

Chapter 1: Introduction

The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

Definition of indigenous people

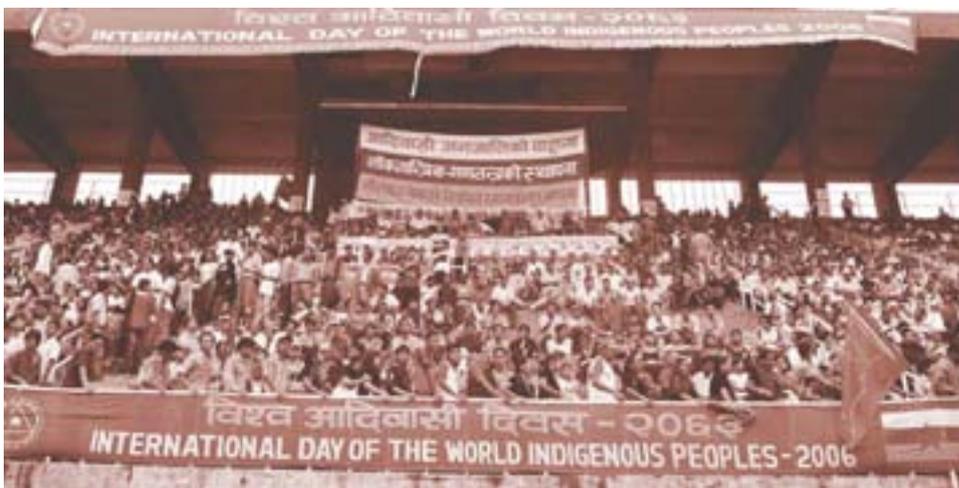
Although there is no single generally agreed upon definition of the term 'indigenous people', a widely used (e.g. World Bank, ADB, IFAD) pragmatic characterisation in the Asian development context is as follows:

'The term 'indigenous people' refers to social groups with a social and cultural identity that is distinct from the dominant groups in society and that makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the development process (IFAD 2000). Indigenous peoples are known by different names in various Asian countries: 'hill tribes' in Thailand, 'ethnic minorities' in Vietnam, 'minority nationalities' in China, 'scheduled tribes' in India, and 'cultural communities' in the Philippines. The features that distinguish them from the mainstream populations include a strong emphasis on clan cultures and ethnicity bonds, a strong sense of identity, and a relatively higher status for women.'

Situation of indigenous peoples

Of the estimated 300 million indigenous people in the world, about 70 per cent live in Asia. Indigenous people continue to be among the poorest in society in almost every country, with higher levels of illiteracy, malnutrition, lack of access to health services, and landlessness. Many of these communities have remained marginal to mainstream political and economic systems and experience social discrimination, economic exploitation, and political marginalisation (IFAD 2000). The productive resources and lands of indigenous peoples are increasingly being exploited in the name of 'national interest' or conservation. The exploitation of minerals, water, and biodiversity, in particular, is taking place at an accelerated pace under the forces of globalisation. Although the importance of community participation in conservation and natural resource management is now well recognised, the general approach to conservation is still largely one of fencing and fining. Issues of tenure and

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ownership of land (as opposed to access rights to forest products granted within specific domains) still remain unresolved. Economic and industrial policies tend to reign over social and culturally sensitive policies. As a result, indigenous peoples are becoming further impoverished.

Background to the Decade

The focus on indigenous peoples' issues at an international level can be traced back to the 1950s and 1960s. These two decades were significant in two ways. With the process of decolonisation, there was a renewed emphasis on peoples' right to self-determination, which at a larger level created a political climate in which new groups could begin to assert claims. In the West, the women's movement and the anti-racism movement gained momentum in the 1960s and, as Bleie writes, '...their defence of diversity, including the right of the oppressed to speak for themselves, paved the way for an incipient indigenous movement' (Bleie 2005). The First NGO Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations was held in 1977. The active engagement of indigenous peoples with the United Nations system began with the setting up of the 'Working Group on Indigenous Populations' (WGIP) in 1982. The annual meetings of this group began to create a legal language that would accord legitimacy to the rights and claims of indigenous peoples around the world. Crystallisation of an 'international indigenous identity' began to take place.¹ Indigenous peoples' issues were brought to the fore in diverse international forums and United Nations processes, such as the World Conference on Human Rights 1993, the World Summit on Social Development 1993, and the Beijing Conference on Women 1995.

In 1993, which was the International Year of Indigenous People, the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights (UNWHCR) in Vienna recommended that the UN declare a decade of indigenous people. This recommendation was implemented through the UN General Assembly Resolution 48/163 of 21 December 1993. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was appointed as the Coordinator of the Decade.

