Indigenous Peoples' Concerns for Environment: Examining the Role of Non-Governmental Organizations

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ABSTRACT

According to the United Nations, there are around 370 million indigenous peoples found in almost 70 countries across the world (UNPFII, 2006). Indigenous peoples are the 'original' inhabitants of their lands, the majority of whom were forcefully removed from their territories by the brutal forces of European colonizers since the early sixteenth century. Because of their original or first occupancy of their lands and territories, these indigenous peoples are also known as 'first generation' people and 'natives'. In contemporary times, indigenous peoples face a number of issues such as discrimination in education and employment, unavailability of health facilities, rampant poverty, and degradation of environment and ill-effects of climate change. Most of these concerns are not addressed by their states. This is the reason that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have pitched in and tried to deal with these issues faced by indigenous peoples.

The present paper aims to analyze the role played by NGOs in highlighting the indigenous peoples' issues related to the environment at the international level. This is done by examining the multitude of functions carried out by NGOs such as lobbying, advocacy, and networking, through which many of the serious environmental issues faced by indigenous peoples such as degradation of biodiversity, burning of forests on a large scale, and misuse of their traditional knowledge were addressed by NGOs. The paper is broadly divided into two parts: the first part discusses the concept of indigenous peoples in general and explains the relationship they have with their environment. The second part of the paper examines the role of NGOs in international politics in general, and in the environmental issues of indigenous peoples in particular. The paper concludes with the contention that the involvement of NGOs (both local as well as international) has brought positive outcomes for indigenous peoples. However, much needs to be done to incorporate the real indigenous voices at the international level.

Key Words: Indigenous peoples, IUCN, NGOs, climate change, biodiversity, traditional knowledge.

According to the United Nations, there are around 370 million indigenous peoples found in almost 70 countries across the world (UNPFII, 2006). Indigenous peoples are the 'original' inhabitants of their lands, the majority of whom were forcefully removed from their territories by the brutal forces of European colonizers since the early sixteenth century. Because of their original or first occupancy of their lands and territories, these indigenous peoples are also known as 'first generation' people and 'natives'. There are indigenous communities found in almost all continents of the world and are known by different names in different countries. For example, indigenous groups in Bolivia are called

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Aymaras, they are Inuits in Canada, Adivasis or Tribals in India, Orang Asli in Malaysia, Ogoni in Nigeria, Masaai in Southern Kenya and Northern Tanzania, Aboriginal and Torres Islanders in Australia, Maoris in New Zealand. These are just to name a few.

Indigenous peoples share an intimate relationship with their natural environment. Because indigenous peoples have been living in the natural environment since time immemorial, they develop emotional ties with their lands and natural resources. Their simple and archaic lifestyle is seen as conducive for environmental preservation. One finds indigenous peoples densely located in the rainforest areas of Brazil, Central America, South-east Asia, Philippines and Indonesia. These regions being the traditional and ancestral homelands of indigenous peoples clearly exhibits the kind of pious relationship these peoples have with their natural and pristine environments. This is not only because indigenous peoples derive their livelihood and basic sustenance through forest produce and activities like hunting, many communities regard their forests and mountains as places of worship. In a relationship of reciprocity, these regions of high biodiversity are also dependent on indigenous peoples because of the latter's unadorned way of life and their traditional knowledge through which they have been able to sustain their environment for countless ages (Perrett, 1998).

In the Cold War period, activities of the modern state and non-state actors like transnational corporations, by way of building infrastructure projects and, mining of natural resources, destroyed this intimate inter-dependence between indigenous peoples and their environment. The beginning of 1960s witnessed many development projects sponsored by international financial institutions such as the World Bank, on lands occupied by indigenous peoples, mainly in the developing countries. This process of uprooting communities from their traditional homes was intensified by the mid 1970s and continued till 1980s (Gray, 1998). In the process of building infrastructure projects such as dams and refineries, the communities which were hitherto self-sustained became literally destitute due to displacement and dispossession of their lands and other natural resources. Indigenous peoples who used to be engaged in agriculture and activities like hunting and food-gathering were often forced to migrate from their habitats to cities where they ended up becoming wage laborers. Thus these activities interfered and ultimately ruined the lives of indigenous peoples in a big way.

