge, there are some basic skills which a researcher must possess. However, this knowledge is not included in any academic curricula or in any requirements for the conduct of research. Researchers can apologize for the lack of knowledge which is basic for indigenous understanding, or they can simply ignore the fact that they do not possess important knowledge. This situation must be changed.

It has been difficult for the academy to accept that indigenous ways of thinking, understanding, and approaching knowledge can belong to anything the academy is prepared to recognize as theory (Cook-Lynn, 1997, 21). The voices of some indigenous researchers bringing indigenous views into academic debates have often been reduced by the academy “to some ‘nativist’ discourse, dismissed by colleagues in the academy as naïve,
Developing Parameters and Requirements for Research on Indigenous Issues

Protocols can contain important requirements for scholars on indigenous issues, and these concerns outsider researchers and indigenous researchers alike. It is worth mentioning that reflexive analysis is needed in a great array of issues related to indigenous so-called insider research. But this issue must remain outside this presentation.

At least four core issues to the development of research protocols must be negotiated: Respect, Reciprocity, Reliability, and Relevance. These four R’s can be filled with content in the following way (based on my own suggestions and fundamental questions about research processes expressed by Linda T. Smith (1999, 10):

Respect:
- What is a minimum requirement for participation in indigenous research?
- How can paternalism be avoided?
- What is the difference between respect and tolerance in indigenous research?
- How will the research outcomes be disseminated?

Reciprocity:
- What negotiation processes are required for a research project, starting from initiation of research, through research conduct to the dissemination of research outcomes?
- Who will carry out research? Who will write it up?
- Who is responsible for research outcomes (any impact)?
- What is the role of indigenous community/communities?

Reliability:
- What is required for negotiation about research paradigms and processes?
- What are the factual requirements to a researcher’s skills
resentations I have published an essay on indigenous methodologies (Porsanger 2004), in which I argue that indigenous methodologies should be designed:

- to ensure that the intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples will be observed;
- to protect indigenous knowledge from misinterpretation and misuse;
- to demystify knowledge about indigenous peoples;
- to tell indigenous peoples’ stories in their voices;
- to give credit to the true owners of indigenous knowledge;
- to communicate the results of research back to the owners of this knowledge, in order to support them in their desire to be subjects rather than objects of research, to decide about their present and future, and to determine their place in the world.

Following these methodological issues, indigenous research will strengthen indigenous peoples’ identity, which will in turn support their efforts to be independent, not only legally, politically or economically, but first and foremost intellectually.

**Indigenous Capacity Building**

Indigenous academics have been active in capacity building for their own peoples. In Sápmi, the first indigenous Sami professors started working in the 1960s. But already in 1910, one particularly well known Sami, Johan Turi, wrote the first description of Sami life and understanding of the surrounding world and reality in the Sami language, expressing Sami understandings and explanations. Despite the fact that he did not have any academic education, he should be considered as the first Sami professor in traditional knowledge. Probably sometime in the future Sami academy will express its gratitude to this extraordinary Sami man and award him an honorary position as a Sami...
Endnotes

1 This paper was presented as a contribution to the International Expert Group Meeting, Indigenous Peoples: Development with Culture and Identity, Articles 3 and 32 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in New York, 12-14 January 2010.

2 This presentation is based on my experiences from 17 years as indigenous Sami researcher (including my research for a doctoral degree, done in the frame of indigenous methodologies), as well as on my work as a director of the Nordic Sami Institute (in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, Norway) during the last years of its existence. The NSI was an indigenous Sami research institution since 1974; it was co-organized with the Sámi University College in 2005, where I continued as a research director for the whole institution. I am grateful to my colleagues from the Sámi University College, WINHEC (World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium), and Gáldu (Resource Center for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), who have shared with me their views on research and self-determination for this presentation.

3 For more information about Sami traditional knowledge, see Árbediehtu Pilot Project 2009.

4 This book also had a great impact on my own research, which has resulted in a proposal of indigenous Sami methodology for the study of Sami indigenous religion (Porsanger 2007).

