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Revitalization of Indigenous Governance System as towards Sustainability
1. Introduction
When the outsiders met indigenous peoples for the first time over five centuries ago, their concept understanding on indigenous peoples was very disparaging and called them aborigine, natives, tribal, schedule tribes, ethnic minorities and ethnic nationalities, connoting backwardness and primitiveness. With such a concept, indigenous systems including governance, culture, social, legal and judiciary, philosophy, economic systems were replaced with supposedly more advanced systems to assimilate and "modernize" indigenous peoples.

However, when excessive exploitation of natural resources resulted in almost the degradation of the environment, affecting all livelihoods, the international community started to think about sustainable utilization of resources in which they realized and gradually recognized the sustainability of indigenous systems.

Most of the ideas regarding indigenous systems from this paper is taken from the work done by PACOS Trust, Sabah, Malaysia on indigenous systems based on the book "Traditional systems of indigenous peoples of Sabah", which I believe is applicable to many indigenous communities in Asia.

2. Indigenous governance system
2.1 Administrative System
Traditionally, the unit of administration and governance among the indigenous peoples was restricted to the village level. However, after means of communication developed, the sphere of administration and governance were expanded in which a number of villages came partially under one administrative system. Before colonial rule, indigenous peoples were effectively independent. Generally, four major institutions of authority governed indigenous political and administrative system: the Village Head or Chief, the Council of Elders, the Priestesses or Priests, and the Warriors. The four institutions worked closely together to safeguard the interest of the community. Customary law was used to govern and control the behavior of members of the community.

Because various tribes or communities were often at war with one another, prosperity, harmony and security were major considerations in the selection of community leaders. Thus, community leaders usually comprised of individuals who were knowledgeable about customs and tradition, have certain specialized knowledge, were wealthy, generous, brave and physically strong. Furthermore, personal integrity, reliability, honesty, wisdom and a sense of justice were valued as personal characteristics when selecting leaders.

The Chief or Village Head held the highest authority in term of hierarchy. She/he was responsible for the overall administration of the village and management of resources. She/he was also responsible for maintaining law and order in the village. The Chief or Village Head presided over village meetings and hearings and played a major role in ensuring that the traditional land boundaries, customary laws and rituals were followed. The Chief or
Village Head was usually inherited as long as his/her personal integrity was fit enough in the eyes and standards of the villagers. In most cases, the Chief or Village Head was selected for his extensive knowledge of the custom, wisdom as well as his prowess and organizational ability to protect the village from raids.

The Council of Elders comprised of members of the community who were usually 40 years old and above. The Council advised the Chief or Village Head on all important matters concerning the village. The Council of Elders was the village administrative body, which made important decisions pertaining to security, development, justice, health, moral, spiritual standards of the community.

The Council of Elders sought their advice from the village Priestesses or Priests. The Priestesses were involved in most aspects of village life: birth, marriage and death as well as other daily activities such as farming, hunting and fishing. Besides being a medical specialist, the Priestesses were also ritual specialists who ensured moral and spiritual integrity. Tradition and custom formed the basis of individual behavior and it was believed that non-adherence to these traditional customs would bring diseases, sickness and natural disasters. To restore harmony, appropriate rituals had to be performed by the Priestesses. They were thus very influential and powerful figures in the community.

The last of the major institutions of authority was paramount leader or warrior who was responsible for security of the community by leading his group of warriors in protecting the village from outside intruders. The paramount leader or warrior was chosen for his prowess in war and in the defense of the community. He represents the higher authority but still seek the advice and assistance from the Priestesses to ward off enemies.

2.2 Socio-Economic system

The key characteristics of indigenous economic system are its subsistence nature, limited goods and services and small scale production. This means that labour is derived locally – usually among family members. Distribution of land, labour and produce is determined to a large extent by social relationships. The tools used are simple and made from locally available resources.

