

Natural resource
development
and the rights of
minorities and
indigenous peoples

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Karuturi Global is an Indian company that grows roses in Ethiopia for export, mostly to Europe. They have recently acquired 100,000 hectares in the fertile Gambella region to expand their agro-industry. To enable this investment, the government has forcibly removed minority groups farming on ancestral land in this region (such as Anuak and Nuer) and resettled them in villages. One activist from the region describes some of the effects of this so-called 'villagization' policy:

'One year after the villagization programme even those farmers who tried to do farming in the new places were not able to produce enough ... since the area is not a good one for the kind of traditional farming they practise. The villagization programme has made the people of Gambella food insecure ... and also increased the tensions between different communities who ... are brought together to share small pieces of land for farming. Since this programme was launched, over 15 individuals ... have been killed in separate incidents. One woman was raped and beaten to death by other people from a different community as she went collecting firewood.'

Karuturi Global calls Ethiopia 'an ideal destination to base our agri-venture' and refutes accusations that its land acquisitions have played a role in displacement.

This year's *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples* will provide many more examples of how natural resource development can affect minorities and indigenous peoples. Natural resource development is a broad category of development and extraction that primarily encompasses use of water, land, fossil fuels, minerals and forests. This development of renewable and non-renewable resources has often negatively affected human and animal life as well as the environments they inhabit. Nevertheless, internal and external pressures to increase economic growth have led the majority of states to turn to natural resource development. Actual implementation of development projects is often pursued by private corporations with state permission and is usually export-oriented. There is strong evidence, based on recent academic and civil society research, to suggest that

development and extraction of natural resources is increasing due to factors including higher energy costs, the need to attract investment after the global financial crisis, and the interest following the food crisis in providing cash crops for emerging economies. While natural resource development activities like logging and dams, oil, gas or mineral extraction, coastal tourism, commercial fisheries, conservation parks and large-scale agriculture have been successful in generating vast revenues, it has not benefited all communities equally and has had devastating consequences for the lives of many and the environment we all share.

Minorities and indigenous peoples across the globe are uniquely affected by natural resource development. They often occupy and use the areas targeted for natural resource development, but they typically lack the economic or political power to oppose harmful or unwanted projects. This means they gain few of the benefits but experience all of the harms from such practices. The state has been able to justify disproportionate harms from natural resource development to minority or indigenous communities in the name of 'majority' public gains. Minority and indigenous communities suffer greatly as a result, not only with regard to their livelihoods and welfare, but also their cultural life, social cohesion and bodily integrity.

These effects constitute violations of their human rights, including their specific rights as minorities and indigenous peoples. While there have been extensive efforts to elaborate standards and guidelines for indigenous peoples on issues related to natural resource development, there are few such resources for minorities, making them less able to rely on international norms for protection.

Indigenous and minority communities do not reject all natural resource development; rather, they seek methods that respect their rights, that are consensual and from which they can benefit fairly. Many groups have mobilized successfully to oppose harmful or unwanted development projects, and others are taking the lead in determining forms of natural resource development that are consistent with their human rights. These struggles are not always peaceful and many are protracted. Nevertheless,

the efforts of minorities and indigenous peoples to reform the way we all pursue natural resource development could be the key to greater sustainability and more equitable resource use.

Marginalization and natural resources depletion

Some of the poorest minorities and indigenous peoples live in some of the most resource-rich regions of the world; this is true in both the global North and the global South. From the oil- and mineral-rich Aboriginal Australian outback, the lush African descendant coastal areas of Central America and the dense forests of India's tribal peoples, minorities and indigenous peoples have lived in these areas for centuries and even millennia yet have been denied their rightful ownership. While the revenues of natural resource development are filtered out of regions where minorities and indigenous peoples live, the harms stay behind.