References

Cartographic Encounters within Counter-Mapping in West Kalimantan

by Albertus Hadi Pramono

Cartographic encounters are a common phenomenon in surveying and mapping. To date, literature on the subject focuses on the colonial mapping activities. Using the case of counter-mapping activities on Dayak lands in West Kalimantan, this paper contends that such encounters still occur today. Many Dayak peoples have counter-mapped their lands since mid-1990’s. Their lands are located within complex river systems. These river systems are then the basis of their spatial orientation. This paper shows how Dayak persons who hold and practice such spatial knowledge interact with cartographic knowledge.

Introduction

In a village planning session co-organized by an NGO from Pontianak (the capital city of West Kalimantan province) and village leaders of a desa in the kecamatan of Nanga Mahap, an elder man approached the GIS technician who was working on a computer to type river names on the map of a kampung. On the screen was a map of the village that was generated from the UTM coordinates taken with GPS units by surveying teams earlier in the day. The river on the map ran north and thus upward. The
Owing Research and Building Force at the Margins: Indigenous Peoples as Agents of Self-Determined Development

by Leah Enkiwe-Abayao

The struggle for the validity of indigenous knowledges may no longer be over the recognition that indigenous people have ways of knowing the world which are unique, but over proving the authenticity of, and control over, our own forms of knowledge.
Linda Tuhaiwai Smith, 1999: 104

The performative is political ... [and] provides the context for resisting neo-liberal and neo-conservative attacks on the legitimacy of the world view in question.
Denzin, 2003: 32

Concerned at the increasing perpetuation of neocolonial regimes in indigenous peoples development discourse, indigenous intellectuals are contesting capitalist frameworks and challenging their dominance. But at the same time they are evolving views that resist imperial paradigms that espouse a “dominant-weak” dichotomy, where the weak is the indigenous in the modern world. The widening inequities between dominant development paradigms and indigenous worldviews can be seen in the colonial and neocolonial history of two important fields: research and education. Many indig-
igenous communities have questioned the wisdom behind all the studies conducted on them. Indeed how have results of researches impacted the lives and conditions of indigenous peoples in their territories? What are the evidences that these results trickle down to their villages and improve their situations?

"Research" and "education" are not indigenous and have long been associated with their colonial and neocolonial underpinnings. Academics and freelance consultants dominated and still dominate the conduct of researches employing neocolonial frameworks that dislocate the indigenous in both the process and end result. In many less developed countries, past researches carried out by social and natural scientists were used by colonizers and their political successors to further justify their policies and programmes on colonization, modernization and development. Indigenous intellectuals have criticized the many unethical and discriminatory practices and ways of doing research on indigenous peoples, especially in how these perpetuate and aggravate their conditions. Indigenous peoples recognize the need to rectify this situation and to strategically decolonize the ways of doing research.

So what have indigenous peoples accomplished are doing to solve issues and problems affecting them? Are efforts confined merely to protests? I used to struggle in answering these questions from my colleagues and students during my first five years of teaching in the university. Back in the 1990s, few literature talked about what indigenous peoples have successfully achieved or about distinguished indigenous peoples in any of the less developed countries. Indeed the problems, issues and concerns of and on indigenous peoples are not simple, nor are they within the priority area of work of the state.

Ten years since the publication of the first and most influential book on indigenous research methodologies, Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples by Linda Tuhillai Smith, indigenous peoples worldwide continue great efforts to engage in or carry out social researches that serve their needs or purposes.1 Written by an indigenous Maori scholar, this

work calls for the transformation of research processes and the broader social contexts in which research is conducted. Central to its discourse is the repositioning of indigenous peoples, their knowledge systems and epistemologies, and the development of research methodologies and ethical guidelines that are appropriate or sensitive to indigenous peoples’ realities, worldviews and perspectives.