The economic system is based on the principles of *reciprocity, social responsibility* and *sustainability of resources*. In the exchange of goods and services, inter- and intra-community relationships are important to support the mutual need for survival. In terms of practices, these principles are seen in the way communities share what they have caught during hunting expeditions (*reciprocity*). The principle of *social responsibility* ensures that all members of the community, particularly those in a disadvantaged position, are taken care of. There should be no exploitation of others, including outside communities that come to trade, by unfair valuation goods. Everyone is expected to assist a member of the community who is in need by giving or making an exchange even if the product being traded is not needed. This is also expressed through the borrowing of land, the hiring of needy members as a farm labourer, or the selling of a calf before it is born at a very low price to the needy person who
is looking after the pregnant cow. When someone had a good harvest, the person would throw a feast for the whole community or contribute the surplus for needy families.

The principle of sustainability relates mainly to the exploitation or collection of natural resources. Customary laws and the social and judiciary systems ensure that over-exploitation of resources do not occur. Indigenous knowledge on resource management is handed down from generation to generation. Small-scale productions and moderate yields/catch using non-destructive tools in farming and fishing characterize the livelihood of indigenous communities. Care is also taken so that only enough food and other needs for the family to subsist are taken from the environment.

The differences with respect to indigenous systems with the present governance systems, concepts and practices is very obvious. While the present governance systems opt towards globalization, indigenous system is very localized and its sphere is expanded only when there is a common issue to share. Indigenous governance system also is very loose and flexible. The core goals of indigenous systems are prosperity, harmony, peace, sustainability, reciprocity and responsibility for the whole community while globalization budgies moving more towards individualism.

3. Democracy and Participatory Decision Making Process in Indigenous System

The inherited Chieftainship may seem feudalistic but it manifests democracy in terms of the selection of Chief or Village Head, Council of Elders and the decision-making processes. The Chief did not establish the village and ruled the people who lived there but the village was established first and the villagers selected someone a leader who has certain characteristics and from well-established family to be the Chief. Generally, the villagers selected someone with extensive knowledge of custom, wisdom as well as prowess and organizational ability. The selection of the Chief was conducted through a community meeting of all mature village members. The decision is adopted only when the meeting reached unanimous agreement on the matter.

Even though there is no fixed tenure in term of service in indigenous governance system like we see in democratic countries today, there are usually principles to ensure that Chief conducts his/her duty throughout the tenure of office. It is not fixed by years but by his/her personal integrity. For instance, if the villagers no longer approve on the Chief's personal integrity, the villagers used to show their disagreement by shifting to other villages. It is a very strong indication to the Chief and in respect of the villagers, the Chief resigned and the selection for a new Chief was conducted. Members of the Council of Elders were selected by the community and in some indigenous communities, they were not necessarily of aristocratic origins and could even be from among the slaves or conquered people. This manifests not only allow representation but also equality in the administration of community.

In general, indigenous system prefers participatory, inclusive and consensus decision making since the units are very localized and thus, the decisions are applicable and appropriate. When standards or by-laws for management of community including resource are
established, all mature community members have to attend a meeting and make decisions by consensus. The system ensures that everybody understands the rules, regulations and laws, which they set up by themselves. In important cases, unanimous agreement is practiced such as for the decision to go to war. If somebody is reluctant or expresses a negative opinion, the whole plan to go to war is cancelled. However, only the Chief or Village Head and the Council of Elders may participate in deciding in minor issues. It is very rare or does not happen at all that the Chief or Village Head makes a decision alone on cases, which affect the community if it is not urgent. In all these processes, the community as a whole also traditionally participate in decision-making. Opportunities for social gatherings either in community houses or meeting places as well as in the course of daily work, allows community members to discuss about issues and influence or contribute ideas to members of the Council of Elders.

