

## **The Indigenous Partnership Banaue Declaration**

**28 January 2012**

From 25 to 28 January 2012, The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (The Indigenous Partnership) held its Asia Convening Workshop in Banaue, Ifugao, The Philippines, to exchange ideas on best practices for enhancing food security, improving agrobiodiversity and protecting local food systems in accordance with indigenous worldviews and customs. The workshop, titled “Indigenous Peoples, Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty - Learning from the Ground Up”, was organised and hosted by Tebtebba Foundation on behalf of The Indigenous Partnership, and was attended by 42 participants from 13 countries. The participants represented such diverse interests as indigenous communities, youth, scientists, NGOs, government agencies and a journalist.

Embracing The Indigenous Partnership ethos to contextualise meetings by holding them in indigenous areas, the workshop organisers treated participants to a visit to the Banaue Rice Terraces in Hungduan Municipality, where they had the opportunity to exchange views with local community members about this unique biocultural landscape. The workshop benefitted greatly from the diversity of participants; young people and researchers came from Asia, Africa, North America and Europe, and representatives of 17 indigenous communities were in attendance.



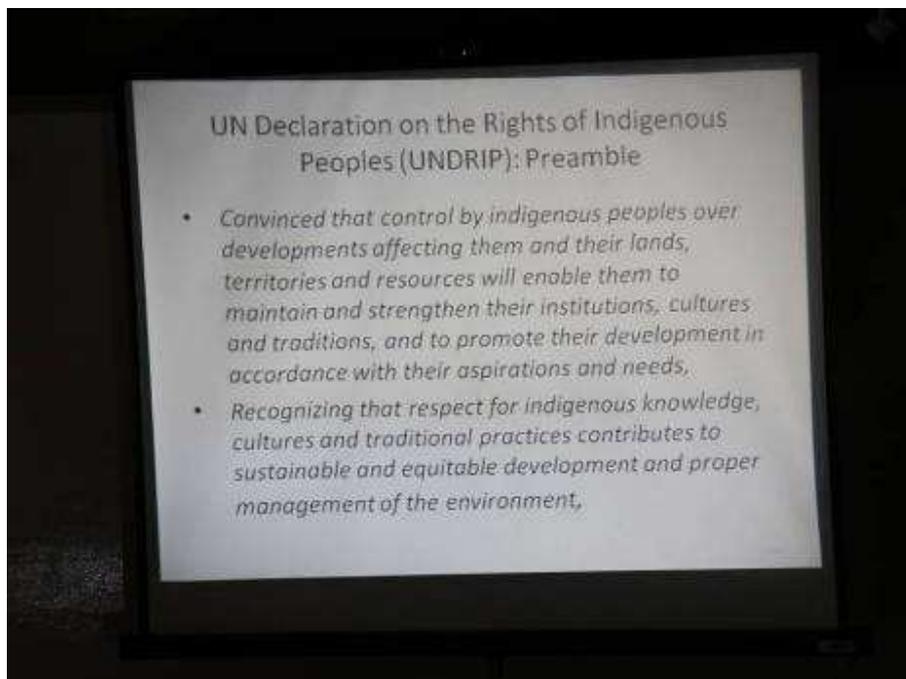
**Rice terraces in Ifugao/M. Saban**

## **Raising Awareness**

The workshop included briefings on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT PGRFA) and the International Panel on Biodiversity and Environmental Services (IPBES). Participants affirmed the importance of the provisions and principles contained in these protocols and underscored the need for all who are concerned about indigenous issues to be informed of and sensitive to:

- the collective rights of indigenous peoples;
- the right to self determination;
- the right not to be assimilated;
- the right to free prior and informed consent;
- the right to traditional livelihoods;
- the protection and transmission of traditional knowledge; and
- other international agreements enshrined in these protocols.

Participants pledged to raise grassroots awareness of UNDRIP in their respective areas and suggested the translation of UNDRIP into many local indigenous languages as a tangible first step.