Linda Tuhillai Smith is among the most influential indigenous scholars who have challenged the historical and contemporary epistemology of Western knowledge. She asserts that research is bound by Western ideology, colonized knowledge and the false notion that researchers are the experts. Indigenous peoples are reduced to mere objects of research. Yet Smith warns us that postcolonial ways of thinking and doing do not mean that people have unlearned colonial ways. This is the kind of problem indigenous peoples encounter when doing research, thus it is important to decolonize research and its practice if it is intended to work for indigenous peoples.

Decolonization is a process of centering indigenous experiences in historical and contemporary discourse, firstly by recreating and re-claiming indigenous histories and knowledges, and secondly, by developing indigenous projects that contribute to the operationalization of self-determined development. Self-determination, in this context, becomes more than a political agenda or outcome. It articulates an indigenous framework and defines the processes by which social justice is achieved by indigenous peoples on which they can freely pursue their economic, social, cultural and political development.

This article aims to show modest ways and efforts of indigenous peoples to free themselves from dominant neocolonial research paradigms and projects, and how they reformulated research to suit their needs and eventually own it. It looks into attempts of indigenous peoples to bring forward their cultural aspirations, affirmation of their tradition, views and analysis of various issues that operationalize what Lincoln and Denzin (1994) call "epistemological version of validity." This is an approach to
validity that locates the power within indigenous peoples and
their cultural realm, and where the gamut of research is deter-
mined and defined by the “researched” indigenous peoples.

However, very few indigenous intellectuals are working
along this line of need in research and indigenous peoples’ de-
velopment. This is the sad reality that exists especially in less
developed countries. There is thus a need to raise and promote
this issue and its urgency among indigenous activists at the glo-
bal level, with its core premised on the establishment of a net-
work of indigenous researchers.

**Forming a Network of Indigenous Researchers**

In 2000 a group of indigenous activists came together during
an informal meeting while attending the Tebtebba-organized
“International Conference on Conflict Resolution, Peace Build-
ing, Sustainable Development and Indigenous Peoples” in Ma-
nila, Philippines. They were concerned about common and in-
creasing negative experiences of indigenous peoples on re-
sarches and documentation done on and with them by non-
indigenous persons and supporters. They used these realities to
build a strategic approach in understanding the state of indig-
igenous peoples in the area of education and research and to for-
mulate a mechanism that would provide an opportunity to iden-
tify, discuss, resolve and advance the sustainable wellbeing of
indigenous peoples. And one way which they saw to address
this vital problem was to build a network. From then on, this core
group worked towards drawing in more indigenous members
and supporters, using as a guiding principle a strong statement
they issued in pursuit of this goal. In 2003, the Indigenous Peoples’
Global Research and Education Network (IPGREN) was formally
formed with the following articulated direction:

“...We Indigenous peoples are increasingly becoming
weary and wary of researches that only treat them as
targets of research and education efforts. In the area of
research, indigenous peoples have always been the
sources of information. Much of these information, when
processed and interpreted by the researchers, become
unintelligible if not totally irrelevant to the indigenous
peoples’ everyday lives. We, Indigenous Peoples, want
to speak out now. We want to conduct research that can
help them articulate their issues and perspectives. We
want to (re)claim an arena where they have been histori-
cally marginalized. At the same time, we want to be
trained on the rudiments of ‘scientific inquiry,’ if only to
better understand their changing social, cultural and en-
vironmental milieu and become more effective in put-
ing forward our issues and concerns.”

Represented at its launching were indigenous organizations
(countries/organizations) and individuals from Ecuador, Guate-
mala, South Africa, Kenya, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and
the Philippines. They shared the results of basic researches they
carried out in a workshop, “Research and Education on Indig-
igenous Peoples: An Assessment and Planning Workshop” on
December 10-12, 2003 in Makati City, Philippines. Based on iden-
tified needs, the researches focused on the state of researches
conducted on indigenous peoples, indigenous education, and
situations of indigenous peoples.