4. Human Resource Development in indigenous system
In general, there is a holistic approach in terms of human resource development in indigenous systems as these systems are all interrelated. For instance, belief, social, cultural, judicial systems because and the objectives are all towards harmony, prosperity and peaceful co-existence among the community. Human development is done through the practice of these systems as a way of life of every indigenous person throughout their lives.

4.1 Indigenous Belief
Indigenous beliefs incorporated in the community's way of life dictate the social system and inter-links with other systems, which in turn keep the various systems flowing in cohesion with one another. The indigenous outlook towards life is holistic and integrated - all things are interconnected physically and spiritually. The dignity and harmonious relationships of all things are the key principles behind the indigenous belief system. It follows that for every action, good or bad, there is an equal reaction. Based on the above principles, the concept of respect and care for all things and the concept of give-and-take are paramount. Any disrespectful action, whether carried out accidentally or purposefully towards a fellow human being, animals or plants, invited trouble for the individual or the community. To ensure respect and care for nature, elders, parents and others, certain rules and regulations are set up and to be abided by everyone.

4.2 Indigenous Social System
The close relationship among members of an indigenous community is one of the key characteristics of indigenous social system. Members of the community live close to each other in small village clusters. The relationships among members are quite varied but generally governed by custom, which is peculiar to each indigenous people. Indigenous communities are predominantly egalitarian in their social organization. The principles behind the custom are based on human dignity, reciprocity, mutual trust and service to others, which recognize the equal rights, worthiness and usefulness of each member of a community. Traditional customs accumulated and honed from generation to generation ensures that relationship among members of the community is balanced and harmonious and the cohesiveness and co-responsibility of each member is maintained. The principle of human
dignity leads to the concept of respect for each member of community. Reciprocity, mutual trust and service to others give rise to the concept of give-and-take, sharing, cooperation and unconditional support for each other in times of need. To ensure that the close and symbiotic relationship among members of a community is maintained and strengthened, members participate actively in social events as well as in the event of death in the community.

4.3 Indigenous Cultural System
Indigenous peoples’ ways of doing things are closely tied with their belief and social system. Work and recreation not only fulfils one’s physiological needs but feeds the soul. The celebration of good things in life and successful completion of work done together is one of its key characteristics. The dignity and the cultural integrity of all things are principles that bind communities together and ensure harmonious relationship among different groups. The concept of respect for others, humanity, tolerance, self-reliance, service and labour-sharing of communal work stems out of a deep appreciation of the cultural integrity of a community. While each indigenous people shows pride in their unique foods, languages, cloths, attires, oral stories, songs, music, dances, crafts and tools, they have a high respect for other cultures. The practice of sharing farm tools, labour and produce remains one of the lasting practices that sustain indigenous communities.

4.4 Indigenous Judicial System
Customs in the form of unwritten laws (now codified in some areas) that guide the administration of justice is a key characteristic of indigenous judicial system. Comprehensive consultation is also an important characteristic to main order and harmony in the community. During the hearing, all members of community are welcome to attend. The principle of collective indemnity and communal solidarity underlie the judicial system. The principle that a decision must be made by consensus is also strictly adhered.

4.5 Indigenous Educational System
Imparting knowledge through oral tradition is a key characteristic of indigenous educational system. Except for certain specialized knowledge and skills, children from an early age are exposed to the different types of life-skill activities in the village. Through examples of adults around them, children learn their custom, which entails how one ought to live in community. Holistic growth, participatory, nurturance and mutual trust are principles that underlie indigenous education system. These principles are shown through the concept of life-long education for the young through the guidance of the older members of the community. Through examples, each members of the community plays an important role in equipping the young with relevant knowledge and skills required to lead independent life. Traditional skills and knowledge are acquired in four different ways, depending on the type of knowledge in question. Knowledge may be transmitted through a process of apprenticeship, the practice of the oral tradition, direct observation and instruction; and through dreams, natural talents or divine gifts.
Individual human development also can be seen in the practice of sharing, particularly with those who are in need of a particular resource. A rich person who has such resource shares or finds a way to help needy persons. For instance in the case of Chin indigenous people who live in India, Burma and Bangladesh, the most important animal is the *mithun* (*Bos Frontalis*). While a person may have numerous livestock, it is by the number of one’s *mithun* that one’s wealth will be judged. Traditionally, the *mithun* has the most important economic value- in terms of payment of tributes and bride price, and as ceremonial animals during feasts, deaths and as sacrificial offerings. For poor families who do not own a *mithun*, it can be acquired through the *Sia Zuat Hlawh*, where families can buy a calf before it is born at a very low price but they have to look after a mother *mithun* when it is only five months pregnant. Another way is through the *Sia Khalh Hlawh*, where a poor family would look after someone else’s *mithun* and get the third calf as their own.