**The UNDRIP presentation/M. Saban**

## **Shifting perceptions on shifting cultivation**

Participants reiterated the continuing importance and relevance of shifting/rotational cultivation in food security and the sustainable livelihood practices of millions of indigenous peoples and its role in biodiversity conservation. Regretting the lack of understanding of many mainstream development workers, researchers and policy makers of the value of shifting cultivation/rotational agriculture, participants lauded shifting/rotational agriculture as a flexible, dynamic, low carbon emitting, energy efficient and sustainable production system that



**Shifting cultivators harvesting in Thailand/IKAP**

also enhances resistance to pests and diseases. Acknowledging the wide diversity and evolving nature of shifting cultivation practices in Asia, participants expressed concerns that such systems, and their associated foodways, will be marginalised and potentially lost unless indigenous communities are freed from repressive policy directives and given the power to make their own culturally appropriate decisions regarding their agricultural practices. Several people suggested that shifting cultivation must therefore be included in the school curricula as a relevant and timely subject, especially for indigenous children. Highlights from this exchange included the case study of carbon storage in Hin Lad Nai village in northern Thailand and an introduction to *A Growing Forest of Voices*, a forthcoming book that is being edited by Malcolm Cairns on indigenous fallow management in shifting cultivation systems.

Following this discussion, it became evident that the issues surrounding shifting cultivation and pastoralism are fairly similar because both systems are environmentally friendly, equitable, adaptive, innovative, culturally embedded and decentralized. The Indigenous Partnership was therefore called upon to prepare simple policy briefs on shifting cultivation, establish alliances between progressive researchers and key traditional knowledge holders to correct the general misunderstandings surrounding the practice and to raise these issues at upcoming international events.

## **Strengthening agrobiodiversity networks**

Participants welcomed the attempts of The Indigenous Partnership to develop a conceptual framework to identify traditional knowledge holders who are grounded in communities, innovative, passionate, practical, conciliatory and mindful of the present and future needs of indigenous peoples. Participants expressed that the Food Festivals initiative of The Indigenous Partnership in India with the support of Slow Food International, Thailand and Mongolia (and soon-to-be Nicaragua and Kenya) is an excellent way to put these ideals into action. Participants also highlighted that Food Festivals build solidarity, revive the cultural identity of a community and are particularly very important for youth identity. They however urged that the food festivals must pay closer attention to the documentation of the diverse food items, agrobiodiversity and other practices that are featured during such events. As a word of caution, some people at the

workshop with experience in running seed fairs warned that one must proceed with caution when including seed fairs as part of a food festival for fear of possible biopiracy.

Workshop participants applauded the work of The Indigenous Partnership and the people of Nongtraw village in Meghalaya to develop larger millet and honey networks. Participants endorsed the Dharwad Declaration on Millets prepared by India's National Convention on Millet Farmers (Dharwad, Karnataka, India 16-17 October 2011). With regard to beekeeping, participants encouraged The Indigenous Partnership to explore the opportunity of raising the issue of pollinators in traditional indigenous production systems at appropriate national or international events. Participants also requested The Indigenous Partnership and the Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research (PAR) to network more closely with young indigenous scientists.

As a link between the scientific and indigenous communities, The Indigenous Partnership is well placed to work closely with PAR, the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED) and indigenous organisations interested in intercultural dialogues to promote discussion between indigenous knowledge holders and “concerned” scientists who accept other epistemologies and other ways of relating to the world. Participants also acknowledged that while scientists must partner with local communities, keeping in mind the principle of free, prior and informed consent, they must also work together in multidisciplinary teams.

Participants agreed that for many remote indigenous areas, community radio, and increasingly the Internet, is an important communication instrument to promote UNDRIP, shifting cultivation and pastoralism. To that end, The Indigenous Partnership should encourage the use of songs and plays on the radio to convey crucial messages, as well as develop its website, explore the use of social media and keep local papers informed. Equally important, The Indigenous Partnership must explore opportunities for promoting these communications initiatives amongst its partners.

Acknowledging that The Indigenous Partnership is playing a useful, evolving and expanding role for indigenous communities, the participants called upon multilateral, bilateral and philanthropic organisations interested in indigenous issues to proactively support it. Participants expressed their appreciation to The Christensen Fund for supporting The Indigenous Partnership and other grassroots indigenous organisations.



**Workshop participants – group photo/M. Saban**