States were most indifferent to the needs and concerns of indigenous peoples. Hence, in the 1990s, supported by local as well as international NGOs such as International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Greenpeace, and many others, transnational alliances were formed at the international level in order to highlight problems suffered by indigenous communities. NGOs already had a long history of engagement with environmental issues since the end of the Second World War. In the beginning of 1990s, they redirected their efforts to take up the cause of indigenous peoples as well. Through activities such as framing, agenda-setting, advocacy, lobbying, networking, monitoring, and information-dissemination, NGOs were quite successful in making indigenous peoples important stakeholders in issues of environmental protection. This holds relevance in contemporary times as well when indigenous peoples are regarded as important constituents in the international framework of climate change and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) discussions.

Against this background, this paper aims to examine the role played by NGOs in addressing indigenous concerns for the environment.

It is divided into two main parts. The first part traces a historical perspective of indigenous peoples. This is important in order to understand their plight in contemporary times. It also discusses the interdependence between indigenous peoples and their environment, examining the relationship between the two. The second part of the paper discusses the role of NGOs in international politics generally, and then goes on to examine the role played by NGOs in the domain of indigenous peoples and their environmental concerns in particular. This is followed by critical concluding remarks.

Indigenous Peoples:
A Historical Perspective

Since the beginning of 1990s, indigenous peoples have formed part of a dynamic global movement. Their movement can be called truly global because: a), it is comprised of representatives from nearly all indigenous groups and communities from all parts of the world, and b), indigenous organizations have begun to exert pressure at domestic as well as international level. These organizations, such as World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), and many others have campaigned and struggled to make indigenous voices heard on global platform like the United Nations (Morgan, 2007). However, this has not been true in each and every era. Three waves or patterns can be discerned from the history of indigenous peoples: recognition, denial and re-emergence.

Indigenous peoples were *recognized* as a special entity as early as the 16th century. They were called 'natives' and by this time the term indigenous had not been coined for them as such. Nevertheless, the existence and recognition of their rights could be traced to the early writings of the Spanish School (Marks, 1990-1991). They were recognized as the true owners

of their lands. Writers from this school supported indigenous peoples' titles to their lands. Two such influential legal jurists had been Francisco de Vitoria and Bartolome de Las Casas. The juridical stand taken by these writers in the 16th century had been to uphold the indigenous peoples' rights of ownership of their own lands. The Vitorian doctrine opined that Indian tribes in America had full rights to own land under their own customs and practices. Lands in America were therefore not terra nullius as the case had been in Australia (Marks, 1990-1991).

This recognition turned into *denial* when mostly Europeans colonized them. The Europeans devised many doctrines to validate their conquest of lands outside of their terrain. The theory of terra nullius was the most frequently used justifications. The theory posited that lands without an owner could be annexed by any power and hence this theory was cited as a justification in the process of usurping foreign lands of the indigenous peoples. Also another rationale provided by the Western powers was that since they had been the discoverers of certain lands and territories, it was only reasonable that those lands should belong to them. In legal parlance, this was the Doctrine of Discovery (Pitty, 2001).

The *re-emergence* of indigenous issues took place at the turn of the 20th century when indigenous leaders made claims of discrimination and these were presented at the League of Nations. The presentation by Chief Deskaheh in 1920s on behalf of his Six Nations people (who resisted its full integration with Canada and wanted full self-government), is a case in point. In 1923, Deskaheh appealed to the League of Nations to be heard but this appeal was rejected and every attempt made by him was discarded. It was due to his hard lobbying that in the fall of 1924 he was invited to present to the Assembly of the League the situation prevalent in Six Nations. But his sudden

demise led to a weakening of the fighting spirit as there was no leader after him who could take charge (Niezen, 2000). However, it was only after the end of the Second World War and the establishment of a human rights regime, that a framework of rights and standards for indigenous peoples began to be laid at the international level.

