

COMMUNITY DECLARATION

*Recommendations to the Civil Society Hearings (23-24 June 2005)
and the Millennium Review Summit (14-16 September 2005)*



Whereas, grassroots and indigenous communities from 44 countries gathered at the Community Commons, held at Fordham University in New York City (16-18 June 2005), and spent four days fruitfully sharing, learning and exchanging knowledge on community level good practice for achieving sustainable development:

We recognize the critical role that the United Nations and its partners are playing in promoting the efforts of grassroots and indigenous communities in realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This is indeed critical as the world is beginning to recognize that local and indigenous communities are the true custodians of the majority of the world's resources and that neither development nor conservation can succeed without grassroots and indigenous participation. We believe that indigenous knowledge, practices and systems are very often the foundation for appropriate community level programme design, implementation, management and monitoring. We, therefore, reaffirm that these systems should be respected and supported worldwide.

Since the Community Kraal at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002, UNDP and its partners have supported six community consultations where grassroots groups have met and made policy recommendations. Through this Community Commons Declaration, we request that UNDP and its partners report back to us on what real actions they have taken over the course of these consultations and document how prior declarations have been acted upon.

As a foundation for the recommendations below, we propose that institutional partners give long-term support directly to community based organizations. Special recognition must go to grassroots women's groups for the roles they play and their contributions to reducing poverty and improving the quality of life for families and communities. Partners must keep in mind the diversity and holistic nature of community work, always ensuring the inclusion of disadvantaged groups - such as indigenous, local and uncontacted peoples, women, youth, people affected by HIV/AIDS, racial and ethnic minorities, and people from non-self governing territories. In addition, we recognize that peace building, conflict management, poverty reduction, addressing the spread of HIV/AIDS and the building of resilience to disasters are all essential to realizing the MDGs.

We are calling upon the United Nations, its member states, multilateral organizations and other stakeholders to adopt the principle of subsidiarity in the implementation of all MDGs and to empower local and indigenous communities to take control of their own development processes to ensure sustainability. *To this end we recommend the following:*

Participation

1. Communities should play a leading role in the planning and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), disaster mitigation efforts and peace building through --

- a). Ensuring that at least 25% of all funds for the MDGs, disaster mitigation and peace building go directly to support and strengthen the work of community based and indigenous peoples' initiatives.
- b). Supporting community based organizations (CBOs) in decision-making, with special attention to the identification, planning, design, management, and evaluation of development, environment, agricultural, disaster and peace-building programmes.
- c). Institutionalizing participatory budgeting processes that fully involve community representatives by governments and local authorities.
- d). Involving communities fully in planning, decision making, and budgeting for large scale funds directed towards MDG achievement, disaster management and peace building is particularly vital.
- e). Promoting the documentation, analysis and dissemination of community experience and good practices related to achievement of the MDGs.

Capacity Development

2. Create a Global Learning Fund to:

- a. Enable communities to identify and undertake peer exchanges in order to learn from successful practices.
- b. To fund community based pilot projects.
- c. Establish community resource teams to teach other communities.
- d. Support community resource teams in dialogue efforts with institutions to build partnerships (donors, government, local authorities, international NGOs, civil society, private sector).
- e. Support local community driven information sharing and learning networks at all levels.
- f. Build capacities of communities to document and disseminate their knowledge and best practices.
- g. Support community-based and women-managed multipurpose information technology centers.

Tenure, Security and Indigenous Knowledge

- 3. Legitimize community tenure security and communal access to, and control over, traditional and ancestral lands, seas, forests, and marine resources. Priority must be given to local communities over private sector in claims to traditional resources. Community decisions on the types of development to be pursued should be respected and acknowledged, especially in Protected Areas. Ensure that local communities and indigenous peoples' free, prior and informed consent is guaranteed with respect to development planning and decision making. Special attention must be given to creating mechanisms, both formal and communal, that ensure women's equal rights to land and effective control over tenure and other productive assets.
- 4. Recognize and restore local eco-system specific traditional and indigenous knowledge systems on health, agriculture and food and other traditional indigenous practices and protect intellectual, cultural and communal property rights. This is especially important as biodiversity is essential for local health and livelihood security. Communities need to be meaningfully compensated for their

traditional knowledge in the event that it is used in research and food, medicinal industries, or in any commercial activity. Research should be participatory and community led.

5. Strong efforts must be taken to stamp out biopiracy. At the same time, improved controls – developed together with affected communities – are needed over prospecting in biological resources.

Responding to HIV/AIDS

6. HIV/AIDS should be globally recognized as a development priority and that communities are at the forefront of responding to the epidemic. Strong efforts should be made to ensure that more money from donors reaches communities. We recommend that 25% of the Global Fund to fight AIDS should be committed to community-driven solutions and responses, particularly in prevention, treatment, care and support.
7. The global initiative to strengthen national health systems must prioritize its efforts to community's access to primary health care and should recognize and leverage upon existing community capacity and expertise – including traditional health and medicines.
8. The capacity of communities to address the underlying causes fueling the spread of HIV/AIDS should be strengthened by using methodologies that assist in promoting open discussions and conversations that reduce stigma and discrimination and enable communities to respond to the impact of the epidemic.
9. There is a direct link between the continued spread of HIV/AIDS and inequalities in women's inheritance and property rights. Lack of access to land and property is increasingly leaving women and children more vulnerable to HIV. Empowering communities to ensure women have equal access to inheritance, property and land is therefore critical and learning exchanges should be established to promote the sharing of best practices.

Strengthening the Role of Communities

10. Establish gender-balanced community task forces at the global, national and local levels to analyze, monitor, advocate and implement the MDGs. This effort should continue through 2015. A strong majority of members of the task forces, should be drawn from local communities and indigenous groups. Ensure strong communications between communities and national task forces. For example, community representatives should sit on regional and national MDG task forces.
11. Convene CBO and private sector dialogues to discuss project development and plans so as to ensure community participation in decision making. Also --
 - a) Ensure effective involvement of local and indigenous communities across the value chain of commercial activities (from harvesting to sale).
 - b) Develop an effective and genuine Access and Benefit Sharing Arrangements (ABS) in which communities benefit meaningfully from their local resources.
 - c) Create community clearinghouse mechanisms that house local level documentation of good practices for MDG achievement.
 - d) Develop, support and strengthen community networks and cross-sectoral alliance building.