

Preface

Most indigenous peoples have developed highly specialized livelihood strategies and occupations, which are adapted to the conditions of their traditional territories and are thus highly dependent on access to lands, territories and resources. These traditional occupations include hunting, fishing, trapping, shifting cultivation or gathering food and forest products, handicrafts such as weaving, basketry, woodcarving among others, and rural and community-based industries. In some cases, indigenous peoples are identified by their traditional occupations, for example, pastoralists, shifting cultivators and hunter-gatherers.

In Asia, most indigenous peoples are primarily involved in small-scale agriculture, fishing, hunting and gathering from nearby forests. Other activities include animal husbandry, together with traditional economic activities that support agriculture and involve artisans such as weavers, carpenters, welders, among others. Since access to land and resources is central to indigenous peoples' livelihoods, most have elaborate land tenure and distribution systems, and customary laws regulating the use of resources¹.

The process of nation-building, coupled with the impact of the modern economic system, has been disastrous in the continuing practice of indigenous peoples traditional livelihoods. The free market model as the path to development has been causing more economic and social marginalization of indigenous communities instead of ushering development. Annexation and privatization of ancestral lands and the historical process of systematic displacement of indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories have had devastating consequences, not only in terms of loss of land and livelihood, but also in maintaining cohesion of indigenous communities and their exercise of self governance.

As the demand for cash grows, more and more indigenous peoples move away from subsistence production to more commercial forms of production. In this process, many have lost precious resources such as agricultural lands to loan schemes and contract farming schemes. Access to market is still limited, and communities that want to market their goods very often have to operate through third parties who in turn reap most of the benefits. Indigenous producers have very little control over the pricing of their goods as their bargaining power is limited, and they are subjected to the fluctuations of market prices. To compete in the open market, many indigenous farmers are forced to use chemicals, while others such as craft producers and fisher folks have overexploited their environment in order to increase production and, in many cases, in an attempt to maintain an increasingly consumerist lifestyle.²

Traditional occupations of indigenous peoples, such as shifting cultivation, fishing and pastoralism, are often not recognized by governments who regard these sustainable practices as outdated and antithetical to 'development'. This has led to discrimination against such occupations and their subsequent marginalization resulted in significant loss of income and traditional knowledge. In the worst case, the practices of shifting cultivation have been banned in most countries in Asia resulting to food insecurity, loss of bio-diversity, traditional knowledge and customary forest governance. This condition is being aggravated by the impacts of climate change to the practice of traditional livelihoods. This is despite the fact that ILO Convention No 111 – (anti-Discrimination on Employment and Occupation) Convention of 1958 has been ratified by 169³ countries which most of the Asian countries are a party to. Further, ILO Convention No 111 provides an important framework

¹ Concept Note: Asia Regional Seminar on Traditional Livelihoods and Indigenous Peoples, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 16 – 18 August 2010.

² Lasimbang, J, 'Indigenous Peoples and Local Economic Development', AIPP, Issue No. 5, 2008 - @local.glob

³ Source : ILOLEX – 27.05.2010 : <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newratframeE.htm>

for promoting the rights of traditional occupations of indigenous peoples in line with ILO Convention No 169 and UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Realizing that they are caught in a vicious cycle through their integration into the market economy and globalization, many indigenous peoples have become increasingly convinced that they have to look within their own systems if they are to survive and maintain their communal values.⁴ It is now urgent for indigenous peoples to find ways and means to strengthen their practice of sustainable traditional livelihoods along the line of having their collective rights recognized and secured in order to carve their own path of development that guarantees their cultural integrity and dignity as distinct peoples.

Given this backdrop, AIPP in partnership with UNDP-RIPP and ILO commissioned case studies on traditional occupations and co-organized a regional workshop on traditional occupations with the Ministry of Rural Development of the Royal Government of Cambodia. These two initiatives were aimed at looking deeper into the specific concerns and challenges relating to the practice of traditional livelihoods, and coming out with concrete recommendations on strengthening these sustainable practices amidst economic globalization and climate change. The result of the workshop and the case studies are presented in this publication. It also includes an overview on the particular context of indigenous peoples of Asia.

The regional workshop that was successfully carried out in partnership with the Ministry of Rural Development of the government of Cambodia came out with substantive discussions on traditional occupations, as well as concrete recommendations on strengthening these practices and addressing the key concerns and challenges faced by indigenous communities relating to their traditional livelihoods. Likewise, the case studies are presented here in the hope of providing a better understanding of this lifeline of indigenous communities. The studies focused on the key issues and challenges surrounding the practice of traditional livelihoods. They offer as well policy advocacy and direction for strengthening traditional livelihoods for sustainable development and promotion of indigenous peoples' wellbeing in line with UNDRIP and ILO Conventions 107, 169 and 111.

This publication has been divided in three parts;

Part A: Traditional Occupation, Food Security and Impacts of the Climate Changes (Bangladesh, Thailand and Viet Nam)

Part B: Traditional Occupations and Livelihoods (NE India, Malaysia, Philippines and Cambodia).

