I spent my childhood in my ancestral hometown of Besao, among the Igorot peoples of the Philippines. It was a world barely touched by industrialism. There was no electricity; the only motor vehicles we saw were the two buses that arrived in the late afternoon from the only city in our region. We raised our own food—rice, vegetables, taro, chickens, and pigs.

Igorots possess a highly sophisticated knowledge of agriculture. Many communities produce ten or more traditional rice varieties and our rice terraces, found high up in the mountains, feature complex irrigation systems, testifying to Igorot expertise in hydraulics and engineering.

Wet rice production for domestic use still remains the main preoccupation of most Igorots who live in traditional villages. The agricultural cycle revolves around the phases of rice production, from seedbed preparation to harvesting. Interspersed between these are hunting and food gathering from forests and rivers, and the planting of other crops like beans, sweet potatoes, and cassava. As a child, I used to join my cousins and aunts to work in the padeso (ricefields). During planting and harvesting, we practiced ug-ugbo, a traditional form of mutual labor exchange. We formed ourselves into groups with neighbors and friends, set out before sunrise, and collectively planted or harvested one field, moving on to other fields until the sun set. In the evening we all gathered to celebrate finishing the work. Sunday was market day, when people from neighboring villages came to trade or sell their wares.

Igorot cultural rituals are linked to the phases of the agricultural cycle and the life cycle (birth, weddings, and deaths). The Igorots do not consider ourselves the owners but the stewards or trustees of ancestral lands. Land is the source of our identity and it provides the material and spiritual link between past, present, and future generations.

We were raised as Christians, but our lives were also rich in our own traditional culture and rituals: the bengas before planting rice and after harvest; dadawak during weddings; rituals for the newly born and the dead, and so on. At a very early age our parents and elders taught us basic values deemed gwis (good): respect for nature and ancestors; honesty; collectivity; community solidarity; reciprocity; and love for Mother Earth. The most important lesson is inmayan. This Kankanay-Igorot word can be translated as “don’t do it,” or “exercise caution,” or “have limits.” But inmayan is more than that. It is a principle and a value system that guides our behavior and relationships with
other human beings, creation (animals, plants, micro-organisms), the spirit world, and nature, and governs our relationship to technology. A closely related term is laua, which means taboo, forbidden, holy, or sacred. Lawa and innayan underpin the traditional religion of the Igorots. Adherence to these values is crucial for our identity and our continuing existence as a people. While life was hard, it never occurred to me that we were "poor" or "underdeveloped."

* * *

At age twelve, I passed a scholarship test for secondary school and went to study in Manila. I was thrown into culture shock, into a totally different world: there was electricity; countless vehicles zoomed through the streets; and you needed money for everything. However, what shocked me most was the way my classmates and teachers regarded me and other Igorot as backward and savage. I got into numerous fights because I couldn't agree that my Manila classmates were more "civilized" than my people, especially when I saw so much poverty and violence in Manila society.

Years later, when I became a student activist in the early seventies, I understood why such discriminatory mind-sets existed. In the early days of colonialism, the Spaniards needed to portray us as headhunting savages in order to justify their violence. Later, the U.S. colonizers shipped our ancestors to be displayed in a sort of circus sideshow at the St. Louis Exposition in the 1900s, to show Americans what heathens we were and to justify President McKinley's "Benevolent Assimilation" policy.

Learning the history of our colonization made me realize that the Igorot traditions—cultural, economic, cosmological, judiciary, and so on—must not be undermined or destroyed. The more I see the decline of Western civilization and the role science and technology play in the decline, the more I am convinced that the wisdom and knowledge of indigenous peoples can help lead humanity forward. The continuing survival of humanity will largely depend on how diverse cultural and biological systems coexist and flourish.

INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS: OBSTACLES TO "PROGRESS?"

Now we face economic globalization, an outgrowth of the colonization that indigenous peoples have suffered for five hundred years. In the past, colonizers used swords and guns to quell my ancestors' resistance to colonization. Colonial and postcolonial governments and their satellite institutions of churches, schools, and media tried to teach us to despise ourselves, our cosmologies, traditions, customary laws, and lifeways. They trained indigenous peoples, including my parents and myself, to look at the world through the eyes of the colonizers. Today, the promoters of economic globalization, the neo-colonizers, use the overwhelming pressure of homogenization to teach us that indigenous political, economic, cultural, and knowledge systems are obstacles to their "progress." Industrialized peoples look upon the principles that guide indigenous peoples' daily lives as backward, unrealistic, or hopelessly romantic. In response, we have had to consciously reclaim and relearn our traditional worldviews and religions to strengthen our bid for our rights to our identity, our culture, and our territories.