Particular attempts to work towards issues of indigenous peoples began only in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Various reasons have been attributed for this 'internationalization of the indigenous movement' in the 1970s. First, this period saw huge trampling on resource rich indigenous lands. It is a fact that indigenous peoples dwell on the most well-endowed parts of earth in terms of natural resources such as minerals, fossil fuels, and so on. Heavy mining, for example, took place in lands of the Yanomamis of Brazil without their consent. As a result, voices were raised in support of indigenous peoples (Sambo, 1993). Second, indigenous peoples till this time were seen as a matter of domestic priority. But when states began to get involved in measures which would exploit them, indigenous peoples had to find recourse for themselves. The international level was considered such a platform for them where they could vent their anger and frustrations (Burger & Hunt, 1994).

Added to these two was another factor that by the late 1960s, indigenous organizations had begun to be established at the international level. For example, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) was created in 1968 as one of the most suitable non-indigenous organizations working on indigenous issues. This was followed by a host of other organizations such as Survival International (1969), International Indian Treaty Council (IITC, 1974); and World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP, 1977). These indigenous non-governmental organizations

had a huge impact on the growing indigenous movement (Sanders, 1989).

Most indigenous peoples had (and even today) continue to share a hostile relationship with their states. For example, Six Nations was an area inhabited by indigenous peoples in Canada which wanted full autonomy rights for itself whereas Canada wanted it to be merged with the territory of the state. Fearing that Six Nations would secede from Canada if given the right to self-government, Canada did not acknowledge the wishes of the population. This tension is often seen in contemporary times as well (the Quebec problem also arose in Canada along the same lines). There are two reasons which have been attributed to this unfriendly relationship between the indigenous peoples and their host states. Firstly, indigenous peoples exercise their rights in groups and collectivities, and this is something which goes against the liberal individualistic system of modern international law. Secondly, indigenous groups often demand the right to self-determination which states view in terms of secession or independent statehood. This is the reason that many states when in deliberations with indigenous groups have asked them to remove 'peoples' (with an 's') from their title and use indigenous 'population' or 'group' because use of the term peoples equates with this right to self-determination. This issue of self-determination was the most contentious one and remained the most widely debated topic even during deliberations and discussions over the drafting of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted in 2007.

Indigenous Peoples and Environment

There exists a debate between some scholars as to the relationship indigenous peoples have with their environment. For example, scholars like Shutkin (2000-2001) believe that the lifestyle of indigenous peoples is conducive

to the protection and preservation of environment; there are others like Kastrup (1997) who believe that indigenous peoples have been a cause for causing harm to the environment. This is because of their practices of shifting cultivation which is not always suitable for environmental conservation (Kastrup, 1997). Even when debates exist on whether or not indigenous peoples share a positive relationship with their environment, the fact is that indigenous peoples' share a close bond with the natural environment.

The issue of biodiversity conservation is of utmost importance when discussing environment and indigenous peoples (Tramontana, 2012). There has been quite a change in the concept of conservation as was understood in the initial years to its understanding today. While the initial conservation efforts typically meant the conservation of biological diversity of a region only--- marine biodiversity, species of fauna and flora, etc—humans were neglected altogether. Hence the various conflicts that the world had witnessed in terms of 'protected areas' versus the indigenous peoples was a result of this kind of conservation ideology. The whale conservation regime in the North Arctic region was also a clear example of the continuous antagonism between conservation ideology and indigenous peoples. This was because hunting of bowhead whale for the Inuits of Alaska was not just meant for their physical survival but also had deep cultural manifestations for them (Gupta, 1999).