Part C: Summary report of the Cambodia workshop - key issues, challenges and recommendations on the practice of traditional livelihoods.

Part A

The case study from Bangladesh highlights the traditional shifting cultivation in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) which is an integrated farming system of agriculture and forestry, fish culture, domestic and wild life rearing. This traditional livelihood practice has contributed to regeneration of forests and soil fertility, conservation of biodiversity and watersheds, and protection of the environment. This study also discusses the effects of climate change and global warming in Bangladesh evidenced by increasing occurrences of cyclones, floods and other destructive natural calamities which is greatly impacting in Indigenous Peoples territories. Climate change and its adverse impacts, and outreach basic services and fair prices are increasing the food insecurity in the country. The government and its development policies are not supporting shifting cultivation and are denying the communities of their ownership to their lands which is affecting their traditional livelihoods.

⁴ Lasimbang, J, 'Indigenous Peoples and Local Economic Development', AIPP, Issue No. 5, 2008 - @local.glob.

The case study of Thailand highlights the traditional livelihood of Indigenous Peoples of the said country and their cultural rights which is creating conflict between the Indigenous Peoples and the government on land and natural resource management. Along with that, the current climate change issues have added to the negative prejudice of the government to the shifting cultivation. The government believes that the rotational farming/shifting cultivation is negatively causing carbon emission and directly contributes to the climate change. This study argues that rotational farming is not a cause of climate change or smog problems as the fields are burned only on one short period of time with only 2-3 days per year, and with a certain burning period of about 1-2 hours per day.

Viet Nam paper focuses on the situation of rotational farming which not only provides food security for ethnic groups in mountainous areas but also to conserves IPs knowledge in farming and traditional seeds that produces diverse in gene resources and conserves the IP traditional culture. This rotational farming is closely related to the ancestral worship through the practice of rituals using rice, chicken, and pig all in line with their cultivation periods which remain unchanged till date. Further, it also elaborates on the REDD programme where the shifting cultivation and rotational farming should be included in the programme and policy for IPs in particular as part of the conservation of customary laws and traditional knowledge in the REDD implementation at the local level.

Part B

NE India study focuses on the shifting cultivation in Ukhrul district, Manipur state specifically on how the forests, rangelands and farming systems are managed collectively by the community. It focuses on the biodiversity conservation which produced many kinds of foods, maintained collective efforts and ensured social security, observation of traditional norms and practices, addressed equity in resource allocation. Land and forest resources are often collectively owned and utilized to meet individual and collective needs in this area. The study discusses the challenges of ethno nationalism and armed conflict situation in the region, the lack of market linkages, land alienation and lost of forest areas, state policies erosion of the roles of traditional institutions, tapping market value in potential niche crops.

The case study from Malaysia presents the results of case studies on traditional livelihoods in two selected indigenous communities in Sabah, formerly known as North Borneo before its independence from Malaysia and the transmission of indigenous knowledge on traditional livelihood and practices to younger generations. The said traditional livelihoods are bead making and weaving by the Rungus community in Pitas and traditional herbal healing by the Kadazandusun in Penampang. The study shares the practice of herbal healing where the community people are very strong in herbal medicine, and the community forest is one of their sources for this. The traditional knowledge on herbal healing is practiced by only a few these days due to lack of traditional knowledge transfer to the young generations from the healers who are knowledgeable in the communities.

Philippines study focuses on the roles of indigenous women in traditional livelihoods. Indigenous women in the Philippines are very much a part of the traditional subsistence agriculture in their communities and play a major and critical role in traditional agricultural production. This study shares the traditional skills and knowledge of women in IP farming systems, responsibility of nurturing the land, resources and culture that they pass on to the next generations such as the traditional healing practices, and also assist in conflict resolution within their own communities as well as to other communities. The role of IP women in agricultural production is inadequately recognized and appreciated though. Further, the non-recognition of IP women weavers as workers in the informal economy denies them those rights to fair wages and benefits for their labour.

Cambodia paper shares the sustainable forest management and market access support through maintaining forest resources, legal recognition of the community boundaries, access to the finance, capacity to meet the market demands, and access to the long-term market system. This study highlights the honey project of the IPs in Monduliri province which is located in the Northeast of Cambodia with the 1.5 million hectares of surface. The honey project is located within the Monduliri Protected Forest in an expanse of 300,000 hectares, and part of a larger protected area in the Northeast region of the province. The Bunong communities have been managing Prey Rodang and Prey Krung Ratuon (forests) and their honey enterprise since 2007.

Part C: Summary report of the Cambodia workshop - key issues, challenges and recommendations.

We hope this publication will help strengthen relations between governments and indigenous peoples, enrich dialogue and cooperation, and inspire greater collaboration and engagement towards respect of customary laws and traditional systems of indigenous peoples.

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