PERCEPTIONS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT:  
A CASE STUDY OF IBAN COMMUNITY IN NANGA MEJONG, SKRANG, SARAWAK, MALAYSIA.

By

ISOBETH BANA

A dissertation submitted 
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master in Environmental Management  
in Development Planning

Faculty of Social Science  
University Malaysia Sarawak  
May 2005
ABSTRACT

The Iban have changed because they desired an improvement in their living, economic status and not to be left out in the modernizing society in Sarawak. In the process, the Iban have to sacrifice many aspects of their traditional living values. This study is about the perception of the Iban community in Nanga Mejong, Skrang on the topic of the relationship between culture and development. It was done using qualitative research methods. The methods include in-depth interview with the tuai rumah, focus group interviews and fieldwork participations. The focus groups interviews consist of three different groups; the men’s group (the longhouse’s committee), the women’s group and the youth’s group. This study has shown that there was a conflict between the young and elderly respondents pertaining the issue of development. The elderly perceive that development brought positive impact in term of socio-economic but otherwise in term of socio-culture. The young respondents otherwise are very comfortable with the ideas of development. Another issue arise was the conflict between the Iban traditional practices and Christianity. Some of the respondents especially the elderly fear that if their children embrace Christianity, they would not remember and consequently abandon the traditional customs, religion and the old ‘adat’ of the Ibans. From the study, today’s youth are exposed to all sorts of culture, especially the western ones. If today’s youth do not inherit these priceless skills from their present older generations, the Iban culture will be at strike in the near future so will the existence of their identities and race. Therefore, with respect to Iban culture there is a need to carry out an in-depth research, collation and documentation of Iban culture. This is to ensure that the Iban culture will remain alive through the process of development.
ABSTRAKS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give thanks to all people who supported me and were involved in one way or another in the preparation of this dissertation. With the biggest contribution to this dissertation, I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Ling How Kee for her encouragement, advice, mentoring, and research support throughout this study. I also truly appreciate her patience and tolerance during my numerous mishaps.

I would also like to thank my cousin, Nicholas Bujang without whose assistance and supports, this dissertation would not have been possible. Mr. Robert Malong also has my complete gratitude for his guidance and patience while I was working on this dissertation.

I would also like to thank all my friends for helping me and being patient with me while I was working on this dissertation. I appreciate all their friendships and their collective encouragement to finish this dissertation. I especially like to thank Wong Tat King, Humperry Robert Linggie, Nancy, Fomalavia, Ruth Robert, Elena Castello and Mark Jana.

I also want to thank my parents (especially my mum) and my fiancé. Because of their financial and spiritual support, I have been able to come to UNIMAS and study at an advanced academic level. This dissertation is dedicated to them.

At last, I want to devote this dissertation to my Lord. Thank Him for giving me good parents, fiancée and my advisors Dr. Ling How Kee and my cousin, Nicholas Bujang. It would not have been possible to complete this master's program without His grace.

To all of you, thank you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ABSTRACTS</strong></td>
<td>i - ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</strong></td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1 - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td><strong>BACKGROUND OF MY OWN INTEREST</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td><strong>STATEMENTS OF THE PROBLEM</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td><strong>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td><strong>OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td><strong>THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td><strong>SCOPE OF STUDY</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td><strong>DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE</strong></td>
<td>8 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td><strong>DEFINITION OF DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td>11 - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td><strong>THE RELATION BETWEEN CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td>13 - 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td><strong>INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF ASIA</strong></td>
<td>16 - 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td><strong>THE IBAN OF SARAWAK</strong></td>
<td>21 - 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td><strong>EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF IBAN CULTURE</strong></td>
<td>30 - 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>34 - 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td><strong>WHY USE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS?</strong></td>
<td>36 - 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td><strong>RESEARCH DESIGN</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td><strong>THE SELECTION OF SITES OF RESEARCH</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td><strong>THE SELECTION OF INFORMANTS</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td><strong>METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1</td>
<td>In-depth Interviews</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>41 - 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.3</td>
<td>Trial interview</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.4</td>
<td>Interviewing the Informants/Respondents</td>
<td>43 - 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.5</td>
<td>Field Work</td>
<td>46 - 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.6</td>
<td>Observation of the Informants/Respondents</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td><strong>DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS</strong></td>
<td>48 - 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td><strong>WRITING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