Their position of marginalization makes them particularly vulnerable to facing these harms. For example, the World Commission on Dams found evidence that regions where indigenous peoples lived were more likely to be targeted for dam development but received little economic benefit as a result: in the Philippines, almost all the larger dam schemes were situated on indigenous peoples' lands, whereas in India, 40–50 per cent of those displaced by dam development projects were tribal people (constituting only 8 per cent of the Indian population). Around the El Cerrejón coal mine in north-east Colombia, poverty rates are 70 per cent for local African descendant and indigenous communities. Many have been displaced from their villages and land and water sources have been polluted, traditional foods are no longer as accessible and they lack adequate access to health, education and sanitation services. This is despite the fact that total government revenues from the mine – currently owned by BHP Billiton (Australia), Anglo American (UK) and Xstrata (Switzerland) – are more than US\$ 1.6 billion. Similarly, in the Ahwazi-Arab minority region of Khuzestan in Iran, where 90 per cent of the country's oil revenues originate, minority communities live in poverty and suffer ill health from the pollution by industry of the Karoon River. The river itself

Right: A Dalit girl works breaking up stones in Pagadala village, Andhra Pradesh, India. *Mikkel Ostergaard/Panos.*

is to be diverted to other drier regions, further threatening the economic security of minority farmers and the local ecosystem. Attempts to legislate for 1.5 per cent of oil revenue to go back to Khuzestan have repeatedly failed. Moreover, about 90 per cent of the labour force of oil and gas industries located in this region is hired from outside the Ahwazi-Arab population. These and many other groups therefore suffer the ill-effects of natural resource development without accruing many of the benefits.

These ill-effects are wide ranging. Natural resource development can severely damage or even eradicate practices of traditional livelihoods, including pastoralism, fishing or shifting agriculture, thus pushing groups further into poverty. In China, investment in mining has forced minority herders off their traditional grazing lands, away from their sacred and cultural sites and out of their ancestral villages in regions such as the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and Tibet. The Bagungu fisher people living in the Buliisa district in Uganda have been unable to continue their fishing practices due to intensive oil production in the area. Undue restrictions can be placed on livelihoods: for example, traditional agro-forestry has frequently been outlawed to make way for commercial practices like logging or conservation parks for tourism. In Cambodia, the Prey Lang forest, inhabited by the Kuy indigenous people, has been designated as a conservation area; however, the government has granted tens of thousands of hectares of the forest for extraction of minerals, timber and for rubber plantations, leaving the community unable to practise their traditional livelihoods that make use of non-timber forest products. Evictions and involuntary migration are used commonly to get (illegal) access to lands and resources. People are forced to migrate to urban slums where they face further marginalization or to even more remote regions where livelihoods are more difficult. Dam construction has depleted the Aral Sea Basin and forced tens of thousands of Karakalpak into Kazakhstan and other neighbouring countries once their



traditional livelihoods literally and figuratively ‘dried up’.

There are particular impacts on minority and indigenous women. Women’s burden of work can increase significantly due to increased problems in accessing clean water, fuel and traditional food sources and to men’s migration for employment once traditional occupations are no longer viable. In Colombia, for example, Wayúu women displaced from their traditional lands in La Guajira as a result of coal mining have struggled to feed their families in new urban environments, relying on bread and soft drinks, instead of traditional foodstuffs of fish, plantain, yam and fruit, thus increasing malnutrition in their families.

Women’s title to land is not legally recognized in some states and when displaced due to natural resource development projects, they will have little legal recourse for compensation or redress. In south-east India, Dalit women displaced from the land to make way for Special Economic Zones in Polepally, Andhra Pradesh, reported loss of status, less economic power and fewer marriage prospects for their girl children, whose status had also declined due to loss of land. Women can also be forced into becoming labourers on cash-crop farms following displacement from their own land and will be paid less than their male counterparts. Where natural resource development projects do offer employment to local people, women are less likely to secure those jobs due to gender discrimination and/or household responsibilities.

The destruction of traditional lands, resources and livelihoods can also lead to cultural erosion, putting the very existence of groups at threat. Spiritual lives and traditional practices of medicine, food preparation and other ways of life tied to the natural environment can easily be destroyed by natural resource development. In the words of a member of the Ogiek community in Kenya: ‘Mau forest is our home: we are not encroachers, we are forest dwellers; we don’t cut trees, we nurture them for our livelihood; we hang our beehives, it’s our sure “hospital” where we get herbs, it’s a sacred mother earth to our traditions.’ These practices and traditional knowledge are not readily transferable to new spaces, and cultures are disappearing with

resource exploitation. In Australia, for example, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs of Western Australia has backtracked on safeguards for more than 200 sites of cultural significance to the Yindjibarndi people under threat from a proposed iron mining venture by Fortescue Metals Group in the Pilbara region. Some would argue that natural resource development outcomes that prevent the exercise of traditional practices can even constitute genocide: in the words of George Poitras of the Mikisew Cree First Nation, facing the harmful environmental impact of the tar sands oil-extraction project in Alberta, Canada, asserted: ‘If we don’t have land and we don’t have anywhere to carry out our traditional lifestyles, we lose who we are as a people. So, if there’s no land, then it is equivalent in our estimation to genocide of a people.’