It was due to the advocacy role of international non-governmental organizations (like World Wide Fund for Nature and, IUCN) that a shift took place in the conservation strategy and it began to recognize the important role indigenous peoples could play in the conservation of lands and natural resources, therefore beginning to see indigenous peoples as important stakeholders in the process. In fact, World

Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) became the first international organization to have a policy on indigenous peoples when it came out with its own 'Indigenous Peoples and Conservation: WWF Statement of Principles' in the year 1996 (WWF, 1996). The idea of 'Community Conserved Areas' (CCAs) originally designed by IUCN in 2008 was also a major breakthrough in this respect. Even though it is not a new concept, however the fact that it not only considers local communities as primary actors responsible for implementation of conservation plans, but also engages them in the process has resulted in a number of benefits for the conservation regime as a whole. However, the failure of state agencies in recognizing the existence and functioning of these CCAs in their national policies is increasingly seen as a challenge in the successful functioning of these community conserved areas (Kothari, 2006).

Apart from biodiversity conservation, climate change is an ever-growing threat for indigenous peoples owing to their proximity to the natural surroundings. The indigenous peoples of the Arctic and island nations are particularly at risk because of this reason. Climate Change has a destructive impact on agriculture, food security, and also leads to loss of biodiversity, thereby acutely affecting the lives of indigenous peoples. Not only does climate change affect their physical habitat, but also has a negative impact on their social, economical, and psychological well-being (Williams, 2012). For communities of Micronesia, for example, for whom navigation and voyaging is a cultural practice, this could be threatened because Micronesia (comprising of 2,000 islands and 60,000 indigenous communities) faces the risk of submergence due to global warming. Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs) have become particularly active as an effective constituency at the negotiations on United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Change (Schroeder, 2010). Indigenous peoples from all over the world share their experiences at this table. This has generated awareness about the devastating effects of climate change on indigenous peoples.

What happens when the natural environment in which they have been living since time immemorial becomes endangered, either due to man-made activities or climate change? Following is a brief description of the impact of environmental degradation on indigenous peoples. Schwartz (1993) highlights the impact of hydro-power projects on the lands of indigenous peoples in India, Quebec, and Ghana. In the same vein O'Connor (1994) discusses in detail about the lives of Huaroni people of Amazon devastated by the activity of oil exploration which was carried out by state agencies as well as many private companies in the indigenous occupied lands in Ecuador in early 1990s. In a similar attempt the case of Alberta tar sands in Canada has also been exclaimed as 'the most destructive industrial project on earth', and 'a slow industrial genocide' (IEN, undated). Oil exploration in this region by a range of transnational corporations has resulted in a number of health hazards for the indigenous peoples of the region who developed cancers because of this toxic oil extraction. Apart from this physical destruction of indigenous peoples caused by environmental degradation, indigenous peoples have also been harmed by way of cultural extinction which is also caused by climate change. Tsosie (2007) elaborately talks about this grave threat to the indigenous way of life. Loss of lands not only leads to their destruction but also interferes with the cultural sentiments of the communities in a destructive way. In recent times, the effects of environmental degradation have taken a new form for indigenous peoples. Selin & Selin (2008) describe how the dumping of hazardous toxic wastes enters into the food chain of indigenous peoples by way of transpor-

tation. A number of such toxic substances are found in fish, mammal, and reindeer population in the Arctic region. Because indigenous peoples derive their nutrients through these foods, they also consume intoxicants, which adversely affect their health and pristine way of life. Thus, environmental degradation ruins the lives of indigenous peoples.

NGOs in International Politics

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been an influential force in the domestic as well as international affairs since the early nineteenth century (Seary, 1996). The nineteenth century witnessed the emergence and subsequent rise of issue-oriented NGOs developed to tackle issues such as slavery, labor rights, promotion of free trade, and promotion of rights of women (Yamin, 2001). This marked the beginnings of NGO presence on the international stage. However, the roles of NGOs were limited at this time. They could neither formally address the sessions of conferences nor issue statements. As compared to the contemporary times when NGOs have much more freedom in organizing parallel summits, disseminating information, distributing pamphlets, and organizing popular resistance, their role in the nineteenth century was limited. Today, NGOs play the roles of agenda –setters, norm-creators, and implementers, but this was certainly not the case in the early nineteenth century when NGOs were just instrumental in mobilizing support for the issues which they raised (Charnovitz, 2006).