4.1 BACKGROUND OF SKRANG REGION AND NANGA MEJONG

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA
  4.2.1 Gender Distribution
  4.2.2 Age structure and Migration data
  4.2.3 Marital Status
  4.2.4 Religious Affiliation
  4.2.5 Education Level
  4.2.6 Household Occupation
  4.2.7 Household Income

4.3 THE MEANING OF CULTURE
  4.3.1 Culture are invented by the ancestor
  4.3.2 Culture is identity of each ethnic
  4.3.3 Culture is dynamic

4.4 CULTURE CHANGE
  4.4.1 Changed because of the attitude of Ikans himself
  4.4.2 Change because of development

4.5 THE MEANING OF DEVELOPMENT
  4.5.1 Change in the standard of living
  4.5.2 Development means government intervention
  4.5.3 Development, culture and Tourism
  4.5.4 Comfortable with idea of development

4.6 DILEMMAS ARISE FROM THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT
  4.6.1 Religions and communal life
  4.6.2 Inter and intra ethnic relations
  4.6.3 The future of Iban culture and heritages

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1  Pie-Chart showing Sarawak's Ethnic Composition from 2000 census
Figure 2  Location of study sites
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Yearly cycle of rice cultivation
Table 2: Respondents Gender
Table 3: Respondents age
Table 4: Marital Status of the respondents
Table 5: Respondents Religion
Table 6: Respondents Education Level
Table 7: Household Occupation
Table 8: Household Income
CHAPI’ER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Indigenous peoples around the world face many common problems in relation to the broader society around them. Yet each region and culture raises its own issues for which no universal answers are adequate.

In Asia, we have no common terminology for indigenous peoples. In India, the term “indigenous” is frowned upon as connoting “primitive, underdeveloped” and people prefer to refer to themselves as “tribals” or by the Hindi term adivasi (literally, “original inhabitants”). Conversely, in the Philippines, the term “tribal” is rejected as connoting backwardness and the term “indigenous” is preferred (Sillitoe, 2000).

In Australia and Taiwan, the familiar term “aborigine” is considered pejorative and not used by those who are conscientized to their cause. In Indonesia, the term pribumi (indigenous) and the Malaysian counterpart bumiputera have political connotations indicating Indonesians and Malaysians of Malay stock ‘in contradistinction to the small but wealthy and influential communities of Chinese and Indian descent’ (Lim & Gomes, 1990).
Although there are no exact figures, it is estimated that the indigenous peoples of Asia are about 350 million people. In China alone, the officially recognized "ethnic minorities" exceed 100 million. In Southeast Asia, they include the "hill tribes" of Akka, Karen, Shan, and Chin in Myanmar and Thailand, the "montagnards" of Vietnam, and the Hmong of Laos and southern China (Lim & Gomes, 1990).

On the Malaysian island of Borneo, the indigenous Iban, Dayak, and Kadazan people form a majority. In Indonesia, the peoples of the "outer islands," that is, all but Java, Bali, and Sumatra, can be characterized as belonging to non-dominant minorities. Perhaps the following three examples will illustrate some of the situations of Asia's indigenous peoples (Lim & Gomes, 1990).

Studies have shown that the indigenous peoples have tried to maintain their linguistic, cultural and religious identity since well before the time of Christ (Lim & Gomes, 1990; Nicholas & Raajen, 1996; Sponsel, 2000). They are usually looked down upon by the dominant groups in society, and they are often the objects of discrimination, harassment, and oppression by the dominant groups. These indigenous minorities have never assimilated into the dominant majority group.