Root causes and resistance

Minorities and indigenous peoples are more vulnerable to harmful natural resource development because their right to equality is not respected fully in society. Discrimination is one major root cause. This can lead to practices such as ‘environmental racism’, whereby higher incidence of pollution or other environmental degradation is found in regions where minorities and indigenous peoples live. It can also affect their access to justice when trying to oppose natural resource development projects or seek compensation for harms caused or illegal encroachments. For example, indigenous land-owners at the Krumbukari mine site in the Madang Province, Papua New Guinea, have failed in their legal battle to prevent the China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) and Australian-based Highlands Pacific from dumping over 100 million tonnes of waste from the Ramu Nickel Mine close to the shore – a practice banned in both China and Australia. The government issued the mine an environmental permit in 2010 despite objections from national experts.

Dominant priorities for development can override alternative priorities and conceptions of progress that may be held by minorities or indigenous peoples. The concept of ‘development with culture and identity’ highlights this intersection: this means that

natural resource development that affects these groups should be pursued in accordance with their own cultural understanding of development and in a way that is not harmful to their cultural, spiritual or religious identity. While many groups seek greater integration into the wider society through development, the price for accessing the benefits of development should not be erosion or elimination of their own cultural identity.

While international human rights standards make clear provision for the full participation of minorities and indigenous peoples in decision-making that will affect them or the regions where they live, this is not often fulfilled in practice. Communities may not be consulted at all on natural resource development in their region, or they may be consulted under only the most cursory and insignificant processes. In many cases, there has not been full disclosure of the potential impacts of development projects on communities or adequate impact assessment procedures. It is also not uncommon for groups to be divided by consultations, and a small number of 'representatives' co-opted into consent without the full support of the wider community.

For example, only part of the indigenous community consented to an offshore gas hub off the Kimberley coast at James Price Point, Western Australia, leading to tensions and the need for a Western Australia Supreme Court decision to render the agreement invalid. The views of women are particularly liable to go unconsidered given their lack of representation in many decision-making structures, both traditional and otherwise. The limited inclusion of minorities and indigenous peoples in structures of governance at all levels further undermines their ability to utilize state and international protection safeguards. For example, indigenous peoples have demanded full participation in global governance on carbon emissions reductions under the UN-REDD+ (UN Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and have been an active voice in criticizing the harmful effects of REDD initiatives.

Minorities and indigenous peoples would be in a better position to challenge harmful natural resource development where their rights to land, territories and resources are legally titled. Many

states do have recognition of customary land rights embedded in the constitution or national law but such laws can be poorly enforced. For example, South Sudan's new Constitution holds that communities 'enjoying rights in land shall be consulted in decisions that may affect their rights in lands and resources' (Article 171(9)). However, when an Emirati company was granted a 2 million hectares lease for a tourism development project, community consultation did not take place and promises by the company to provide education and health for local groups have not materialized. In other states, there can be resistance to recognition of customary land rights, making the process of allocating title unnecessarily protracted and/or plagued by disputes.

Without this legal protection, it can be very difficult to defend land and resource use rights in the face of powerful corporations or state interests. Moreover, laws regulating industries for natural resource development are generally promulgated without consultation with those indigenous and minority communities whose rights may be deeply affected by such legislation. Many states are reluctant to exact strong regulatory policies over corporations to ensure effective social and environmental safeguards, and corruption or bribery to avoid regulation is a widespread problem.

Faced with these many challenges, indigenous peoples and minorities have implemented several strategies to resist harmful or unwanted natural resource development. Various forms of non-violent protest have been used but such actions have often been met with violence, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearances, torture and even death. The Mapuche in Chile have faced government use of anti-terrorism legislation against community members who have been protesting against exploitation of their lands by extractive industries; similar use of anti-terrorism and other spurious charges have been used in Ecuador for indigenous leaders protesting against mining laws. Protest has also escalated into outright armed conflict in some cases. Government failure to seek consent from minority or indigenous communities to development projects, coupled with increasing poverty, inequality and mass displacement, risks

pushing groups to take up arms against the state and corporations in defence of their rights.