The engagement of NGOs in international affairs intensified in the post-First World War period which witnessed a sudden expansion in the interest area of NGOs in areas of finance, trade, drugs, intellectual property, refugees, disarmament, women, and children. This growth of the involvement of NGOs in international issues was slightly ruptured by the Second

World War but after the end of the war and with the establishment of United Nations, the role of NGOs was formalized for the first time in Article 71 of the United Nations (Raustiala, 1997).

Since the early 1990s, NGO involvement has increased manifold in international affairs. Many reasons have been attributed for this. First, the increasing current of globalization is seen as a reason for the recognition of global problems which has resulted in the development of more inter-governmental negotiations, thus creating a new space for NGOs which had not existed before. Second, the cessation of Cold War hostilities has increased the activities of NGOs. Third, the emergence of a worldwide media such as CNN International has provided a new exposure to the NGOs to publicize their views more freely. And last, the proliferation of democratic norms has raised expectations about transparency as well as public participation in the international organizations, thus giving a new lease on life for NGOs (Charnovitz, 1996-1997). The increasing facilities of the Internet and the Web have made the boundaries of states more porous and have also enabled NGOs to foster transnational links (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

The post-Cold war era has seen NGOs taking active interest in the issues of environment, women, children, refugees, indigenous peoples, and development. These are those issues which the states were not interested in discussing. Hence, NGOs highlighted these issues at the international level. The following section gives an elaborate account of how NGOs made the environmental concerns of indigenous peoples emerge as an international issue.

NGOs and Indigenous Peoples' Concerns for Environment

Indigenous peoples became an international subject of enquiry during the mid-1970s af-

ter the internationalization of their movement, due to the ample support given by local and international NGOs. However, their concerns related to the environment were highlighted only in the decade of 1990s when international NGOs became involved in indigenous peoples' environmental issues at that time. This internationalization of indigenous peoples' environmental concerns could take place due to the advocacy role of INGOs such as IUCN, WWF, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace International, and Conservation International. An immediate example is the deforestation issue in Brazil. Pieck (2006) talks about the internationalization of the issue of tropical deforestation in Brazil and its impacts on indigenous communities and gives the credit to the awareness that was generated by international campaigning of NGOs. The 'Amazon Alliance' (in Brazil) was formed by small and local NGOs like Rainforest Movement, Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA), along with international NGOs such as Conservation International, Oxfam International, and Sierra Club. This alliance had come into being after oil drilling in the forests of the Amazon proved devastating for the local indigenous populations. The success of this network of local and international organizations could be attributed to the series of norms and declarations this alliance produced (Pieck, 2006). Of course these international NGOs forged transnational linkages with local indigenous groups, but the mere presence of these big NGOs helped the movement gain an international audience which had not been the case prior to the involvement of these international NGOs.

It is because of the expert knowledge of these International NGOs that they played an extremely important role in the preparatory meetings of United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or

Earth Summit) in 1992 (Charnovitz, 2006). International NGOs such as Greenpeace and IUCN played an important role as agenda-setters in this conference and inserted topics relevant to indigenous peoples in the agenda of the international conference. In fact, it is due to the advocacy by INGOs about the negative impact environmental degradation could have on indigenous peoples, the UNCED for the first time formally recognized the important role indigenous peoples could play in the conservation of the environment and sustainable management of natural resources. This could be seen in nearly all documents that the Conference produced. For example, Principle 22 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Chapter 26 of Agenda 21 is especially devoted to the positive role indigenous peoples could play in the conservation of lands. Though these are 'soft' laws as they are not binding, they are important precedents which have been laid down by the international community, after diligent efforts made by the indigenous peoples and many nongovernmental organizations, principally the IUCN and WWF. These two NGOs are the oldest in terms of their origins and these are the primary organizations working towards environmental protection. Though their mandates were limited to conservation efforts in the beginning, with time they have evolved and now include welfare of indigenous peoples in their policies.