In other cases, they are peoples who were forced to leave their homelands and migrate elsewhere due to the pressures of war, famine, or appropriation of
their lands by others. They differ from the dominant majority in language, culture and religion. They are usually considered to be at the bottom of the social and economic scale, are looked down upon and discriminated against, and regarded by the dominant majority as “backward” (Nicholas, 1996).

On the one hand, indigenous peoples are considered an obstacle to national progress, while on the other, landlords oppose education programs in order to keep indigenous people uneducated so as to better control them (Lim & Gomes, 1990). Indigenous peoples are regarded with suspicion because they resist assimilation and yet in many cases indigenous peoples do not have the rights of full citizenship. For example, in Thailand, 60% of hill-tribe people are not citizens.

Studies also have stated that mostly the indigenous peoples in Asia affirm that the beginning of the end of their culture, identity and communal dignity began with the arrival of the development and Christian missionaries (Hughes, 2003).

As a result of the above-mentioned factors, we find in modern Asia an increasing marginalization of indigenous peoples. ‘The marginalization is social, in that they live on the outermost and lowest fringes of society, political, in that they have little say in decisions that affect their lives, economic, in that they are among the poorest, religious in that traditional religion is not considered on a par
with the great world religions, cultural in that they are seen to hang on to primitive and non-adaptive ways, and physical in that they live in isolated areas distant from “civilization” (Hughes, 2003).

Development has created a hybrid culture, but as people come to have closer contacts with their neighbors and begin to live and work together, difficulties arise. Indigenous peoples in Asia often feel no solidarity with those of a neighboring tribe, and several regions have experienced violent intertribal clashes. Much work needs to be done in Asia before we have an intelligible a comprehensive explanation of these social phenomena (Hughes, 2003).

1.1 BACKGROUND OF MY OWN INTEREST

As an Iban myself who grew up in the city, I often see my parents and my grandparents argue about culture. As a Christian believer, my parent tried to compromise with my grandparents who are both pagan. Sometimes, I heard my grandmother said something like ‘you are all blind by these modernizations that make you forget your own root’. This usually made me wonder whether development jeopardizing our culture.

Although sometimes I did agree with her. Born in the city, I have a very minimal knowledge on my own culture. Until I worked in the Sarawak Culture Village, I did not realize the values of my own culture, which is unique and
beautiful. In this study, I intend to seek out the perception of the Iban community in Nanga Mejong, Skrang on the relationship between culture and development.

1.2 STATEMENTS OF THE PROBLEM

The 'Dayak', preferably nowadays called the Iban changes and the receptive response to the changing surroundings transformed the Iban practices and values. Looking at the elements in that set of criteria and comparing it to the condition of the modern Iban in general, it is no longer valid except the feelings of belongings and the remembrance of the old days that the older generation keep on reminding the new generations about.

Recent studies have seen that the Iban has been so involved and become the participants in the changing modernizing society. New form of Iban identity emerged and the construction of the new identity taking place at various sites, through continuous interactions with the others, also with the surroundings (Ngidang, & Sanggin, 2000).

Although the aim of this study is to seek out the perception of the Iban community in the case study area on the relationship between culture and development, there are some issues that needed to be discussed. Other studies of Iban communities have shown how well adjusted Iban culture has been not only to the environment but also to itself as a design for communal living. What I hope to do in this study is to find out, how a culture which has defined by the Iban
people and what are their perceptions toward culture change and the relationship between culture and development.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that guide this study are:

1.3.1 What does culture means to the people?

1.3.2 How do they perceive and experience the changes in their culture?

1.3.3 What does development means to the people?

1.3.4 What are the dilemmas arise from the relationship between culture and development?

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

From the research questions above, the following objectives have been identified:

1.4.1 To identify the perception of the Iban community in the case study area on the meaning of culture.

1.4.2 To determine how they perceive and experience the changes in their culture.

1.4.3 To identify what is the respondents understanding on the meaning of development.

1.4.4 To determine whether there are any dilemmas arise from the relationship between culture and development.
1.5 THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study was done by using qualitative research methods. The reasons for using this method and also the process of this study will be discussed in detail in chapter three. The research was carried out in *Nanga Mejong*, Skrang district with 26 households.