The indigenous organizations/individuals who actively par-
cipated in the initial stages of building IPGREN were: Indig-
enous Information Network (INN) of Kenya; National Khoisan
Consultative Conference (NKOK) of South Africa; Instituto
Muni’kat of Guatemala; Hill Tracts NGO Forum (HTNF) of
Bangladesh; Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantra (AMAN) of Indo-
nesia; Tebtebba; Confederacion Nacional de Organizaciones
Campesinas, Indigenas y Negras del Ecuador Versalles
(FENOCIN) Ecuador; Bineet Mundu (indigenous activist),
Jarkhand, India.7

Research became the basis of unity among the members,
and they committed to do research for indigenous peoples and
by indigenous peoples. They developed a research agenda that would serve their work and purposes. The agenda was directed at basic research that would engage them to start a more concerted effort to continually share updates on research and education. The exercise was seen as a process of getting basic data they needed for their advocacy work.

Thus, IPGREN was envisioned as a venue for indigenous organizations to share, plan and act on a research agenda and education programs that strengthen the indigenous peoples’ movement in less developed countries. It was seen as a network where indigenous educators and advocates are organized to train, develop and strengthen indigenous peoples’ capacities to undertake research and education work, in particular to generate data, do their own analysis and use research findings to strengthen their advocacy work. Membership was open to all those who share the cause and its principles.

Believing in IPGREN’s potential for transformational impacts, one of its convenors, Victoria Tauoli-Corpuz, led the network and used its guiding principles to expand its membership and work for activities to be undertaken towards achieving its goals. She talked about the network and its goals to her friends in the academe, international institutions, and grassroots indigenous organizations and how they could contribute to its work. Many ended up doing volunteer work, while institutions offered to network or do collaborative work.

Central to the concerns of the founding members and one of the challenges they have to address is how grassroots organizations view research—as a very disempowering tool. Very few indigenous organizations appreciate the uses and importance of research in their work, much less have a research component in their program of work. This is usually left or contracted out to the experts—mostly academic friends. The notion that “research is for experts” is strong, prevalent and continues to marginalize indigenous peoples who do not have necessary academic qualifications even if they are competent enough.

Another reason is that indigenous organizations are more concerned about the functional literacy of indigenous peoples. This is a literacy that refers not only to being able to read, write and count, but to knowing, understanding and internalizing their rights as indigenous peoples. For indigenous organizations, the issues and problems of indigenous peoples, including research and education, are subsumed in a broader spectrum of social realities such as poverty, government policies and development programs geared toward modernization. Indigenous peoples are thus largely unaware of the purposes of researches being done and the benefits they could gain from them; in addition the results may be totally irrelevant to what they really need or want.

Such realities have not only prodded indigenous scholars to work proactively among grassroots indigenous organizations to clarify and correct the erroneous thinking that only experts can do research. These pointed out to a greater need—the training of indigenous peoples in social research. IPGREN has thus embarked on training indigenous peoples who are interested to do research. The training is directed at skills development to enable indigenous peoples to come up with their own situationers and write their own experiences, analyses, programs and actions, and thus own the knowledge. The training program encourages interdisciplinary approaches to research, as these are seen as nearer to indigenous ways. One of the most urgent targets is to build capacities and make an impact, to encourage more indigenous persons to engage in research and own it.

International Research Training on Social Research and Indigenous Peoples

Working on the vision to reinforce the capacities of indigenous peoples in research, Tebtebba-organized “The International Training on Social Research and Indigenous Peoples” on October 25 to November 6, 2007 in the Philippines guided by the
following objectives: 1) To build the capacity of indigenous peoples to conduct intelligible researches relevant to indigenous development that will enable them to better articulate their issues and perspectives and reinforce their proactive engagement on various processes locally and abroad; 2) To initiate the development of training modules on “Social Research and Indigenous Peoples;” 3) To promote indigenous peoples’ perspectives integral to the conduct of the trainings, research and its issues, including indigenous discourses on research ethics, indigenous concepts of development and other evolving issues; 4) To strengthen and expand the current pool of indigenous researchers of IPGREN.