5. Synopsis on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and indicators from indigenous peoples' perspectives

In the above-mentioned indigenous systems, one can obviously see its uniqueness, interconnectedness and its integrity. Therefore, although indigenous peoples may have different views, interpretations, concepts, principles and practices in terms of development, poverty and hunger, education, sustainability, building partnerships and among others, all these issues need to be linked with indigenous systems in order to make the MDGs relevant. Most of the ideas regarding indigenous perspectives on MDGs from this paper is taken from “Indigenous Perspectives: A Journal” of Tebtebba, Volume 7, No. 1, by Tebtebba Foundation, Philippines, which I believe that the journal adequately covers the views of indigenous peoples.

The term “development” has acquired a negative connotation for indigenous peoples even "sustainable" because their histories are replete with traumatic experiences with development projects, policies and programs. In facts, mainstream development is regarded as one of the root cause of problems faced by communities. If the MDGs reinforce this paradigm instead of challenging it, there will be more problems and cannot really bring positive changes for indigenous peoples. If the imposition of development projects and policies without the free, prior and informed consent of affected communities under the rubric of modernization and nation-state building continues, it can lead even to more violent conflicts as we have witnessed today.1

Systematic changes and policy reforms are required for the MDGs to make a different in the daily lives of indigenous peoples. In the face of the negative experiences of indigenous peoples with nation-state building and mainstream development, they built up their own distinct movements, which helped bring about policy changes. They pushed for constitutional amendments and legal reforms, which recognize indigenous identity and rights. In some countries, there are policy shifts and revitalization of indigenous system where they deemed necessary.

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In countries where economic growth rates are increasing, the situation for indigenous peoples has not necessarily changed for the better. In fact, for many countries whose economic growth are spurred by massive extraction of natural resources and the building of giant hydroelectric dams, indigenous peoples became more impoverished. Many of those who lost their cultures and were displaced from their lands have not been resettled yet. Even those who were eventually resettled have been placed in the most hostile or infertile lands. It is a common observation that indigenous peoples live in territories richly endowed with natural resources but they remain the poorest of the poor. This observation was in line with the Asian Development Bank study done in Indonesia. This shows that the richest provinces per capita GDP include East Kalimantan and Irian Jaya, yet the living standards of the populations are generally lower in terms of per capita consumption. This transfer and resulting depression of living standards have undoubtedly led to serious discontent and a potentially explosive situation in these provinces.

Therefore, concerns about the definition and indicators of MDGs have been raised by indigenous peoples. Poverty is generally defined in terms of income and consumption and is constructed around cash incomes and foods expenditures within a market and case-based economic setting. These are parameters that do not adequately reflect the realities of many indigenous peoples. Important non-income indicators of poverty include lack of voice or power in political and bureaucratic systems, the non-recognition of the collective rights of indigenous peoples, and their lack of access to basic infrastructure and social services. Thus, the $1 income indicator does not make much sense for people who do not sell their labour or who spend little time producing for the market.