Many indigenous peoples are still awed by the magic of the cosmos and the mystery of life. Our rituals, worldviews, belief systems, and stories affirm our surrender to this mystery and magic. Among the most important to us are our understanding and reverence of nature, our experience of living in community and reciprocity with the spirits of the natural world, our respect for the sacredness of all life, our sharing of work and burdens, and our solemn mandate to protect Mother Earth's gifts for future generations. Industrialized culture regards our values as unscientific obstacles to modernization and thus worthy of ridicule, suppression, and denigration. The industrial world also views our political,
social, and land-tenure traditions as dangerous: our collective identities; our communal ownership of forests, waters, and lands; our unfract system of community sharing; and our consensus decision making are all antithetical to the capitalist hallmarks of individualism and private property.

The mechanistic worldview of industrialization and globalization regards humans and other living beings as machines that should be manipulated to function with ever-increasing efficiency and productivity. Nature, in this view, is inert, dead, manipulable matter that only has value as a commodity. Microorganisms, plants, animals, and human beings are nothing more than biological commodities to be exported and trafficked in world markets. The genetic engineering of sheep like Tracy to enable them to secrete marketable drugs in their milk is an example of this. Trade must be liberalized, in the mechanized worldview, so that cheap, highly subsidized wheat or canola oil can travel thousands of miles from Europe and North America to Asian countries that, in turn, produce and export rice and palm oil. Concepts like "productivity," "competitiveness," "efficiency," and "engineering" dominate the discourse and practice of global economics and science.

If this logic continues to dominate the mind-sets of policy makers, then there will be no place for indigenous values such as subsistence agriculture, which mainly produces for local or domestic consumption. Invisible in the calculation of the gross national product is nature’s contribution in ensuring soil fertility and nurturing biodiversity, and women’s unpaid work in caring for the family and community. How can such conflicting worldviews possibly coexist?

For indigenous peoples, keeping our territorial or ancestral lands is the most important thing. This is what determines our identity. This is where our ancestors walked and where they learned everything they left to us. Our land is where we forge our relations with Mother Earth and create social bonds with each other. It is no wonder, then, that rapidly increasing so-called "ethnic conflicts" in the world are really pitting indigenous peoples, asserting our rights over our territories, against the global institutions that want to separate us from our land. Globalization policies and activities play a huge part in inflaming these conflicts by erasing borders and erasing identities that are inextricably linked to our rights as indigenous peoples.

PRESSURE FOR INDIGENOUS RESOURCES

In December 2000, Tebtebba Foundation hosted the International Conference on Conflict Resolution and Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines. Around one hundred indigenous peoples’ organizations from all over the world—Latin America, Africa, Asia—attended and shared their experiences.

All our stories, though different in place and circumstance, are essentially the same: competition over lands and resources because of globalization has led to conflagrations worldwide. These include the U’wa in Colombia who are fighting oil development on their lands; the Pygmies in Rwanda and Burundi who are battling against logging concessions in their forests; the Igorot, Mangyan and Lumad peoples in the Philippines who are resisting incursions of mining corporations into their ancestral lands; the Penans of Sarawak, the Cree of Canada, and the Mapuche of Chile who are all fighting World Bank dam projects. And these are only a few examples.

Now that national governments are liberalizing laws and regulations to match WTO rules, corporations are aggressively moving into new communities seeking to exploit the world’s last remaining natural resources, most of which are found on indigenous peoples’ lands. We have been fighting such exploitation for ages, so naturally, the places where the resources are left are the places where indigenous peoples have been the most successful in resistance.
However, our minerals, logs, and biodiversity are not enough for them. They also need our collective knowledge about plants and even our human genes. The Aceh people from Indonesia reminded everyone at the conference that their fight is not really an "ethnic conflict," as the colonizers like to describe it; it’s about the oil on their land. And although they were once successful in stopping Exxon Mobil, globalization policies now make it easier for corporations to invade and usurp land and resources, and so the oil company is trying to return. In addition to benefiting from liberalized government policy, corporations also strategize with paramilitary groups to terrorize and destroy the peoples who assert their rights to their homelands.

**The Myth of "Sustainable Development"**

Unfortunately, most governments adhere to the dominant worldview of infinite economic growth through a globalized market economy. Even "sustainable development," which is supposed to represent the antithesis of economic globalization, has been subsumed under this model.