Twenty-eight researchers from seven Asian countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam actively participated in the rigorous process of the training. The training not only enhanced indigenous peoples’ capacities in research but also provided a space to broaden perspectives and insights, and gain deeper understanding of the issues of indigenous peoples from other countries. The knowledge gained from the training was a valuable tool that the participants could use to help their people to advocate for their rights, especially to self-determination. The training also intended for them to work on a module in their own language on how to develop and train their own indigenous peoples as researchers. At the end of the two-week training, they were able to present research project proposals which they refined based on feedback from the trainors and other participants.

Evolving Efforts, Shifting Paradigms

As IPGREN members engaged in research for their own use in advocacy work, they continued to reflect on how best research could serve them. After doing basic literature surveys on indigenous peoples and attempts at generating disaggregated data on indigenous peoples in their home countries, they soon recognized the need to examine the conceptual contexts to build a...
strong framework on which research and education can operate.

A meeting entitled "Advancing Indigenous Peoples Rights through Social Research: Indigenous People's Epistemologies, Paradigms, Research Methodologies, and Approaches" on October 17-20, 2008 in Baguio City, Philippines brought various indigenous persons to again share their experiences in doing research themselves, the various methodologies they used and developed, and their proposals on how to improve further this area of work. Building upon the good experiences and learning lessons from the bad ones, they recognized the complexity of the challenges indigenous researchers face. First, while they want to conduct studies, they lack the means, technical abilities and resources to do so. Secondly, they have to address the challenge of meeting standards set by Western traditions vis a vis indigenous ways of knowing and learning. The ways used to reach these standards have led indigenous peoples to distrust their own capacity and ways of articulation. For others, some formal research practices and results have ruptured their trust in research altogether.

Third, indigenous scholars need to develop ethically responsible methodologies and approaches that value indigenous epistemologies. Further, they have to contend with local dynamics in relation to research implementation, especially when these are done in their own homes. Indigenous peoples are drawn to defend their knowledge systems and their home territories from current neocolonial agenda that perpetuate development policies and programs. Such programs have destroyed their rainforests and mineral resources, flooded their lands, patented genetic material and tribal medicin, commodified spirituality, and otherwise directed, classified, and interpreted indigenous peoples' ways of knowing within Western paradigms.

Finally, indigenous researchers have to face and overcome their own communities' distrust of researchers. Indigenous peoples are constantly challenged to be actively involved in research to ensure that their own ways of knowing and being are not misrepresented and misused. They have to ensure that the issues and problems of their communities are well studied and documented as the results can help direct and support the communities' political campaigns and advocacy. Yet very few respond to this challenge. The IPGREN was seen as a venue to encourage indigenous peoples to use research to their own advantage.


When a research project on the Assessment of the First International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1995-2004) was developed, IPGREN members saw a key role that the network could play. It provided an opportunity to implement research as they had envisioned. Researcher-writers, who were indigenous peoples in their home countries in which the research was conducted, were hired to do the research. IPGREN held a series of meetings, consultations and mentoring with the researchers. In one meeting-workshop, they discussed in more detail the project concept and research methodology to be carried out, got feedback from the researchers about the project itself, as well as identified local strategies to enhance the conduct of the research. A project handbook was prepared and given to the researchers. The country researchers then prepared a research and implementation plan for their respective countries, and organized national consultations where these were validated and generated feedback from key people and institutions.

The research project produced a set of common recommendations, which affirm that while there is evident policy and program support for indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia, they still have a long struggle ahead in order for States to recognize their existence and identities as indigenous peoples. The most prominent of these were categorized according to themes and the
agency they were addressed to: States, UN agencies and international organizations working along thematic areas. All the country researchers presented their findings on the assessment of the First Decade of the World’s Indigenous People in a culmination workshop held in November 2006 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The research was funded by IFAD and implemented jointly by ICIMOD and Tebtebba.