Based on IUCN's efforts, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) formulated drafts for adoption of a global convention concerned with conservation of biodiversity. This Convention also has important provision for the role of indigenous peoples in the management of biodiversity, mentioned in Article 8 (j). Provisions on indigenous peoples were included after these NGOs lobbied countries, mobilized local victim interests, issued oral statements, publications, and organized confer-

ences (Arts, 2004). Another important development which took place was the adoption of the term 'Cultural Landscape' by the World Heritage Convention in 1992. Taylor and Lennon (2011) have shared their research findings about the impact of inclusion of cultural landscape for the status of the indigenous peoples. This was done after concerted efforts were made by World Conservation Union (IUCN), by way of holding conferences and disseminating information- to not only recognize the important cultural sites of indigenous peoples, but to also include these people in maintaining and preserving their sites. Prior to 1992, preservation of only natural sites was considered important and this preservation took place by constructing national parks and protected areas without taking into consideration the fact that these areas were inhabited by indigenous peoples. In the late 1980s, efforts were made by small conservation organizations spearheaded by IUCN to preserve cultural sites as well. The importance placed on preservation of cultural sites meant that small communities of indigenous peoples who resided in those territories would be consulted in the process of preserving those lands. Uluru-Kata Tjuta in Australia is a peculiar example because it was inscribed as a natural heritage site in 1987. However, after adoption of the term 'cultural landscape' at the global level, this same site was re-inscribed as a cultural site in 1993. This re-inscription as a cultural site demonstrated a positive outcome for the Anangu people of this site who not only got international recognition as traditional owners of the land but their traditional knowledge and their practice to patch burn the country was also recognized as a major 'ecological tool in the park' (Taylor & Lennon, 2011).

Another important document adopted at the Earth Summit, with possible repercussions on indigenous peoples was the 'Forest Prin-

ciples'. The problem of deforestation became a global issue as early as the 1980s, but the inability of states to deal with the issue (because of the ongoing north-south debate) made way for the NGOs to come into the picture (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Here the lead was taken by international NGOs such as Greenpeace, WWF, and the World Rainforest Movement to campaign about protection of forests and ratifying a global forest treaty. Here the INGOs were credited for 'framing' the agenda in such a way so as to get the interest of the international audience. By linking the deforestation issue with the impact on indigenous peoples, they were able to get the much needed support from the international community. The deforestation issue did not get an overwhelming response from the international community because no binding treaty was signed during the Earth Summit. But a non-binding statement of principles was adopted in 1992 towards sustainable use of forests and recognition of local communities who were residents of those forests. This was done after campaigns were launched by leading International NGOs (Greenpeace and WWF), making pacts with big industries in countries like United Kingdom under the name 'Forests are your business' (Arts, 2004). NGOs were the first to politicize the issue of deforestation and how this negatively affects those who reside therein.

It should also be noted that the Ramasar Convention on the Protection of Wetlands came into existence after a series of technical conferences were organized by International Waterfowl Research Bureau (Charnovitz, 1997). Though it had come into existence in 1972, the role of indigenous peoples was formally recognized in 1999 by way of publication of a report titled 'People and Wetlands: The Vital Link' (Tiega, 2011). This could be achieved after information was disseminated by NGOs such as Wetland International (WI) and World Wetland Network (WWN) on the potential role of local communities towards not only preservation of wetlands but also optimizing these areas for better use. These organizations work with a plethora of national-level organizations.

