

NAILSMA Hosts International Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples

By Samara Erlandson

From 2 – 4 April 2008, NAILSMA in conjunction with Japan-based United Nations University – Institute of Advanced Studies and the Secretariat of United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) convened an International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change in Darwin, Australia.

The Expert Group Meeting drew on the expertise of Indigenous Peoples; United Nations Permanent Forum members; relevant United Nations agencies; intergovernmental agencies; national and local governments; Indigenous Peoples' organizations; non-government organizations and academics that are active within the field of climate change to discuss important issues surrounding climate change impacts and opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

International Indigenous experts represented each of the seven UNPFII regions: Africa; Asia; Central and South America and the Caribbean; the Arctic; Central and Eastern Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; North America; and the Pacific.

'Indigenous people have done the least to cause climate change and now the solutions...are causing more problems for them', said Victoria Tauli-Corpuz from the Philippines, who is the Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

NAILSMA Staffer Ms Jean Fenton presented a positive story to the debate about carbon trading or offsets, highlighting the West Arnhem Land Fire Agreement (WALFA) as being a way in which voluntary offsets can contribute towards Indigenous aspirations to remain, return or re-connect to their country. Whilst there is more work to go in ensuring that the finer aspects, particularly those relating to the communities themselves such as governance and benefit sharing, this methodology presents as a positive contribution towards Indigenous development and contribution to climate change.

The objectives of the Expert Group Meeting were to:

- Promote an opportunity to exchange information on the effects of climate change.
- Draw attention to the impact of climate change on indigenous peoples, their livelihoods, cultural practices and lands and natural resources.
- Identify options and further plans to accommodate the many issues (i.e. migration) that indigenous peoples face as a result of climate change and identify possible solutions that maintain indigenous peoples' identity and cultural integrity.

- Identify international institutions that may have an interest in working in partnership with indigenous peoples to address the issues in relation to adaptation, mitigation, monitoring and carbon emissions trading.
- Highlight good practice models; and
- Identify gaps and challenges and a possible way forward.

Indigenous people have shared harrowing stories. An Indigenous member of the Inuit people has told the Experts meeting how hunters have lost their lives because of the melting polar cap. “Hunters have gone out hunting and they have fallen through the ice and so forth and people have lost their lives”. People are putting it down to climate change and changes to the ice sheets. Very significant issues to be aware of and it’s the first time obviously in this part of the world we have heard of this type of impact of climate change”.

The meeting also heard how islands are being lost in the Pacific Ocean to rising sea levels. “Many of the Pacific islands are very small and they are also very low islands, they are already experiencing a lot of king tides which are taking over and taking away a lot of islands and a lot of Indigenous estates”.

Four major themes were discussed as follows:

- Theme 1 Outlining the effects of Climate Change on indigenous peoples**
- Analysis of International standards and recommendations concerning the rights of indigenous peoples (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN Convention on Climate Change, Human Rights Committee and other treaty bodies, Human Rights Council, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, ILO and others) relevant to the effects of climate change;
 - Analysis of how the goals and needs of indigenous peoples in climate change arrangements differ from the needs and goals of other interested holders, especially in the climate change processes;
 - Provide case studies outlining the effects of climate change on indigenous peoples;
 - Outline strategies required to deal with the effects of climate change such as migration.
- Theme 2 Adaptation Measures to Climate Change**
- Highlight ways that indigenous peoples could be involved in programs that support community level mitigation and adaptation measures and at the same time recognize the value of traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples that has enabled them to maintain and interact with their environment in a sustainable way;
 - Provide case studies of instances where indigenous peoples are working as a community or in partnerships with Governments, private sector companies, donor agencies to adapt to Climate Change.
- Theme 3 Carbon Projects and Carbon Trading**

- Analysis of carbon projects and their impact on indigenous peoples' livelihoods, their lands and territories;
- Highlight and provide case studies of partnerships that currently exist between Governments, private sector companies, donor agencies and indigenous peoples in carbon projects and carbon trading;
- Provide an analysis on the promotion of forest conservation, measures for energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Theme 4 Factors that enable or obstruct indigenous peoples' participation in the Climate Change processes.

- Provide examples where there might be effective participation in decision-making at the national level;
- Highlight examples where indigenous peoples are working in partnership with UN agencies, Governments, the private sector and/or donor agencies on monitoring and assessment of climate change;
- Analyse whether indigenous peoples have public access to information on climate change measures;
- Highlight measures of accountability and integrity in decision-making and implementation of policies at the international and national levels in regards to the Climate Change processes;
- Identify obstacles, including lack of relevant statistics, lack of information and lack of understanding of technical and scientific language of Climate Change arrangements;
- Focus on the persistent barriers that block indigenous peoples' effective participation in the Climate Change process;
- What is the role of the donor community and the private sector in enhancing or weakening indigenous peoples' participation in the Climate Change process?

Joe Morrison said recommendations made during the talks will be put to the seventh session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. "Which is a very significant forum for Indigenous peoples around the world and we hope Australia will sign up to that", he said.

What we want to do is use the permanent forum to articulate how Indigenous people are affected on their land by climate change and what the opportunities are as well".

For further information visit the UNU-IAS Traditional Knowledge Initiative Website at: www.unutki.org