Education, for most indigenous peoples, is seen as a way to get out of poverty and while education is very important, it can also lead to alienation. There is no question that universal primary education is desirable for indigenous peoples. However, the quality of the education has to be looked into. Does education make indigenous children value their indigenous cultures, norms and systems, or does it make them deny their identity or despise their own cultures, traditions and systems? In most cases, indigenous children who enter the school for the first time are traumatized because of they do not understand the language used, they are teased and discriminated against because they speak a strange language or dialect, they are not dressed like others, and they are treated badly by teachers. Indigenous worldviews, perspectives and history are absent from textbooks and school curricula. In fact, discriminatory references to indigenous peoples are common. Bilingual intercultural education is a frequent demand by indigenous peoples in most countries.

Indigenous peoples repeatedly underline the interrelatedness of social and ecological balance and health. Natural resources management is not just the business of MDG 7, but rather, it underpins the achievement of the majority of the other seven goals. The MGD on “Ensuring Environmental Sustainability” places too much attention on qualitative measures for protected areas and forest cover when the concern should also be on the form of protection as well as sustainable usages. With regard to what is protected, there is too much emphasis on
Northern priorities towards rare or endangered species and habitats rather than on species that are valued by local people for foods, fuel and medicines, or are of cultural significance. In fact, the establishment of protected areas has historically been a major cause of forced displacement of indigenous peoples.

Concerns and recommendations on MDG 7’s targets and indicators have been frequently mentioned by indigenous peoples in many international forums. The Indigenous Peoples Statement to the High-Level Segment of the CSD 12 (2004) stated that “…. today, we reiterate that underlying the water crisis is not just a governance crisis, but also a cultural crisis. …. Water is life, physical, emotional and spiritual. It should not be considered merely as an economic resource. Sharing water is an ethnical imperative and expression of human solidarity. The cultural relationship between water and peoples should be explicitly taken into account in all decision-making processes.

In reviewing the millennium’s social and ecological crises, we note that the global economic and financial system, which has produced tremendous wealth, has also delivered extreme poverty in its wake. The continued enclosure and privatization of nature’s services and resources, including water, is undermining the Earth’s and societies’ capacities to meet the water, sanitation and housing rights as basic entitlements for all.”

“Global Partnership for Development is the goal which tries to address some of the global structural causes of the poverty. It stresses that the problem should be dealt with in a comprehensive manner. The goal focuses more on an open trading, financial system, debt problems and new technology among or between states. The goal is irrelevant to indigenous peoples because it misses to mention “linking its focus areas with relationship between states and indigenous peoples”.

Poverty amidst indigenous peoples finds its roots in colonization, the destruction of indigenous economic and socio-political systems, continuing systematic racism, discrimination, social exclusion, and the non-recognition of indigenous peoples’ individual and collective rights. Indigenous peoples felt betrayed by nation-states when they saw that the autonomy and local sovereignty which their ancestors fought and died for have been violated by the new rulers because in many countries, the dominant populations become successors of colonizers and perpetuate internal colonization to indigenous peoples even though they fought side by side with others against the colonizers.

Structural inequities and inequalities were further reinforced by the legislation of discriminatory and oppressive land laws, which ignored indigenous peoples’ customary land tenure systems and laws. Natural resources management laws of governments contradicted indigenous sustainable natural resource management practices in some cases. Indigenous territories were mainly regarded as resource-base areas and it was the sole prerogative of nation-state to decide how to exploit these resources.
Official Development Assistance (ODA) and loans were the most important sources of external financing for developing countries until early 1970s. Now this has significantly declined and private capital inflows expanded but only to a few developing countries. Indigenous peoples have questioned the use of ODA when very few benefits reach indigenous communities from ODA projects. In the case of some countries, ODA is strongly offended by indigenous peoples because the concerned governments not only siphon the assistance to build and expand unproductive investment such as military purposes but also use the fund to suppress the indigenous peoples concerned. Structural adjustment packages tied to foreign loans made basic social services even inaccessible for indigenous peoples. In addition to the direct negative impacts of inappropriate development projects, the debt burden, is another major factor for the exacerbation of indigenous peoples’ poverty. To generate foreign exchange for payment of the foreign debt, many governments extract natural resources from indigenous territories for export even if these are clearly unsustainable.