Having discussed the positive role of NGOs in the field of environment and indigenous peoples, it must also be noted that NGOs do not always play a constructive role as far as indigenous peoples are concerned. There have been instances where INGOs have come into direct hostility with indigenous peoples and their local organizations. The Camisea Gas Project in Peru is a case in point where the interface between local and international NGOs has not been smooth. The indigenous organization COMARU (Consejo Machiguenga del Rio Urubamba) which was protesting against the extraction of gas from the area resided by hundreds of Machiguenga people was not supported by other international NGOs working on the same lines but not with the local organizations. Poor communication between those directly affected and INGOs, in this case, characterized incompatible agendas and this often resulted in weakening of transnational advocacy networks which is so essential for effective functioning of NGOs (Pratt, 2007).

Apart from INGOs, local/national NGOs have also been instrumental in addressing the concerns of indigenous peoples related to the environment. This is particularly true in the case of the Convention to Combat Desertification where state parties not only allowed the presence of NGOs, but also asked for their expert knowledge and recommendations to make the Convention a success. And it is based on the experience of local NGOs that the language of the Convention is based on a bottoms-up approach rather than a top-down one (Corell & Betsill, 2001). In fact it is because of activities of NGOs that a national issue such

as desertification (which occurs within the boundaries of nation states) is now recognized as a global problem. Inclusion of local communities and indigenous groups and ensuring their participation in order to fight desertification is one of the most important provisions of the Convention, inserted after deliberations with local NGOs like Environmental Development Action in the Third World (ENDA) and supported by International NGOs such as Arid Lands International Network (ALIN). In fact, the advocacy efforts of many local NGOs have helped in the development of 'soft law'. The Kari-Oca Declaration and Indigenous Peoples' Earth Charter (adopted in the Global Summit which was held parallel to the main conference) was a result of informal meetings of indigenous peoples, their own organizations, think tanks and other small non-government organizations like the Rainforest Action Network (RAN). This Charter recognized the special relationship indigenous peoples have with their environment and gave a call to the international community to respect the same (Richardson, 2010).

Conclusion

Non-Governmental Organizations have played an effective role in ameliorating the condition and status of indigenous peoples in general, and have also addressed their concerns related to the environment, in particular. The 1970s was a decade when both environment and indigenous peoples emerged as important international issues. And these emerged as important international issues after intensive lobbying activities were carried out by international NGOs as well as indigenous peoples' NGOs. Indigenous peoples share a symbiotic relationship with their environment. This is because not only do indigenous peoples need the environment for their physical and spiritual well-being, in turn the environment also needs

the knowledge of these indigenous peoples for its sustenance. This inter-dependence between environment and indigenous peoples has been brought forward by the activities of NGOs. NGOs have played active roles of agenda-setters, norm-creators, and implementers in the fields of environmentalism and indigenous peoples. However, there is still some lacuna in the functioning of these NGOs. Their aims and motives are not always clear, their accountability is always doubtful. Whether they represent the voices of the otherwise voiceless indigenous peoples is also uncertain. In addition to this the transnational links forged by these NGOs is also not smooth. As is evident from the case of Camisea Gas Project and Amazon issue, the interaction between indigenous and international NGOs is not always smooth. INGOs have a tendency to disappear once their interests fade. Local NGOs, on the other hand, interact with INGOs in order to gain international visibility. The real issue of indigenous peoples seems to get obscured in this process.

Based on the insights gained from this study, it is seen that NGOs have played an important role in highlighting the cause of indigenous peoples at the international level. If not for NGOs, indigenous peoples would not get as much international visibility and attention as they have received in the last decades. In many of the issues discussed in the paper, indigenous peoples mobilized themselves, formed local organizations, and in this process were assisted by some major international NGOs whose association with local causes gave them a much needed international identity. Therefore, it is recommended that more of indigenous peoples' own organizations should be allowed to function in international affairs. Because local IPOs have local knowledge of the issues they face, it would be better if they are allowed to find solutions themselves than

relying on outside support to do the same. INGOs have been and can still continue to represent indigenous peoples, but it is high time that indigenous peoples take on this responsibility and become self-dependent. It is only when more indigenous groups will be visible at the international level that their concerns will be taken seriously. ∎

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