



**5<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES  
IFIP-PERMANENT FORUM SIDE EVENT**

*Phrang Roy, Assistant President on Special Assignment for Indigenous and Tribal Issues of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)*

**IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD CAPACITY WITHIN  
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

17<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2006, United Nations Headquarters, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

The deprivation of indigenous peoples is well known to all of us and I will not bore you with facts and figures. This is one side of the story of indigenous peoples we all talk about and we must certainly be steadfast in upholding their rights and in working for their call for justice.

However, when identifying opportunities to build capacity within indigenous communities, we must also take a look at the other side of their story - a story of communities who are endowed with attractive assets and who are, for example, providers of environmental services without any demand for compensation. They certainly have assets on which the international community could build a world of hope for everyone.

For example, I come from a matrilineal indigenous community where ancestral property is inherited by the youngest daughter. In such a community no child is a bastard because she or he belongs to the clan of the mother. A woman in such a community may not have any say in community affairs but she has a lot of dignity. Because of this dignity, domestic violence is almost unknown in my community and this is unique. Such attributes are precious and we can work with such indigenous communities to protect and promote a way of life that that are being eroded very rapidly.

IFAD has promoted many self-help groups of indigenous women and we have been amazed at the transformational role of such groups. In the process, we have learnt to look for opportunities in a community with a more appreciative attitude. We have learnt that as we search for opportunities with indigenous peoples, we must also listen to their stories of their high moments in their local history.

I have had a long involvement in the formulation and implementation of development projects. In this respect, I have learnt one important lesson: there is no direct relationship between the size of a loan or a grant and the effectiveness of a development

project. In fact, the larger the volume of the loan or grant, the greater is the danger of the project being hijacked by local elites and local powerful groups. It is therefore very important not only to look for the historical high moments of a community but to also search with them for those “tipping point” opportunities.

In the early 1980s, Mozambique was under a regime that recognized only State Farms as agricultural land. Since IFAD supports only smallholders and marginalized groups, funding of State Farm initiatives was not possible at all. While trying to formulate an investment project for Mozambique, we suddenly discovered the small backyard gardens where women depended for their food security needs and where biodiversity was very much respected by them. We saw this as a very unique opportunity and developed a backyard garden project for the food security of poor households. The project became a roaring success.

Years later when the World Bank went to Maputo to assess the performance of the agricultural sector of Mozambique, it noted that the IFAD funded project for backyard gardens had silently led to the eventual reforms in the agriculture sector of Mozambique. We need to play a more proactive role in helping indigenous communities to constantly scan for such “tipping” opportunities.

In my key note address of yesterday, I had highlighted how isolated indigenous communities do provide the international community with a challenge. However they also provide us with plenty of opportunities for creative collaboration for capacity building within an indigenous community. Such neglected and isolated pockets are also to be found in otherwise well developed or developing areas. In all such areas, the most difficult challenge is the provision of delivery services.

The Government of India has a rural Public Health Clinic (PHC) for every 20,000 of its rural population. A PHC is schematically designed to have a small and appropriately equipped clinic with a Medical Officer, a nurse and associated medical attendants. Unfortunately, in many of the very remote areas, most of this infrastructure is lying idle because Medical Officers are unwilling to work in such isolated areas that are often infested with malaria and other preventable diseases.

IFAD and FAO have been working together in promoting a community led alliance against hunger. Our local partners in North East India are two Church based NGOs. As hunger is very closely linked to health and concerned with the lack of medical facilities in these remote areas, the Government of Meghalaya requested the NGOs to take over the running of these remote health centers.

The NGOs are planning to manage these health clinics by attracting medically trained and experienced volunteers from outside the region or country and from amongst those who may have just retired and who may like to devote some of their time to work in such areas for sometime. IFIP could use its networks to support this much-needed service and thereby serve an indigenous community.

Indigenous communities associate their poverty with the trampling of their dignity, with humiliation and with their powerlessness. They are also very conscious that their poverty is very much entwined with the lack of respect of service delivery agents of their abilities to identify both problems and solutions concerning the well being of their communities. In such situations, philanthropic organizations could work with Governments and NGOs to support training programmes that could transform the mind set of service deliverers and thereby assist to develop the capacity and sensitivity of national, provincial and local institutions that work with indigenous communities in such remote areas.

Intra community conflict is one area that we often do not talk about in international conferences of indigenous peoples. Philanthropic institutions could be of help by supporting organizations that provide training for human rights and peace making negotiating skills. The sharing of experiences, ideas and hope could also be of great help to local communities under conflict. Supporting the poor, the marginalized and young people from areas of conflict to visit other communities that have been able to negotiate peace amongst themselves is another powerful way that a philanthropic organization could build peace and justice within an indigenous community.

Finally, for identifying opportunities to build capacity within an indigenous community, one must work very closely with organizations that have a convening authority and with local facilitators that have credibility within a given community or country. Philanthropic organizations can therefore gain considerable mileage by working closely with UN bodies, inclusive faith based institutions and with people who have credibility in their respective country or community.

Thank you.