Declaration of the Decade

Over the last two decades, the issues facing the world's indigenous peoples have been given increasing attention with the recognition of the intrinsic link between their continued marginalisation and lack of rights, and persistent poverty. A diverse range of international initiatives have been introduced to address the problems faced by indigenous peoples. One of the most significant among these initiatives was the United Nations declaration of 1995-2004 as the First International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (hereafter referred to as the 'Decade') with the main objective of 'strengthening international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, education and health'. The theme was 'Indigenous People: Partnership in Action'.

Objectives of the Decade

The main objectives of the Decade were

- i. adoption of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,
- ii. establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples in the United Nations system.

¹ The phrase 'international indigenous identity' may seem to be an oxymoron. However, it holds meaning when placed in the context of the intense debates around defining the term 'indigenous'. The continued contesting of the term and the fact that many states still do not accord it official legitimacy is central to the political claims of indigenous peoples, which derive legitimacy by invoking an 'international indigenous identity.' Even if referred to in different ways by states/governments, the recognition of indigenous identity at an international level provides a legal and moral idiom for expressing demands for recognition and collective rights.

The United Nations declared 1995-2004 as the first International Decade of the World's Indigenous People with the main objective of strengthening international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, education, and health.

Some other broad objectives of the Decade included

- i. further development of international standards and national legislation for the protection and promotion of the human rights of indigenous peoples,
- ii. furthering the implementation of the recommendations pertaining to indigenous peoples at all high-level conferences.

In 1995, the General Assembly adopted the 'Programme of Activities' for the Decade and identified a number of other specific objectives:

- i. The development of activities by specialised agencies of the UN system and other inter-governmental and national agencies that benefit indigenous peoples
- ii. The education of indigenous and non-indigenous societies concerning the cultures, languages, rights, and aspirations of indigenous peoples
- iii. The promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples

Declaration of the Second Decade

In January 2005, the United Nations declared a Second International Decade of Indigenous People in recognition of the fact that many of the objectives of the first Decade were not adequately met. The present assessment is, therefore, placed at a critical juncture to reflect upon the successes and failures of the first Decade. It is hoped that the findings generate ideas for action and strategies to make the Second Decade more effective.

Assessment of the Decade

IFAD, ICIMOD and Tebtebba

To what extent did the declaration of the Decade improve the status of indigenous peoples in the world? What tangible, positive changes did the Decade help to bring about in the way that individual nation states address the issues and needs of indigenous peoples? What, in general, is the value of such declarations by international bodies like the United Nations?

Towards the end of the Decade, in 2005, IFAD, together with ICIMOD and the Tebtebba Foundation, started one of the few comprehensive assessments of the first International Decade of the World's Indigenous People to find an answer to some of these questions. The assessment covered ten countries in Asia, five ICIMOD regional member countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, and Nepal), and five in Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam) covered by the Tebtebba Foundation, the Philippines.

IFAD and ICIMOD's interest in the assessment emerged from the distinct overlap in their mandates to address rural poverty in an environmentally sustainable way. The geographical areas on which IFAD and ICIMOD focus are home to large numbers of

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S. Dhong

indigenous peoples (Table 1). Approximately 100 million indigenous people live in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, ICIMOD's area of coverage.

Country	Indigenous Peoples' Population (approx.)	Number of Main Indigenous Communities
Bangladesh	1.2 million (50% in CHT)	45
Bhutan	672,425 (100% of population)	-
Cambodia	140, 397 (1.6% of total population)	17
China	106.4 million (48.7 million in South West China)	55
India	84.3 million	647
Indonesia	30-80 million	N/A
Nepal	8.74 million	59
Philippines	12-15 million	110
Thailand	1 million	9
Vietnam	14 million	54

Tebtebba, established in 1996, is an indigenous peoples' organisation, as well as a research, education, policy advocacy, and resource centre. It seeks to further the understanding of the world's indigenous peoples, their perspectives, issues, and concerns in order to ensure social and environmental justice and sustainability. By bringing together indigenous people at all levels, it seeks to promote sharp advocacy through policy and campaigns recognising, respecting, and protecting the rights and aspirations of indigenous peoples.

IFAD's strategic framework emphasises the need to build the resilience of the poor. It believes that a focus on indigenous peoples will contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The value of focusing on indigenous peoples is highlighted by the fact that one-third of IFAD's investment projects are in regions where there are indigenous peoples in large numbers. In addition, historically, 20 per cent of IFAD's total investment in Asia has been for the development of indigenous peoples.

Objectives of the assessment

The assessment sought not only to document and evaluate changes at the level of the United Nations, but also to analyse the extent to which such proclamations translate into policy and programmatic changes at national levels. The main objective of the assessment was to analyse the successes and failures of the Decade at the national level in individual countries.

