



Forest Peoples Programme

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PRESS RELEASE

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Inaction to recognise Indigenous Peoples' rights is frustrating conservation goals

Conservation is missing its 'main best chance' of being effective, warns a new study from IUCN member the Forest Peoples Programme. The study results from a collaborative investigation by indigenous peoples of their situation in relation to protected areas.

At the last World Parks Congress, held in Durban in 2003, conservationists committed themselves to a 'new paradigm' of conservation which respects the rights of indigenous peoples. No new parks should be established without their consent, forced resettlement should be strictly eliminated, lands taken without consent should be returned to their traditional owners and indigenous peoples should be involved in the management of protected areas and share in the benefits. Now, five years on, the study examines whether conservationists have been putting into practice the commitments they made in Durban and at Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

'We wanted to know if this 'new paradigm' has been put into effect,' reports Marcus Colchester, Director of the Forest Peoples Programme. 'What we have found is that, despite adopting new policies and despite some encouraging examples of progress, which show that conservation through securing indigenous rights is possible, in practice conservationists have hardly changed their ways. Protected Areas are still being run in top down ways that exclude indigenous peoples and deny their rights.'

The review of the situation in Cameroon shows that although in one national park, Campo Ma'an, the management plan has been revised to allow the Bagyeli pygmies to continue to hunt and gather from their forests, in most other protected areas laws and policies continue to exclude 'pygmies'.

'In practice, we continue to suffer repression by eco-guards who stop us hunting in our forests' says Messe Venant, a Baka from the 'Pygmy' organisation, Okani. 'The guards come into camps, brutalise us, take away our shotguns and our game and sometimes even burn our huts. But these are our forests, we have lived here and conserved them for centuries. Why are we, who know how to live with our plants and animals, now denied our livelihoods? The conservation agencies should be working with us to defend our rights and protect our forests.'

In Uganda, where the Batwa people were evicted to make way for the Bwindi and Mgahinga National Parks and Echuya Central Forest Reserve, there has been little progress to revise policies in line with the Decisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

'We welcome the fact that the Ugandan protected area authorities have been open to a dialogue with us about implementing the commitments made at the CBD,' says Peninah Zaninka who works for the United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda, 'but on the ground the

situation has not changed. The Batwa are deprived of access to their forests, most are landless and they have no meaningful role in managing these areas which are their ancestral homes.'

In Suriname, many indigenous peoples and Maroons find that their ancestral lands have been incorporated into protected areas without any consultation. The review has so far found no evidence that the government is making concrete progress implementing the 'new paradigm'. The government admits it is difficult and progress slow: 'we are struggling with a lack of financial, technical and human resources'. A priority for the indigenous peoples of Suriname is the amendment of national laws so they recognise and guarantee their rights over their lands, territories and resources.

'Suriname is the only country in the Americas which has no statutory law allowing recognition of Indigenous Peoples' land rights' says Cylene France of the Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname (VIDS). 'This is the biggest obstacle to a rights-based approach to conservation in Suriname. We feel that the international conservation organisations working in Suriname should do more to support us on this matter, because they are very powerful. Are they on our side or only interested in our resources?'

In Thailand, where some 700,000 members of the 'hill tribes' who lack land rights and have been declared illegal residents in watershed conservation zones, the people live in great insecurity. The government still has plans to relocate all these people.

'We are aware of our responsibilities to look after our lands and forests, we have mapped and documented our systems of customary use. Under the DANIDA-funded Joint Management of Protected Areas project we were able to dialogue with government officials about our situation. But, in fact, laws and government policies have not changed. We still fear expulsion from our lands,' says Kamonphan Saelee, a Lisu working for the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association.

The Durban Accord and Action Plan had called for an end to the eviction of indigenous peoples from their lands to establish protected areas. Adam Ole Mwarabu Lemareka, a Parakuiyo elder from central Tanzania.

'In 2006-7, some 400 families of my people with over 300,000 cattle and 20,000 goats were expelled from our lands to make way for the expansion of the Ruaha National Park in the southern part of Mbeya and Iringa regions. We were forced to move over 1000 kilometres to the coast and Lindi region to a place where we are not welcome. We have suffered rapes, shootings, loss of our property and made poorer. If this is the 'new paradigm' we don't want it!'

The series of reports, issued as discussion drafts to the World Conservation Congress, urge conservationists to put their prior commitments into practice. The aim is to promote dialogue at international, national and local levels to bring about change.

