

## Reflection on participating the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

By

*Pasang Dolma Sherpa, Co-Chair of IUCN, CEESP-SPICEH, April 15, 2019*



The eighteenth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the high-level advisory body to the Economic and Social Council, one among the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN) was established on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2000 with the mandate to deal with indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. Although the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the UNPFII was held in May 2002, for the first time, I participated the forum in 2012 and the 18<sup>th</sup> session of the UNPFII has been my second time.

In comparison to my first participation, my engagement on the special theme of the forum, *traditional knowledge: generations, transmission and protection* has been fruitful. I was interested to catch up the discussion on traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples, how they have been experiencing by different indigenous groups around the world while dealing with modern development and government policies and programs, their experiences and stories from different regions despite developed and developing countries with interest to know the commonality and differences on the issues and concerns of indigenous peoples and their cultural ties to the natural resources and their land. While listening to the stories and experiences of the status of traditional knowledge and cultural practices of indigenous peoples either in the western or eastern countries with different social and economic status, the core concerns of the indigenous peoples remained the same, “no respect of indigenous peoples in their own land”, the sorrows and pathos of not being able to continue traditional knowledge

and cultural practices of livelihoods remained the same. This shows, indigenous peoples' happiness depends on how indigenous peoples' cultural identity is respected without differences from the people in the mainstream.

Throughout the struggles of indigenous elders at the international forum, the establishment of the UNPFII is the great platform for indigenous peoples to speak their burning concerns for respecting and recognizing their traditional knowledge and cultural practices to be addressed by the national laws, policies and regulations at home country. It was a great opportunity for indigenous peoples like myself working on the issues and concerns of indigenous peoples in relation to climate change, natural resources, environment and land tenure to share stories and experiences and join hands, how could we promote and save our remaining language, knowledge, culture and our traditional livelihood and influence each of our concerned ministries so that the broken heart of indigenous communities could be healed and hope for the continuity of speaking indigenous language and enjoyment of cultural practices by the future generations.



During the forum, I was not only listening to the stories of others but also shared my stories as one of the panelists in two side events of *Pawanka Fund* organized jointly by AIPP, TEBTEBBA, Samburu- Women Trust, Totimiya and FIMI with main theme of traditional knowledge and indigenous peoples' innovations for the sustainable natural resource management. Along with other panelists, I could share how indigenous peoples in Nepal are still able to continue their traditional customary institutions with self-governance systems, practice of their own traditional healing systems and uses of the herbal medicine found nearby their home with the examples from Dura communities in Lamjung District and Lama communities in Nubri, Kutan and Tsum villages in Gorkha district in Nepal. However, the challenges faced by indigenous peoples in Nepal for continuing their cultural practices with hardly safeguard policies at the national and community levels to protect and promote remained the same as other countries.

As a member of the Facilitative Working Groups (FWG) of Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples (LCIP) Platform in United Nations Forum on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from Asia, I got the opportunity to share my expectation, engagement and future efforts during another side event of the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Climate Change and Traditional Knowledge: Updates from the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), Global Landscape Forum (GLF), and the FWG on the LCIP* organized by Indigenous Peoples Major Group on Sustainable Development (IPMG), International Indian Treaty Council. The global forum like UNFCCC starts acknowledging and realizing the crucial role played by indigenous peoples to protect the remaining world' forest and key players for climate change resilience and why it has been crucial for indigenous communities around the world to join hands to lobby and negotiate to their

governments to make them realize, respect and recognize the values of traditional knowledge and cultural practices by the legal provisions at the country level too. a



Apart from joining the plenary discussion and panelists in two of the side events I mentioned above, I found UNPFII is the platform helpful to catch up the aspiration of indigenous elders, leaders and activists around the world as well as meetings and interacting bilateral and multilateral agencies that have been working on the concerns of indigenous peoples around the world. I found the forum has been very significant platform to follow up and engage in the coming days too. Finally, I am so thankful towards Kristen Walker, the Chair of IUCN CEESP for this opportunity to exchange and share the issues and concerns of indigenous peoples as well as our work at community and national levels in Asia particularly in Nepal.

Pasang Dolma Sherpa, PhD  
Center for Indigenous Peoples Research and Development (CIPRED)  
[pdsherpa@cipred.org.np](mailto:pdsherpa@cipred.org.np) & [www.cipred.org.np](http://www.cipred.org.np)