The assessment was divided into three broad but inter-linked parts:

- i. Policy analysis – analysis of local, national, regional, and international policies and frameworks
- ii. Programme analysis – documentation of successes, failures, and lessons from projects
- iii. Situational analysis – to capture the broader contextual environment including the role and influence of civil society, the judiciary, research institutions, media, and public discourse

The intended broad outcomes of the assessment were

The main objective of the assessment was to analyse the successes and failures of the Decade at the national level in Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

- i. to assess the extent to which the Decade advanced the cause and rights of indigenous peoples through an analysis of the successes, failures, and lessons learned from the Decade; to identify outstanding issues; and to evolve innovative approaches, strategies, and options for the future;
- ii. to initiate a collaborative dialogue and consultation process with a diversity of stakeholders, to strengthen institutional capacities, and to share lessons and disseminate the findings in order to advance the rights of indigenous peoples;
- iii. to identify and facilitate policy and programme development and advocacy strategies that support the rights of indigenous peoples.

Methodology and partners

The assessment was undertaken in collaboration with in-country partners in all ten countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam). Many of these partners were indigenous organisations or people themselves or are active in research on indigenous peoples' issues and in lobbying for their rights at local, national, and international levels.

The assessment was undertaken by the following partners.

In South Asia:

- Bangladesh – Bangladesh Adivasi Forum
- Bhutan – Institute for Language and Culture Studies
- China – Centre for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge
- India – Indian Social Institute and North-eastern Social Research Centre
- Nepal – Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities

In Southeast Asia:

- Cambodia – Moul Phath
- Indonesia – Albertus Hadi Pramono (Independent)
- Philippines – Tebtebba Foundation
- Thailand – Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT)
- Vietnam Centre for Sustainable Development in Mountainous Areas (CSDM)

A combination of primary and secondary research was used for the collection of data and information.

Primary research consisted of a series of consultations at the local and national levels with indigenous people, indigenous peoples' organisations, researchers, universities, NGOs, and donor agencies. Where possible, discussions were also held with government representatives.² The consultations were in the form of workshops or individual interviews and discussions. Secondary research consisted of a literature review of documents and reports from the UN, other



N. K. Rai

² In most countries, direct discussion with government agencies and representatives was not possible because of the sensitive nature of the topic (in most countries 'indigenous peoples' are still not recognised as such) or because government officials were not aware that 1995-2004 had been declared the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

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international agencies, the government (especially policies), NGOs, and the media, and academic writing. Much of the data was collected through a secondary review of material and validated through discussions and interviews.

Both national consultations and local consultations were conducted in all ten countries. Organised by researchers, the national consultations proved to be very useful in generating feedback, comments, and suggestions from key people from various institutions and organisations, including indigenous peoples' organisations.

A culmination conference was held in November 2006 in Kathmandu, Nepal, in which all the country researchers presented their findings of the assessment and deliberated on a set of common recommendations that could be put forth as an outcome of the assessment. The present synthesis report captures only some features of the country reports for the sake of brevity. For more detailed information and analysis, the individual country reports should be referred to. (The ten country reports, and budget analyses for India and the Philippines, will be published by Tebtebba.)

Scope of assessment and country reports

To refine the scope of the assessment, a greater focus was placed on regions with large populations of indigenous peoples. Accordingly, for India, a separate report was produced for Northeast India. In the case of Bangladesh, a substantial part of the research was devoted to issues in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), and in China, to the four provinces of Southwest China.

Bhutan, in many ways, is unique and most of the findings for other countries cannot be generalised or said to apply to Bhutan. At the same time, the Bhutan report provided a detailed description of the ethno-linguistic mosaic of the country. Bhutan is also a signatory to various conventions, like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which are integral to the discourse on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Each of the country reports, while following a broad common methodology and having similar areas of focus, represents a wide diversity in style and level of critique of policies and programmes. Furthermore, the reports are also naturally conditioned by the ideological leanings of the individual researchers, as well as the political context of the country that they were researching.

Outline of assessment report

This publication is organised into an introduction (Chapter 1), three main chapters that form the body of the report (Chapters 2-4), followed by recommendations and conclusions (Chapter 5). Chapter 2 provides a summary of the impact of the Decade at the international level, focusing primarily on the activities of the UN system. Chapter 3 presents the overall impact at the national level under broad thematic areas. Chapter 4 focuses on policy issues and changes at the policy level, with a substantial part of the chapter devoted to policy changes in each country. This is followed by a documentation and analysis of selected programmes and projects for the empowerment of indigenous peoples implemented during the course of the Decade. Chapter 5 presents a synthesis of the findings of the assessment and recommendations.