

Information note #7b

Have your voice heard at government level



Baka women fishing, Payo, Cameroon, February 2010.
Photo: Centre for Environment and Development (CED).

In addition to the actions possible through the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Commission or the Commission), NGO involvement at the domestic level is equally important. Simultaneous actions at national level (within the country) and regional level (the African Commission in particular and the African system in general) will have an impact and will be able to bring about the desired changes. For example, it would be possible to request the African Commission's support for a national campaign to bring national laws into line with regional standards. As part of its promotional mandate, the Commission would be able to guide the governments through this procedure. NGOs could play a dynamic role in this process.

A number of actions can be taken at the domestic level to contribute to greater awareness on the part of government authorities and members of civil society with regard to the situation of indigenous women. The suggestions below could lead to real changes.

Stay informed

In order to defend the rights of indigenous women effectively, it is essential to be informed about:

- The different ways in which the rights of indigenous women in the country are violated;
- National laws and initiatives which infringe their rights;
- The regional and international framework established to guarantee the protection of the rights of indigenous women and peoples.

Carry out training

- Organise training seminars for women so that they can learn about their rights and the remedies available to them;
- Organise training and awareness-raising seminars for other civil society organisations and for lawyers, judges and members of the legal and judicial community of the country;
- Develop training materials to disseminate information on the rights of indigenous women and on available remedies. Ensure that the materials are widely distributed.

Participate

- Be visible: take part in activities organised by other civil society organisations and use the opportunity to raise awareness among

the other participants of the situation of indigenous women in the country;

- Try to get invited to conferences on the subject of human rights and the rights of women; ask the speakers questions on the rights of indigenous women; ask to give a presentation on indigenous women's rights;
- Encourage indigenous women to speak at events and meetings so that it does not appear that others are speaking on their behalf.

Unite

- Form a working group or network of organisations with similar aims in order to discuss strategies and to co-ordinate promotional and advocacy activities for the rights of indigenous women – in the words of an African proverb, "if you wish to go quickly, go by yourself, but if you wish to go far, we must all go together";
- Consider partnering with other credible organisations to denounce violations of indigenous women's rights by producing, among other things, reports on their human rights situation in the country;
- Involve the media so that they can transmit the message.

Play the advocate

- Seize every opportunity to advocate for the rights of indigenous women;
- Use the available forums to remind the government of its obligations under regional and international law;
- Share reports and awareness-raising material with the government to provide information on the human rights situation of indigenous women in the country;
- Remind the government, where applicable, of any recommendations by the African Commission or United Nations monitoring mechanisms.

Involve national human rights institutions

National human rights institutions usually have a presence in every country. Entering into contact with these institutions and sending them information and reports can be a good strategy, as can inviting them to come and observe the situation "on the ground". These institutions provide a forum in which civil society organisations can make a significant impact and which can potentially serve as a mouthpiece at the national level.