6. Bridge the gap or rebuilding indigenous governance system

Doctrines and laws used by colonizers such as terra nullius or the Regalain Doctrine, were invoked by many new nation-states, in many states of Asia, indigenous socio-cultural and political systems which were seen as barriers to the entrenchment of colonial rule or perpetuation of state hegemony, were illegalized or destroyed. Structural inequities and equalities were further reinforced by the legislation of discrimination and oppressive laws, which ignored indigenous peoples’ customary and other systems. Under such situation, indigenous governance systems are in the brink of extinction for once and all. Where and when the situation is strongly favoured to revitalize indigenous systems for the betterment of community, the community themselves, or NGOs or governments reintroduce to a certain part or parts of the indigenous governance systems but not as a whole. In some areas, the governments or NGOs replace the indigenous governance with quasi-traditional system.

6.1 Malaysia

In the case of indigenous peoples in Sabah of Malaysia, traditional authority is still there but it is very weak and superseded by the authority introduced by the government. Therefore, Partner for Community Organizations in Sabah (PACOS) mobilized the community to establish their own “Community Organization” comprising with adults, youths and women to observe and maintain their traditions, customs and other systems, particularly for management of lands and resources. PACOS provided trainings for establishment of the community organization as well as facilitation on the community decision-making processes. Government also sent their staff of the concerned departments to take part in the training.

After 1960s in Sabah state of Malaysia, the river fish population began to deplete due to excessive habitat destruction such as loggings, illegal fishing such as using poisonous chemicals, explosives and electro-fishing, and over fishing in order to meet the increasing demands. Only when fish population has been dwindling over the years, Fishery Department of the state’s authority cropped up to revitalize “Tagal System”. Tagal system is a traditional community-base resource management of indigenous peoples in Sabah in which local
Community are authorized and empowered to protect and manage their riverine fisheries resource. Leaders of the Tagal committee are elected by the community themselves and all households within the concerned Tagal zone automatically become ordinary members of the committee. District Fishery Officer acts as advisor to the Tagal committee. The Tagal committee formulates rules which will be benefit for the community such as demarcation of the boundaries of the rivers to be their jurisdiction, duration and time for closed season, applicable gears for fishing, and amount of penalty. For doing so, existing laws and acts allow to enforce and empower Tagal system such as “Section 58 of the Sabah Native Court (Native Customary Laws) Rule 1995 and Section 36 of Sabah Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Enactment 2003”. Now, fish population in the river is just like in the 1960s. The Tagal system is so far revitalized and practiced in 179 villages in Sabah state.

➢ UNDP: ADR in Cambodia not based on traditional system but on court system
The Sabah government (Sabah is one of the 13 states in the Federation of Malaysia) has articulated the need for participation of indigenous peoples in natural resource management. Indigenous peoples themselves have opened many opportunities for participation, particularly when capacities are enhanced and openness is expressed by the government. Workshops, seminars and conferences organized by governments, the academia and NGOs are important venue to articulate opinions, although these have sometime been criticized as inappropriate for indigenous peoples as English is often used and the venue, not conducive for discussions. Communities have also called several dialogues but government representatives have not reciprocated by attending these meetings, thus cutting the opportunity to also listen and see the conditions that indigenous peoples are living. In a number of cases, indigenous peoples of Sabah were able to participate in decision-making such as the drafting of the Rules for Sabah Biodiversity Enactment.

**Case 1 - Development of Rules for the SBE2000**

The Sabah Biodiversity Enactment was adopted by the Sabah state Legislative Assembly in November 2000. However, it could not be implemented until Rules to the Enactment were formulated and adopted. PACOS Trust thus undertook several consultations with communities and government to develop the Rules accompanying the Sabah Biodiversity Enactment 2000 to fulfill the requirements of section 9(1)(j) which requires the creation of a ‘system’ that ensures indigenous peoples "... shall all times and in perpetuity, be the legitimate creators, users and custodians of traditional knowledge, and shall collectively benefit from the use of such knowledge."