'What is now needed,' says Maurizio Farhan Ferrari, Coordinator of the Environmental Governance Programme of the Forest Peoples Programme, 'is the establishment of effective mechanisms, especially in country and locally, that can put the Durban Accord and the Decisions at the CBD into effect. We appeal to all IUCN members – Governments, statutory bodies and NGOs - to make good faith contributions to reconcile conservation efforts with indigenous peoples' rights. We can't afford another decade of mutual suspicion and conflict. We have to work together if ecosystems are to be defended.'

To arrange interviews or for further information:

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Biographies of persons in Barcelona available for interview:

Mr. Messe Venant is a Baka from Cameroon, who works for Baka organisation OKANI. He is also FPP's focal point in Cameroon. He carried out the review in Cameroon.

Ms. Cylene France is a researcher working for the Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname. She studies International Relations. She is a Lokono from West-Suriname, currently living in Paramaribo. She is working on the review in Suriname.

Mr. Adrian Lasimbang is a Kadazan-Dusun from Malaysia, who works for PACOS, a community based organisation working with indigenous peoples throughout Sabah, Borneo, Malaysia. He produced the review paper on Malaysia.

Mrs. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz is an Igorot from the Philippines. She is the founder and executive director of Tebtebba Foundation, an indigenous people's policy research centre based in Baguio City in the Philippines. She is also the Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). Tebtebba produced the Philippines review paper.

Ms. Kamonphan Saelee is a Lisu from Thailand, working for IMPECT, the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association. She is currently carrying out the review in Thailand.

Ms. Penninah Zaninka is co-ordinator of the United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda. She has spent over a decade tirelessly supporting Batwa communities in their struggle against discrimination and marginalisation. From a fledgling indigenous organisation formed in 2000, UOBDU currently has eight members of staff working to support its members in six districts of Uganda. Penninah continues to work with both Batwa families at the community level and their respective partners at the local, national, and international levels. She carried out the review in Uganda.

Mr. Onel Masardule is a Kuna from Panama, working for the Foundation for the Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge in Panama (FPIC). He is also the Focal Point for Protected Areas of the Indigenous Peoples Conservation Committee (IPCC).

Mr. Adam Ole Mwarabu Lemareka is a leader of the Parakuiyo Pastoralists in Tanzania. He is part of the Organisation for Parakuiyo Pastoralists Indigenous Community Development.

Dr. Maurizio Farhan Ferrari is the Coordinator of FPP's Environmental Governance Programme.

Dr. Marcus Colchester is the Director of the Forest Peoples Programme. He was principal author of the synthesis review paper and was in charge of the international review.

Mr. John Nelson is FPP's Africa Policy Advisor, who has been involved in the review study carried out in Cameroon.

Ms. Caroline de Jong works for FPP's Environmental Governance Programme and is involved in the review in Suriname.

Dr Christopher Kidd is a social anthropologist working with the Forest Peoples Programme in support of their programme in Uganda. Chris' has been working alongside the Batwa since 2002, supporting their representative organisation, the United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda. He has worked on the Uganda review paper together with Penninah Zaninka.

Documents:

One synthesis report and four case studies are available:

Marcus Colchester, Maurizio Farhan Ferrari, John Nelson, Chris Kidd, Peninnah Zaninka, Messe Venant, Len Regpala, Grace T. Balawag, Borrromeo Motin, Banie Lasimbang, 2008, *Conservation and Indigenous Peoples : Assessing the Progress since Durban*.

Chris Kidd and Penninah Zaninka, 2008, *Securing Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Conservation: A review of south-west Uganda*.

Messe Venant with John Nelson, 2008, *Securing Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Conservation: Reviewing and promoting progress in Cameroon*.

PACOS Trust, 2008, *Securing Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Conservation: Reviewing and Promoting Progress in Sabah, Malaysia*.

TebTebba Foundation, 2008, *Philippines Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas: Review of Policy and Implementation*.

All these reports are available on: www.forestpeoples.org

Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) is an international NGO, founded in 1990 to promote forest peoples' rights. FPP supports forest peoples in their efforts to secure and sustainably manage their forests, lands and livelihoods. Strategies to achieve this include promoting the rights and interests of forest peoples at local, national and international levels, providing them with opportunities to have an effective voice in decision-making processes, challenging top-down policies and projects that deprive local peoples of resources, coordinating support among environmental organisations for the visions of forest peoples, supporting community-led sustainable forest management, and publicising the plight of forest peoples through research, analysis and documentation. For further information visit the website at www.forestpeoples.org