

Abstract. The 1992 Rio Summit brought Indigenous Peoples and the importance of their knowledge to the world's attention for the first time. What has happened since then? Have Indigenous Peoples participated in environmental decision-making, and have their perspectives been included in the work on global accords, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, Climate Change, POPs, and so on? Eight authors from Canada, French Guyana, Kenya, and New Zealand illustrate that some progress has been made, but there is plenty of room for further improvement.

Increase our representation (Kenya)

Lucy Mulenkei

*African Indigenous Women's Organization
PO Box 74908
Nairobi, Kenya
iin@iin.co.ke*

Mr Peter Wasike, a farmer in Bungoma, Kenya grows many varieties of *Amaranthus*, whose leaves are eaten as vegetables by the local people. Mr.

Wasike's work is supported by SACRED Africa, which is promoting participatory community development, sustainable agriculture, and biodiversity conservation in Eastern and Southern Africa. To learn more, visit: www.acts.or.ke/sacred.

OR write to:
SACRED-Africa,
P.O.Box 2275,
Bungoma, Kenya
Tel: 254-337-30788/
30293.

(Photo courtesy of Eusebius Muhkwana)

In Kenya, the Rio Earth Summit received press coverage only when the President boarded his flight for Brazil. At that time, many environmental meetings were taking place in Nairobi but they were mostly attended by high level officials mainly from the Ministry of the Environment. Rio had little impact for Indigenous Peoples in Kenya. It was only in preparation for Rio+5, when more information was made available and discussions took place regarding the conventions that had come out of the Rio Summit, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), that people participated in the process. However the process advanced slowly at the regional and national levels and participation was non-existent for Indigenous Peoples at the community level.

In Africa, there are many environmental concerns. These include the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their traditional hunting and gathering lands, deforestation due to logging, the loss of Indigenous crops and biodiversity, climate change, drought, desertification, and the contamination of major waterways. In addition, there is lack of information and awareness concerning environmental issues amongst Indigenous communities. Most of the communities are poor and the situation is exacerbated by the continued threat of war. The influx of refugees to Eastern Africa due to armed conflicts has a heavy impact on the environment: refugee camps are always located



in fragile and/or semi-arid environments. Survival is difficult since basic resources like water and firewood are scarce.

Indigenous Peoples must be involved in planning and implementing policies to improve their situation. Indigenous Peoples' integral roles within international fora such as UNCED held in Rio, the Working Group on Article 8(j) of the CBD, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and CCD need to be recognized by non-governmental organizations, the UN, and national governmental departments. Presently, Indigenous Peoples' representation remains very low except in the CBD process. Because many communities are isolated and communication with them is often difficult, outreach activities and information sharing must be undertaken. Also, financial support must be given to enable the Indigenous Peoples in Africa to 1) plan, develop, implement, and evaluate projects for greater environmental awareness, 2) build their capacity internally, 3) advance their issues at the national, regional, and international level, and 4) ensure their full and effective participation in these processes. Finally, alternative ways for sustainable living, which alleviates poverty within Indigenous communities, must be developed and implemented.