**Needs-Driven Researches and Activities by Indigenous Peoples**

Seven years after the founding of IPGREN, the number of indigenous researchers doing research for their own organizations has increased significantly. This section discusses in detail two ongoing research activities of indigenous peoples at the grassroots level that also demonstrate the ways in which IPGREN has operationalized its vision. These two projects are: the “1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord Evaluation” and the “Indigenous Peoples, credit union and grassroots holistic development: the case of the Pancur Kasih of West Kalimantan, Indonesia.”

**1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord Evaluation**

In 2007 key leaders of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh embarked on a systematic evaluation of the CHT Peace Accord. This was in response to a defined need among leaders of the Hill Tracts NGO Forum (HTNF) to assess the implementation of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord from the perspective of the CHT indigenous peoples (including layman-indigenous peoples [non-educated], women and minority indigenous groups such as the Khyang) as well as to determine the views of the national/regional/district governments and international organizations on the same implementation.

They felt that previous evaluations were inadequate in certain areas: the level of understanding of the layman-indigenous peoples of the contents of the 1997 CHT Accord and its implementation, how inclusive the negotiation process was, and implicit and unwritten agreements made during the signing of the Accord (including functional elements and interpretations of the agreement). They wanted an in-depth study of the extent and processes of implementation of the CHT Accord, drawing data both from CHT institutions, regional councils and ministries tasked to implement the Accord and from the layman Jumma peoples themselves who view the Accord and its implementation in their own terms.

Indigenous intellectuals from the Chittagong Hill Tracts were called to help articulate these views of the indigenous leaders in a research proposal. HTNF asked the support of other IPGREN members including Tebtebba to organize activities to develop the contents of the study, including an implementation plan that would work for the local indigenous researchers. It took three meetings of IPGREN members to complete and subsequently deliver a full proposal which indigenous leaders in CHT were happy to carry out. The indigenous elders had high hopes for the proposal, giving their full support and commitment to be key informants and to assist in local forms of data collection.

It took a while before the research got implemented. It was difficult for the local researchers to rid themselves of the established notion that research is practiced by “expert consultants” who are mostly academics. Some creative activities and guided research exercises had to be conducted to boost their confidence and make them realize their potentials to do the research. Tebtebba invited some of them to attend IPGREN meetings and workshops with fellow indigenous researchers who were conducting studies. This helped them prepare not only for the implementation of the research project at hand but to make them realize that they could contribute at various levels within the indig-
enous movement, including doing collaborative work with other indigenous peoples outside their countries.

The researchers soon gained support and confidence, including a realization of the urgency of the work they were going to do. After they had gathered sufficient data, indigenous intellectuals assisted them through a workshop to analyze the data. This activity posed difficulties to the researchers as it revealed data gaps and security issues. But they learned to be more flexible in the research process and to appreciate the rigor involved in data collection, considering the study involved a very sensitive topic. Soon they were employing several exercises and mechanisms to generate more data without sacrificing the credibility of the research. It took at least three years to fully conceive of and implement the research agenda within the ways and village structures of the indigenous peoples of the CHT as well as strong IPGREN guidance and leadership for it to be carried out.

One of the biggest achievements of this research exercise was that as insiders the local researchers were able to draw out data, including very sensitive information that form a credible empirical basis for the reports on human rights violations that were committed in the Chittagong Hill Tracts despite the 1997 CHT Peace Accord. In addition, the researchers came to experience and appreciate the rigors of research work and gained the confidence that have led them to turn around the wrong notion about research; the previous connotation of “expert administered” can now be applied to indigenous peoples in the villages. The results will soon be published, and to date, the researchers have completed writing all four sections of the book.

But what the researchers and indigenous intellectuals of CHT celebrate most is that the data they have generated serve several other purposes in their work locally as well as globally. The evaluation research demonstrated that indigenous epistemologies are important in delivering intelligible researches useful to indigenous peoples. The results show a rich political articulation of indigenous peoples at the grassroots level, an aspect that was restrained if not concealed in previous researches. An indigenous Marma, for example, explicitly said: “The hill district council has never attempted at preserving the ‘indigenous entity and identity’ of the indigenous peoples in the CHT and has frequently violated the Accord especially in cases authorizing issuance of permanent resident certificates to settlers.”