Given the state or corporate crackdowns on activism, some communities have adopted some alternative strategies. Many alliances have been formed with civil society actors outside their countries. MRG is actively supporting a number of land rights claims by minority and indigenous communities around the world.

Some communities are taking a political path to assert greater influence in decision-making on natural resource development, often by seeking political positions. For example, in Mindanao in the Philippines, a local indigenous community (Subanon) federation undertook a strategy to secure elected seats in local governance structures (*barangay*) where they would be better able to apply national laws and traditional rights in negotiations with the government and mining companies seeking resource extraction access in traditional territories.

Litigation has been one option utilized by communities. There are some high-profile cases, such as that recently won against Chevron-Texaco by indigenous and other local communities in Ecuador suffering health impacts from oil exploration; the company was ordered to pay US\$ 18 billion in compensation for environmental damage and harm to the affected communities. However, there are numerous low-profile initiatives being taken by communities through legal mechanisms such as legislative or judicial review of decisions taken by the state in favour of natural resource development and in apparent contravention of minority and indigenous rights. These disputes can sometimes take decades to resolve and may entail complex legal cases; most minority and indigenous communities simply cannot match the resources of their private or public sector opponents. Even when they win such cases, implementation of decisions remains difficult in the face of obstinate governments and corporate interests.

A human rights framework for natural resources development

Policy decisions on natural resource development made in 'the national interest' cannot be based on the interests of the majority alone, particularly if such policies would cause serious violations of

Right: A Mapuche man, near Temuco, Chile.
Julio Etchart/Panos.

the human rights of minorities and indigenous peoples. The framework of what constitutes a serious violation in such cases is determined primarily by the rights to self-determination, non-discrimination, cultural life, means of subsistence, and to land, territories and natural resources.

The specific standards elaborated for indigenous peoples and minorities respectively related to natural resource development do differ, with those for indigenous peoples being more extensive and specific. This gap presents a serious problem for minority groups affected by harmful natural resource development, who have fewer mechanisms and remedies available to them. Some of this gap can and has been filled by progressive interpretations of existing standards, including non-legally binding standards such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UNDM).

The right to self-determination is an important starting point for both groups, not least because it is linked to freedoms regarding the use of natural wealth and resources. All peoples have the right to self-determination under common Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). This article further states that 'in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence', a crucial point in light of natural resource development impact on (traditional) livelihoods. This right is reinforced for indigenous peoples in the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) under Article 3, which holds that 'Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.'

Key to exercising self-determination over natural resource development is the right to 'free, prior and informed consent' in its various forms. This right has been recognized in numerous international legal standards and jurisprudence, including in International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 Concerning Indigenous



and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (ILO 169) and in the UNDRIP. Numerous examples from the case law also support this, including the *Ogoni* and *Endorois* cases before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the *Saramaka* and *Awás Tingni* cases at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. In summary, 'free' means that consent must be given without coercion or intimidation; 'prior' means that consent must be given fully prior to the commencement of any activity affecting the group or its land, territories or resources; 'informed' requires that groups be given full disclosure of the activity and its potential impact; and 'consent' is a collective right to give or to withhold consent to proposed activities.

The international standards on minority rights recognize that persons belonging to minorities have 'the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live' (UNDM, Article 2.3). Progressively interpreted,

the right to participate effectively in decision-making can afford many of the same protections that are evident in the free, prior and informed consent standards on indigenous peoples' rights. This includes ensuring that participation is free, comes prior to decisions being made, is based on full access to relevant information, and is understood as 'effective' only where minorities can consent (or not) to decisions that may affect them.

While the rights to land, territories and natural resources are elaborated clearly for indigenous peoples in international law, the standards for persons belonging to minorities on land, territories and resources are less clear; the UNDM makes no provisions on these specific points, nor do relevant regional standards. Protection for land, territories and resources can be included in nationally agreed autonomy arrangements, whereby regulation of these issues is delegated to minority self-governance. Such rights may also be recognized under customary law or general property laws. In Colombia, for example, Law 70, In Recognition of the Right

of Black Colombians to Collectively Own and Occupy their Ancestral Lands, was adopted in 1993 to protect such rights for certain Afro-Colombian communities. Law 70 has not been implemented fully, however, and many Afro-Colombians with land rights claims have been left without protection. The situation underscores the need for further elaboration of land and resource rights protection for minorities at the national and international levels.