In fact, the term *sustainable development* has come to mean sustainability of the global market economy, not environmental sustainability, or the sustainability of communities. In a global market economy, only economies of scale can survive, which in turn can only survive through cheap labor, mass-production capacity, government subsidies, and ever-increasing access to resources. Every decision is determined by the most efficient means of production at the lowest possible labor cost, so goods can be sold cheaply to world markets. The country which subsidizes production and exports so it can flood foreign markets with its products gains the so-called "comparative advantage." Economic and political systems are being harmonized—in other words, homogenized—via the regulations of the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Negotiations focus more on minimizing environmental regulation, than they do on addressing the negative consequences of economic growth on the environment and the people. This leaves no room on the planet for genuinely sustainable development that supports local economies, respects traditional livelihoods, or nurtures the land.

In the same duplicitous spirit, modern science, such as genetic engineering, is now also regarded as a tool for sustainable development, since it does not produce the same kinds of pollution as industrial machine and pesticide-intensive agriculture, though it produces new problems. Even the mining industry is trying to sell the concept of "sustainable mining," which is nothing but a crude attempt to greenwash mining activity. Clearly, the goal of reconciling environmental integrity and developmental imperatives is becoming increasingly confused and unreachable.

So, where does this leave the 80 percent of indigenous peoples who still live in communities that are not completely ruled by global market logic—communities that still practice successful subsistence agriculture, hunting, and fishing. Does it mean that our only chance of surviving is to forget our traditions and assimilate into capitalist thinking and practice?

Sometimes indigenous farmers do try to convert their traditional farming into cash-crop production for exports. It doesn’t usually work out. For example, in one province in my region, many people stopped growing their own food and shifted into growing potatoes and other temperate vegetables, which are not indigenous. Suddenly, due to import liberalization—that is, the lifting of protections against foreign imports—our market was flooded with prepackaged, ready-to-fry, dried potatoes subsidized by the United States and Canada at half the price of the potatoes we grew ourselves. Approximately fifty thousand potato farmers were put out of a job because of the entry of these cheap, highly subsidized potatoes coming from thousands of miles away. Fortunately, because of that terrible experience, the people have returned to producing their own food crops, which removes them from the ups and downs of a global market that is well beyond their control.
Since the Philippines joined the WTO, many of the domestic laws established to protect small farms and industries are being destroyed. For example, the 1996 Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act is being undermined by new laws—consistent with global rules—that provide incentives to attract foreign corporations and investments. The Philippine Mining Act of 1995, allows mining companies to enter the country and to own up to eighty thousand hectares of mineral lands for fifty to seventy-five years. They are allowed investments with 100 percent equity using no local partners. They are allowed to take all their profits out of the country rather than reinvest them. They are free to remove people from their lands. They have water rights and timber rights. So if they want to deforest our land to build their own infrastructure, they are free to do so, with no government regulation or oversight. Such a law is completely consistent with “free trade” ideology as promoted by the World Bank, IMF, and WTO (See Box A, page 42.)

Fortunately, many people are now resisting these incursions, and a strong anti-mining movement is growing in the Philippines and spreading to Indonesia, Malaysia, the Solomon Islands, and other parts of Asia and the Pacific. In the Philippines, four foreign companies—Rio Tinto Zinc (United Kingdom), Western Mining Corporation (Australia), Newcrest (Australia), and Mt. Isa (United States)—have all recently left the country because of massive resistance from indigenous peoples and other local communities.

Privatization and SAPs
The Structural Adjustment Program rules (SAPs) propagated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been very important in expediting the invasion of global corporations into Third World nations. These new rules help privatize public services, utilities, and land resources such as forests. Now the big push is for the privatization of water, which is taking place throughout the Philippines with the same aggressiveness experienced by Bolivia in 2000. Not surprisingly, the indigenous peoples of Bolivia led huge demonstrations protesting water privatization in Cochabamba. (See Chapter on Global Water Wars, page 89.) And the same is beginning in the Philippines.

Indigenous peoples see no reason to hand over control of water to private industry. Why should we relinquish our traditional water-management practices to a national bureaucracy? This totally alien concept is intended to destroy efficient indigenous water-distribution mechanisms already in place. As global institutions continue to push for privatization, more strife of the kind we saw in Bolivia can be expected.

Privatization of forest resources is also predictably disastrous for indigenous peoples. In most traditional communities, forests are considered communal. The concept of land ownership is completely absurd to us. But more to the point, once these huge land concessions come in with the “legitimacy” to log, we are stripped of our very culture and sustenance.