Further the research is valued for generating important statistical data, both from official reports and from village recording systems, a big leap that allows indigenous leaders to advance their work. In addition, indigenous lawyers analyzed legal cases that reveal sensitive and vital information in raising the political credibility of cases presented by indigenous peoples to legal authorities and national and international human rights institutions. The research skills developed by indigenous researchers contribute to the political action of indigenous peoples in CHT in their struggle for self-determination. The research has proven indigenous capacity as well as the validity and theoretical value of indigenous worldviews.

The Pancur Kasih Peoples’ Organization

In 2008 another research project was conceived under IPGREN. Inspired by the great achievements of a Kalimantan-born indigenous peoples’ organization, Tebtebba Executive Director and IPGREN Convenor Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, convinced some key members of the Pancur Kasih (PK) to write and share their story, as it can serve to inspire other indigenous peoples. PK founder A. R. Mecer gladly accepted and asked for assistance on how it can be done in collaboration with international organizations. Tebtebba offered support by mobilizing IPGREN members, and a similar process as undertaken in the earlier discussed 1997 CHT Peace Accord evaluation was implemented. Meetings and a workshop were held with distinguished key leaders of all PK units (about 20 including those from the PK Credit Union) to develop the content of the research agenda.
The project aimed to conduct a systematic and comprehensive research of the historical development and achievements of the Pancur Kasih and the Pancur Kasih Credit Union, discussing in depth indigenous Dayak development. It focused on the positive attributes of the Dayak (as opposed to discriminatory and stereotyped labels) and demonstrate the initiatives and good practices of indigenous Dayak development (e.g., addressing poverty). Also highlighted were the good practices and lessons learned from the Pancur Kasih movement and the operation of credit union cooperatives.

PK and Indigenous Peoples’ Development

The Pancur Kasih Foundation (PK) is an indigenous Dayak organization established in 1981 by teachers working in church-run schools in Pontianak. A. R. Mecer, a Dayak from Ketapang, West Kalimantan, was one of the founders who believed that the aspiration for better conditions for the Dayak people had to be achieved through the spirit of solidarity, self-reliance and a strong cultural base. He has sustained his energy and commitment to work for the advancement of the Dayak people and other indigenous peoples in Indonesia.

Pancur Kasih was instrumental in establishing schools in Dayak villages that sensitized and organized the Dayaks to work towards their development. It started as a foundation composed of a few volunteer teachers teaching a group of junior high schools in West Kalimantan, but soon grew in scope of work, geographic coverage, organizational structure and manpower. Today it has become an organization with specialized units, support organizations, and a federation that continues to respond to the various needs of the Dayaks and other indigenous peoples in Indonesia.

To date, PK has established at least 22 local organizations/ institutions, various economic units and credit union cooperatives throughout Indonesia. The PK Credit Union Cooperatives alone illustrate the work PK has done and the economic and socio-cultural benefits gained by the Dayak people. Initially set up to meet the need of PK activists for easy to access credit with low interest, the credit unions have developed into a vital financial institution, not only for PK but also for the people in West Kalimantan. Of 1,400 credit unions in Indonesia, 43 were established by Pancur Kasih, with assets composing some 50 percent (approximately 160 million Rupiah) of the total combined assets of credit union cooperatives in the country. The PK credit unions are affiliated with both the Asia regional and international credit union cooperatives. More importantly, however, the PK credit unions, which are run by and for the Dayaks themselves and nurture their holistic development, have proven to be an empowering tool for indigenous peoples.