This system also draws upon the requirements of the various international legal instruments concerning the issue, some of which have come into force subsequent to the passing of the Enactment. The result of an extensive consultation process with representatives from over 40 indigenous communities, the system provides a culturally appropriate means for the dissemination of information, the obtaining of consent on mutually agreed terms, in accordance with customary law and the equitable sharing of benefits with indigenous communities. Practical benefits include an increased efficiency in collection efforts and effective monitoring of illegal collection activities, poverty alleviation and the realization of human food security and health and cultural integrity within indigenous communities.

**Case 2 - DANCED and Capacity Building of the Sabah Wildlife Department to Ensure Participation of Indigenous Peoples**

An approval by the Danish government through DANCED to support a capacity building project to the Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD) initiated a project which among other
components, included a community component aimed at obtaining better understanding of various aspects of hunting and wildlife management of rural indigenous communities in Sabah. In the Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997, there are two provisions that relate to the participation of local communities in sustainable wildlife management – the Village Hunting License, AKHL and Honorary Wildlife Warden, HWW. In November 2001, the SWD Capacity Building Project and PACOS TRUST, initiated the Pilot Project on AKHL and HWW. Two indigenous communities were selected as pilot areas and the main objectives of the Pilot Project were to develop a model for the issuing of AKHLs to local communities in Sabah, to develop appropriate wildlife management mechanisms and to appoint a number of community Honorary Wildlife Wardens.

In cooperation with the local communities, mechanisms for participation in and administration of hunting and wildlife management were developed. The experiences gained during the implementation of the Pilot Project show that local communities are willing to participate and compromise on natural resource management even if it means a restriction to their hunting activities but which would recognise their rights to manage their wildlife resources and assist them in developing appropriate wildlife management mechanisms. The role of donors to facilitate engagement between indigenous peoples and governments is very significant in Sabah.

8. Impact of equal participation of indigenous women and men

Women's Participation at UN Processes
In the Preamble of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognizes the important role of women and women's knowledge in conserving and nurturing biodiversity. Yet, the operative articles of the CBD and many of the Programme of Work of the various thematic issues have not given much emphasis on women. The International Indigenous Women on Biodiversity (IWBN) was thus formed to provide a perspective on issues faced by women. The IWBN made a conscious effort to involve equal number of indigenous women and men participants, and although this has not been achieved, there has been a significant increase of very active women in the CBD processes. The formation of the IWBN and the consciousness of having more women have raised the profile of indigenous women who have all the time been active in the negotiations including negotiations at these meeting, but were otherwise not noticed or appreciated. This is also the case for other processes at the international fora such as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII). In 2003, the PFII theme on "Women and Youth" brought almost equal number of men and women, bringing home the message that women are also capable of bringing up issues effectively at the international level.

9. Role of donors
Prior to 1997, participation of NGOs and community organizations in project planning and implementation were very rare in Sabah. Technical cooperation between Germany (GTZ) and the Sabah government (Forest Department) to develop the Sustainable Forest Management System at a pilot site in Deramakot Forest Reserve represented the turning point in incorporating a "social component" in bilateral support to the State. Similar projects funded by the Danish development agency, DANIDA and several government departments in Sabah further enhanced the participation of indigenous communities and NGOs. Technical cooperation with DANCED (and later DANIDA), which has firm commitment to a policy on indigenous peoples led to active participation of PACOS Trust and the community in the various pilot areas. JICA, Japan which does not currently have a policy on indigenous peoples' policy have a potential to formulate such a policy through the Borneon Biodiversity Ecosystem and Conservation (BBEC), a project between the Sabah government and JICA.

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