BIOPIRACY OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES

Indigenous peoples’ resistance to colonization and globalization has been instrumental in retaining our indigenous knowledge, sciences, and technologies. Now, with modern medicine desperately seeking new treatment of diseases, indigenous knowledge of plant life is being sought as yet another new commodity. Ironically, it is because we have been so successful in protecting the earth’s precious biodiversity that our lands have become such magnets for corporations and governments not only for the minerals, forests, and waters of our land but also for our knowledge about the properties and benefits of the plants that grow there—and even our human genes.

Corporations are prospecting throughout native lands for seeds we have developed and for our knowledge of the cosmetic and pharmaceutical properties of forest plants. They take our seeds and our knowledge home—usually without our
permission—and patent our plants. This biopiracy reaches inside our bodies to our gene structures: they are surreptitiously collecting blood samples from our people without telling us why. Scientists call it the Human Genetic Diversity Project, but we call it the Vampire Project. Biopiracy is legitimized under the WTO's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPs), which confirms the rights of individuals and corporations to patent life forms in defiance of our traditional beliefs and practices. The TRIPs agreement is pushing all countries to allow corporate scientific institutions to search for and patent indigenous plant varieties that have beneficial properties.

Our traditional usufruct system retains common community ownership and control over all plants and their properties—without patents. WTO-style patent laws are not even in place yet, but corporate biopiracy is already flourishing. Four plants from our territories in the Philippines have already been patented, including the bitter gourd (ampalaya) and another plant called sambong that we use for treatment of asthma. A perfume company, Yves St. Laurent, has patented a plant we call ilang-ilang for its beautiful fragrance.

TRIPs is clearly the imposition of alien western legal regimes which are incompatible with indigenous peoples ways of thinking and behaving. It contradicts indigenous peoples’ customary laws, worldviews and values for retaining community ownership and control over plants and their properties. TRIPs threatens our capacity to ensure that our collectively evolved knowledge will remain under our control and use. By establishing a universal practice of patenting life forms, TRIPs insults the ethics of regarding life as sacred. (See Chapter on Biocolonization, page 59.)

Tourism also plays a critical role in bioprospecting. Whereas the obvious negative impact of conventional tourism on indigenous peoples is the way it commodifies and destroys traditional indigenous cultures by turning them into commodities, its less obvious effect is how it facilitates the hidden entry of bioprospectors. Ecotourism, which is promoted by some environmental organizations brings "researchers" to our communities who then collect plants, soil, insects, and other materials from our lands and forests. (See also Chapter on Ecotourism, page 115.)

Our rights over our lands, resources, knowledge, culture, and genes are all interconnected. Protecting biodiversity does not just mean protecting biological resources but also protecting cultural diversity and respecting our rights to our territories. Local sovereignty by distinct groups of peoples seeking control over their resources must be protected; this is the foundation for our political lobbying.

Indigenous peoples are being pressured to permit conversion of our economic systems into the capitalist framework of high productivity and profitability, which are not primary values that we share. If we go along, it means losing control over our territories, knowledge and resources. Why should we allow foreign or national mining corporations to lease our lands for seventy-five years when we know fully well that what will be left for us will be polluted and devastated lands and the disappearance of waters? Why should we be forced to share our knowledge over seeds, medicinal plants and resource management with corporations who claim ownership, simply because they can wave a patent in our faces? What will the world gain if our diverse and sustainable ways of living are destroyed so we can fit into the cogs and wheels of the globalized capitalist world?

SIX CRUCIAL STEPS FORWARD

Our ancestors told us that land is sacred, that animals and plants are our relatives, and that it is our duty to ensure that they are defended for the next generations. Our resistance to these efforts to homogenize us must be supported —our right to self-determination and our right to be allowed to remain different and diverse. Legal instruments that conflict with our indigenous values, cosmologies, lifestyles, and customary laws should not be imposed on us from any out-
side body. These are not decisions for the WTO or the IMF or the World Bank. We fight for the right to define ourselves and to maintain our continued existence as indigenous peoples on our own ancestral lands.

What are the challenges and strategies we should pursue to ensure that our indigenous ways of thinking and doing will not be obliterated? What policy recommendations are being proposed? Here are six important standards and policies we should push for:

Firstly, it should be recognized that our role in promoting truly sustainable development lies in our ability to continue practicing our indigenous systems of production. This means allowing us to have control over our ancestral territories upon which these practices can survive, and not denigrating the cosmologies that underpin these practices. We demand that governments and financial institutions like the World Bank and other regional banks should allow our indigenous economic, cultural and socio-political systems to co-exist with other systems. They should not force us to be assimilated or integrated into the mainstream if it means the destruction of our diverse worldviews, diverse ways of producing and consuming, diverse cultures and diverse governance systems.