The right to take part in cultural life is also firmly protected in international law. Beyond Article 15 of the ICESCR, Article 27 of the ICCPR states further that persons belonging to minorities 'shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language'. Indigenous peoples' right to cultural life is recognized extensively in the UNDRIP and ILO 169, particularly in relation to the pursuit of traditional livelihoods, education and health. For minorities, the UNDM calls upon states to 'take measures to create favourable conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs' (Article 4.2).

Crucially, cultural life is not something to be pursued in detachment from economic and social life; it is inter-dependent with other human rights protections. Cultural life also encompasses traditional livelihoods which are commonly under threat from natural resource development. The ILO Convention no. 111 concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation is one tool to prevent discriminatory policies against traditional livelihoods; ILO 169 also addresses this point extensively (see Articles 20–23). Sacred spaces or spaces essential to cultural life must also be protected in natural resource development. UNESCO has promulgated several standards to this end, including the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Similarly, Article 8 (j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity protects traditional cultural practices 'relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity' and encourages 'equitable sharing of the benefits'

from such resources.

International development banks, such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, have elaborated policies to help ensure that loans for natural resource development projects do not harm indigenous peoples. But there is still scope for improvement: for example, the World Bank's latest Operational Policy (2005) only acknowledges the need for 'free, prior and informed *consultation*' (emphasis added) where indigenous communities might be affected by World Bank-financed projects, rather than 'consent' as recognized in other international standards. Notably there are no global minority-specific standards related to development to mirror those elaborated for indigenous peoples, further evidence of the large gap in protection.

Indigenous peoples and minorities have worked to shape these initiatives and emerging norms, but the outcomes have not often fully met expectations. In many cases, the inclusion of indigenous peoples or minorities in emerging global initiatives related to natural resource development has been hard won: for example, in REDD, which calls on parties to ensure 'the full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, *inter alia*, indigenous peoples and local communities' (paragraph 72) in national REDD strategies. These guidelines and initiatives can contribute to better practice but they must be implemented from a starting point of human rights recognition and protection.

Adopting a human rights-based approach to natural resource development for indigenous peoples and minorities is a vital means to this end. The human rights-based approach calls for development outcomes and processes to avoid human rights violations and to aim for the realization of human rights, without discrimination. This approach emphasizes state duties and accountability for these goals, and the central role of participation by those affected in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policies. Indicators that measure the impact on human rights of development interventions are used to assess progress.

Addressing harmful natural resources development: ways forward

Minorities and indigenous peoples do not seek to

resist all natural resource development. In many cases, they hope to benefit from the development to improve their social and economic life. They also have skills and knowledge to contribute to the effective and sustainable management of natural resources. The way forward is through natural resource development that will respect, protect and fulfil their human rights.

An important starting point is the recognition of the rights to self-determination and to participate effectively in decision-making regarding any natural resource development that will affect minority and indigenous communities or their land, territories and resources.

Indigenous communities in particular hold the right to free, prior and informed consent. There should be harmonization of laws regulating natural resource development with these core rights of communities. This should also include laws to protect economic, social and cultural life for minorities and indigenous peoples.

Addressing land and resource title claims is key to this process. The rights of communities to occupy and use their land and territories must be legally guaranteed in a process that is transparent and not unduly prolonged. Furthermore, norms on effective participation and on free, prior and informed consent must be respected fully through the adoption of effective mechanisms, including the use of customary law and structures of decision-making as appropriate. Women belonging to minority and indigenous communities must be enabled to participate equally in these processes. In Kenya, for example, the 2009 National Land Policy calls for the proportionate representation of women in all institutions dealing with land.

Impact assessments are also essential tools to prevent harmful or unwanted natural resource development being carried out by the relevant actors in a specific project, such as government authorities, development agencies and companies. General social and environmental impact assessments may not be sufficient to uncover particular harms faced by minorities and indigenous peoples linked to issues such as discrimination, cultural life or customary rights to land and resources. A minority and indigenous rights component should therefore be integrated into impact assessments. These should be applied

to all natural resource development proposals and should include also assessment of impacts on the full range of human rights of affected communities. Particular attention should be paid to differential impacts on the basis of gender, age and disability. There should be free and easy access to information on impact assessments for affected communities, including translation or other forms of communication as required. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, has recently proposed a set of 'Guiding Principles on Human Rights Impact Assessments of Trade and Investment Agreements' that could be one useful tool.

