



GAINING MOMENTUM:
**BUILDING ON OUR INITIATIVES AND STRENGTHS TOWARDS SECURING OUR RIGHTS TO
FORESTLANDS AND RESOURCES, SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT
LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY**

Statement Delivered During Asia Pacific Forestry Week 2016

February 26, 2016

Clark, Pampanga, Philippines

We, leaders of organizations of indigenous peoples, local forest based communities and enterprises and family smallholders in 16 countries in Asia thank the organizers of Asia Pacific Forestry Week 2016, as well as our apex organizations Asian Farmers Association (AFA), Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and network partner Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Program –Asia (NTFP-EP), who brought us here, with the support of FAO Forest and Farm Facility, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Swedish Society for Conservation and Nature and Both Ends.

We came here to share our initiatives and struggles in (1) defending our rights to our lands, territories and forests, (2) in promoting community-based sustainable forest management and (3) in getting a fair share of the benefits of forest products. We also came here to learn from the experiences of others stakeholders. But most of all, we came here to dialogue with our development partners and with representatives of our governments.

We know we are primarily at the forefront in efforts to achieve food security and nutrition, respond to climate change, conserve biodiversity, reduce poverty reduction and hunger and increase nutrition through sustainable agriculture and forestry management. And we want to play our part as key stakeholders in processes that relate to forestry.

However, our capacities to contribute to the achievement of the sustainable development goals, which are also actually for us, are hampered by many challenges and obstacles: insecure land tenure, complex and inappropriate forest regulations and weak recognition of the bundle of collective rights of our communities to forest resources, weak market access, low prices of products, weak position in the value chain, unequal and inaccessible benefit sharing in forest resources.

Our lands and forests are being expropriated without our free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for forest conservation, large-scale biofuel plantations such as sugar cane, oil palm, jatropha, and corn as well as for the construction of mega-dams and geothermal plants for renewable energy. These development aggressions are engendering the adverse environmental, economic, social and cultural impacts to our livelihoods and traditional occupations, ultimately affecting our very identity and survival. Further, our traditional livelihoods such as shifting cultivation are seen as drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. The recent study undertaken by AIPP, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN and International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in 7 countries in Asia buttressed what has been pointed out by researchers and indigenous farmers for many years, namely that shifting cultivation is not a driver of deforestation. The study also confirmed that shifting cultivation is playing an important role in providing livelihood and food security for millions of indigenous peoples in Asia.

We are happy to hear that the Asia Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) will endorse the statement “Building Momentum” a product of our cooperation during the World Forestry Congress in Durban. Building on this statement, we forward the following key recommendations to our governments and to the Asia Pacific Commission (APFC) and development partners including the Forest and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to recognize and uphold our rights, and strengthen our capacities to be careful stewards while benefitting from the sustainable management of forests.

We call upon our governments and inter governmental organizations to :

Number one, Secure ownership/stewardship/management of farm and forestlands that fully respect traditional institutions and customary laws and are negotiated in fully participatory ways. In line with this:

1. Respect, protect, fulfill and effectively implement all human rights and treaties including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security.
2. Grant full and inalienable rights to access, use, management, exclusion and alienation in their forests, lands and waters in their territories; and where rules and regulations governing these rights are subject to principles of self-determination and communities have access to sufficient technical, financial, legal and material resources to fully realize their rights. Ensure that laws are supported by clear guidelines and simple procedures to secure rights and access to forests. Guarantee that women will have equal access to these forest and land rights .
3. Ensure the implementation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as enshrined in the UNDRIP prior to granting any land concessions to private sector and business entities. Governments should stop land concessions that displace indigenous peoples and local communities and pose threats to their livelihoods and identities.
4. Adopt decisive reforms to recognize and support shifting cultivation (with a cycle of at least 7 years) as sustainable land use system of indigenous peoples in view of food security.
5. Support the global call to action on indigenous and community land rights to double by 2020 the global area of land legally recognized as owned or controlled by indigenous peoples, local smallholder family farming communities.

Number two, we live in an integrated landscape where forests and farms are managed interdependently. Thus, we call on APFC to develop and fund community driven programs on sustainable forest management, agro forestry, agro ecology and related livelihoods with the support of appropriate technical agencies.

6. Such programs should include sufficient capacity building on participatory forest inventory, land mapping, disaster risk reduction and management, Non-timber forest products development, the development of in situ model farms and forests, as well as the provision of incentives for agriculture research (e.g. on forest cover, fallow management, soil fertility regeneration, crop diversity) and the establishment of learning exchange platforms on good practices, knowledge and innovation.
7. Recognize, protect and promote indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge including the roles and contributions of women in sustainable forest management and biodiversity enhancement

Number three, benefits from the forests must accrue to the local farming families and indigenous communities with their organizations, who are closest to these resources based on ownership, needs and sustainable practices. Thus, it is vital to:

8. Recognize our organizations, cooperatives and enterprises by supporting our organizing work and respecting our freedom for association, giving simple, accessible requirements for registration.
9. Ensure adequate and appropriate policy and program support such as, the provision of infrastructure, tax incentives, Non-timber forest products development support and access to finance, technology and markets.

For regional bodies such as ASEAN, SAARC, SPC, set standards and monitor implementation of agreed upon actions on sustainable forest management, community/social forestry as well as the sustainable management of the "commons"; as well as facilitate cross-country technology and information exchanges among government officials, indigenous peoples, and forest and farm producers.

And lastly but most important, make us equal partners (1) in key decision making processes on forest-related issues at local, national and regional levels, (2) in the participatory design, implementation and monitoring of programs on forestry as well as in formulating financial policies and instruments through institutionalized mechanisms, and (3) in the conduct of agriculture and forestry research and innovations.

The forests provide life and sustenance to us. It is to our best advantage that we take care of the forests. We commit to manage it sustainably, for many generations to come.

RECOGNIZE AND RESPECT OUR CONTRIBUTIONS. SUPPORT OUR WORK. SUPPORT OUR ORGANIZATIONS. DEVELOP PARTNERSHIP WITH US.