In spite of colonization, and now globalization, many of our sustainable practices, whether in the area of agriculture, forestry or health, have persisted. In fact, it is a miracle that these practices persist to this day, given the incursions and destruction which took place in the form of assimilation and integration policies. This persistence is a major testimony to the viability of indigenous societies.

Recently, I wrote a paper on our agriculture practices and concomitant belief systems and cultural rituals. I used as a major reference a paper written by my uncle in 1954. I was struck that, after almost fifty years, not much has changed in how we grow food and the linkage between this and our traditional religion. This convinced me even further of the viability of our ancient production systems which have weathered a litany of perverse development impositions, not the least of which was the Green Revolution.

Secondly, it is urgent that the roots of the unrest in indigenous peoples' territories be addressed by governments and the international community. The conference on conflict resolution and indigenous peoples, which I mentioned earlier, presented the Manila Declaration. The Declaration highlighted the need to deal with the root causes of conflicts which in many cases are the appropriation of indigenous lands and resources and the denigration of viable indigenous economic, political and cultural systems.

The threats to the very existence of indigenous peoples—especially those whose populations have been reduced to the mere hundreds—are very serious. We are talking about the U'wa in Colombia, the Batwa in Burundi and Rwanda, the Shor peoples in Siberia, among others. Their representatives in the Manila conference appealed to the international community for support in their fight for survival.

If the United Nations is not able to play its role in peace-building, other mechanisms should be built to address conflict situations. One resolution at the conference was the creation of an International Independent Commission of Indigenous Peoples for Mediation and Conflict Resolution. Its mission is to promote and defend the rights of indigenous peoples, especially in conflict situations, and to mediate between conflicting parties for the resolution of the conflict and the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

Third, institutions which claim that they are promoting sustainable development, whether this be the UN and bodies like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank and other regional banks, and governments,
should be informed about what indigenous peoples want. There is a need to sensitize those involved in development and environment work on indigenous peoples’ vision and practices.

Let’s face it: the survival of authentic indigenous tradition is diametrically opposed to economic globalization. One is based on true sustainability through a nuanced harmony with Nature’s cycles; the other values nothing other than how natural resources translate to the bottom line. One benefits the community and stretches far into the future; the other benefits only a few, and only until resources are depleted. Because of these profound paradigm differences, we must remain active and vigilant against the distortion of authentic indigenous beliefs by institutions claiming to promote sustainable development.

Fourth, case studies, reviews and assessments of how mainstream development has destroyed or distorted indigenous models of sustainable development should be undertaken. If such were done, the results could be widely disseminated. Assessments of policy guidelines on indigenous peoples made by the World Bank, other regional banks, UN bodies, the EU, etc., both in terms of substance and how these could be implemented, should also be undertaken. There have been initial efforts made in this direction, but they do not ensure the direct participation of indigenous peoples themselves, and are in need of expansion.

Fifth, efforts should be expanded to ensure that our issues and concerns are addressed in a holistic manner. We have recently had some successes on this point in international agencies. For example, for many years we urged the UN to set up a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples because we were frustrated that our issues were always being addressed in a fragmented manner. It was unworkable. We were tired of being told that we could discuss our rights as Peoples only in The Commission on Human Rights. We were forced to present our attempts at preserving our peoples and nations in reductionist arguments about environment or biodiversity. We sought a mechanism within the UN which would be at a higher level within the UN hierarchy, thus allowing us to address environment, economic and social development, health, culture, and human rights as one comprehensive issue, consistent with our own views. Finally, the UN agreed to establish the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, with indigenous peoples sitting as equal partners in all discussions.

Sixth, the assertion of indigenous peoples of our right to self-determination and our rights to “free, prior and informed consent” to all development plans affecting us should be recognized and promoted, not only by the governments and the UN, but also by society at large.

These rights are essential for us to pursue our political status and our economic, social and cultural development. Our assertion of such rights, even in the face of state and corporate violence, has enabled us to maintain our indigenous systems and our sciences and technologies. Recognition of these rights by governments and the broader society is crucial if we are to save whatever is left of the planet’s cultural and biological diversity. (In Chapter 24, at the end of this book, I will go into greater detail on the specific steps international agencies and governments must take.)

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Indigenous peoples have come a long way in asserting our identities and rights. However, there is still much to be done. There are still indigenous peoples in many parts of the world who are in danger of extinction. This would mean the loss of the diverse knowledge and cultures which they embody. Actions from civil society are as crucial as those from governments and international institutions. Indigenous peoples have shown, time and again, the viability and sustainability of their economic and socio-cultural, political, and indigenous knowledge systems. Whatever is lost is a loss for the entire world, not for indigenous peoples alone.