Of interest to some IPGREN members is how such a grassroots cooperative has achieved comparative advantage and financial management through cultural revitalization and proactive education work at the community level. The PK movement has long been praised as outstanding by indigenous activists in Asia and other regions, and they look up to it for inspiration, expressing interest to learn from its initiatives, motivations and guiding principles. While its work and achievements in 25 years have faced challenges and local dynamics, PK has demonstrated its strength and success through cultural and spiritual motivation as well as innovative strategies and approaches. Its success story and good practice in indigenous peoples’ development can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The IPGREN research project on the Pancur Kasih movement will be published in a 2-volume book: the first part will cover the history of the PK and its achievements and the second part will deal with the PK credit union. Fifteen PK leaders, each heading an independent unit or institution within the PK organization, are contributing to the book project. It was thought that the best people to write each section of the book would be current PK members who built and grew with the organization.
Perhaps the greatest challenge encountered in the research project was language differences. The involvement of international indigenous intellectuals necessitated the use of the English language, which somehow posed limits to some of the local researchers who are articulate in the Dayak language. As part of the remedy, translations were used, which worked well but demanded a lot of time, resources and much work from a local research manager. IPGREN fellows took extra care to allow the local researchers to learn the rigors of doing research at a pace acceptable to them, and in such a way that the conduct of the research and their engagement with it do not undermine their identity.

Celebrating Modest Work in 10 Years

Indigenous intellectuals and the IPGREN have reasons to celebrate as their achievements are gaining momentum in the indigenous movement, especially in building and enriching the capacities of indigenous peoples at the grassroots level to advance their work. But as much as IPGREN encourages indigenous peoples to conduct their own research using their own strategies, more work needs to be done in three areas: 1) to raise their confidence to develop, conduct and implement research programs to serve their needs and correct wrong notions that only expert academics can do this; 2) to encourage and assist indigenous peoples to develop a tradition of research rigor that meets indigenous standards; and 3) to strengthen collaborative work between indigenous intellectuals and indigenous leaders working at the grassroots level and allow research work to strengthen and enhance advocacy work. In this way, “research” is transformative and a site of resistance in which indigenous peoples reclaim historical, cultural and moral ties, promote their authority over traditional knowledge, and sustain their determination to continue the ways of life of their ancestors.

Endnotes

3 See details in the proceedings of the meeting.
6 For details of the findings and recommendations, see First International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People in Asia, 1995-2004 Assessment Synthesis Report by International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu, Nepal, November 2007.
7 The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Accord, popularly known as CHT Peace Accord, was signed between the Government of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) on December 2, 1997, ending more than two decades of armed conflict between the indigenous Jumma peoples and Government of Bangladesh. The two main purposes of this accord, as with many other similar political arrangements, was to reestablish peace in the Hill Tracts and to provide a measure of autonomy to the southeastern border region that is topographically, demographically and culturally different from the rest of Bangladesh—being the home of indigenous peoples, namely the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Murung, Lushai, Khumi, Chak, Khyang, Bawm, Pankhua. The Accord recognizes the reestablishment of the rights of the Jumma indigenous peoples over the CHT region with the formation of four local councils as controlling and supervisory bodies over land & land management, law and order, civil administration, police (local), development, primary and secondary education, forest and environment, and many more.
9 PK members expressed the concern that they did not want to do this alone because they did not want to make it appear like self-promotion.

11 John Bamba, Ibid.

References


Indigenous Peoples and the Millennium Development Goals*

by Victoria Tauli-Corpuz

If the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are met, there is no doubt that some effects will trickle down to some of the world’s 350 million indigenous peoples, the majority of whom live in poverty. The question remains whether Governments, the international community, civil society, indigenous peoples and the private sector can achieve these goals. It could happen that indigenous peoples become the sacrificial lambs for the reduction of poverty through development projects that will displace them from their lands. Framing the Millennium Development Goals as a human rights-based agenda is therefore essential. For indigenous peoples it is difficult to talk about development without talking about basic rights to lands and resources, culture and identity and self-determination. At the same time, some Governments and even intergovernmental organizations question the wisdom of targeting indigenous peoples as a specific beneficiary group for development.

Indigenous peoples are invisible in the Millennium Development Goals. A review of the Millennium Development Goals in some countries shows that they are not even mentioned or referred to. In this context, it may be worthwhile to explore how to make the Millennium Development Goals relevant to indigenous peoples and, in the process, discuss more comprehensively indigenous peoples’ development.

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