In January 2012, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) (part of the World Bank Group) adopted a new Performance Standard 7 on indigenous peoples that recognizes the right of free, prior and informed consent as a required component of social and environmental impact assessments for private sector financing. The IFC Performance Standard 5 on land acquisition and involuntary resettlement offers related safeguards.

In some cases, benefit-sharing agreements can be made between corporations (and states) and affected groups. If constructed well, they can enable groups to benefit from natural resource development in their region and to greatly improve their human development prospects. However, not all agreements are consistent with the rights of minority and indigenous communities, and few fully recognize the legal entitlement of groups over the land and resources affected. Such benefit-sharing agreements should be reviewed regularly to ensure compliance and continued consent of affected communities. One positive example is the Sakhalin Energy company agreement in Russia. Following protests in 2005 from indigenous communities (mainly Nivkh and Oroch people) on Sakhalin Island negatively impacted by oil and gas extraction on their traditional territories and waters, the company has worked through a series of more progressive benefit-sharing agreements in partnership with formally elected indigenous representatives. They have agreed the second Sakhalin Indigenous Minorities Development Five Year Plan (2011–15), which includes an external monitoring system, a grievance procedure and indigenous governance structures.



Full participation of minorities and indigenous peoples is needed also at the level of global governance on natural resource development. The Convention on Biological Diversity is one useful model, where the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) has been created as an advisory body. Similar measures are needed urgently in arenas like climate change and forestry management. One promising initiative is the draft annex to UN REDD+ on free, prior and informed consent, elaborated following several regional consultations with indigenous peoples' organizations. Similar institutional initiatives and policy recognition are needed urgently for other ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities whose rights and situation are often ignored.

Access to justice should be ensured to communities in natural resource development

processes. Disputes over natural resource development can turn violent, frequently with state actors as perpetrators or complicit in the actions of private security companies. Alternative dispute resolution can be employed to bring parties in natural resources disputes to agreement peacefully. Crimes committed against minorities and indigenous peoples in the context of natural resource development should be subject to full investigation and prosecution. Litigation against corporations or state officials for illegal natural resource extraction should be supported through appropriate legal aid assistance for affected communities. Such legal aid facilities can also be enabled to ensure communities negotiate fair benefit-sharing agreements or other contracts related to their land, territories and resources.

It is important to build the capacity of minority



Left: Work in progress for the Sakhalin Energy oil and gas pipeline on the island of Sakhalin, Russia, in 2007. *Francesco Cito/Panos.*

better for sustainable natural resource development: for example, recent studies have shown that forests managed by indigenous communities have been more effective in reducing deforestation than those protected for conservation only.

Conclusion

Indigenous peoples and minorities are getting few of the benefits and more of the harms from the myriad of natural resources development projects currently being pursued. The lands and territories they have long occupied and the resources they have long relied upon are under increasing threat from powerful state and corporate forces. The negative effect of harmful and unwanted natural resource development on these communities is striking and constitutes a clear violation of their human rights. In some cases, it is now a threat to their very existence.

Many communities are successfully fighting back against unwanted or harmful natural resource development and also contributing towards management of such resources. In Canada, for example, the Environmental Stewardship Unit of the Assembly of First Nations is working with several government ministries and commercial entities to ensure a central role for indigenous peoples in sustainable natural resource development. Meanwhile, others do not have adequate access to information, legal assistance, knowledge of commercial natural resource development processes or funding in order to defend their rights.

Ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities have so far not garnered the recognition of their rights and concerns that has been achieved by indigenous peoples. The gap in protection could make these groups even more vulnerable to harmful natural resource development in future.

The development of natural resources need not be harmful or unjust. The future of natural resource development is our *common* future, and minorities and indigenous peoples have a right not only to benefit in this, but also to help determine its path. This is their right to self-determination. ■

and indigenous communities to elaborate, monitor and implement natural resource development programmes that are consistent with their human rights and view of development. This is not only about technical capacity to critically evaluate and design good natural resource development but also to assert alternative development strategies that might challenge dominant paradigms that have contributed to so many harmful outcomes. Support can range from technical and financial assistance, including from international organizations, inter-community solidarity and advisory services, scholarships and training for community members on relevant standards and technical knowledge. The Indigenous Peoples Resource Management Program at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada is one model curriculum. Undertaking such management roles can also be