The interviewing method used in this study was in-depth interviews and focus group. Other than that, both direct and participation observations were also used in this study. The observation are done while conducting the interviews and also while staying at the case study area. A guideline was designed and employed the in interviews of the following key informants in order to gather data about their opinions, knowledge, and perceptions:

- The *Tuai Rumah*
- Focus groups interviews of longhouse committees, women’s group and youth group were also carried out

1.6 SCOPE OF STUDY

As mention earlier, this study attempts to see the perception of the Iban community in the case study area on the relationship between culture and development. However, this study is not intended to examine others factors such as socio-economic and political system but only emphasised on the perception of the Iban people on the relationship between culture and development.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses six main issues. Firstly, it defines the meaning of culture. Secondly, it discussed the meaning of development. Thirdly, it dwells with the relationship between culture and development. Fourthly, it discusses the indigenous people of Asia in term of their struggle to preserve their culture in the face of development. Fifth, it reveals the Borneo’s cultural diversity. Next, it traces the history of the Iban existence in Sarawak. Finally, it discussed Iban culture particularly the factors influencing the evolution of the Iban culture, and how these cultural values have evolved as a result of modernization.

2.1 DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE

The word culture comes from the Latin root colere (to inhabit, to cultivate, or to honor). In general, it refers to human activity; different definitions of culture reflect different theories for understanding, or criteria for valuing, human activity.

Culture means different things to different people. Culture has been defined in a variety of ways by different scholars. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn culture are made of assumptions and ideals that are stored in people’s minds and consequently are hard for the outsiders to see (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952).
Many studies have defined culture as dynamic and can be taught and learned, making it a potentially rapid form of adaptation to change in physical conditions. Culture is never static. Basically, human culture is very dynamic. The internal as well as the external environments pressures, propel people to change their behaviour and adjust to suit the existing environment, a process known to many anthropologists as adaptation. In order to survive and be able to keep pace with the development, people must be willing and able to adjust accordingly with the changing environment (Sanggin, 2000).

Culture is also accumulative. Whenever a new element is added to the existing culture, the existing cultural practices may have to give way and lose their importance. Because of this characteristic, we are able to witness changes in the culture communities through processes known as adaptation and enculturation (Sanggin, 2000).

Adaptation refers to a phenomenon whereby an existing culture subjected to change to adapt to changing times. In sense, culture changes due to internal forces. On the other hand, enculturation is a process whereby outside cultures are slowly absorbed into the existing culture of a particular community and changing and bringing new forms of culture among the community (Sanggin, 2000).

Another key aspect of culture is that ‘it is created by people’. The ‘person-made’ aspects of culture can be contrasted with the environment givens
that people face (Herskovits, 1948). Another definition of culture was by Child and Kieser (1977), who describes culture as patterns of thought and manners that are widely shared by the community.

Another common way of understanding culture is to see it as consisting of three elements: values, norms, and artifacts. Values are ideas about what life is important. They guide the rest of the culture. Norms are expectations of how people will behave in different situations. Each culture has different methods, called sanctions, of enforcing its norms. Sanctions vary with the importance of the norm; norms that a society enforces formally are called laws. Artifacts are things, or material cultures that derive from the culture's values and norms (Dictionary of Modern Sociology, 1969).

From the above definitions, it is clearly seen that there are no one definition for culture. After reading all of these definitions we can summarize that cultures are mostly about values and norms which are about what is right and what is wrong or perhaps about what is desirable and what is undesirable. These values evolve simply from experience, religions, a philosophy or an ideology.

Other way to describe culture is it is a way of thinking, feeling and believing which at the end, the community members developed ways of dealing with the arisen of cultural change that reflected from its environment and
economic setting. It can be used and manipulated, discarded, segmented, homogenized and adapted (Wood, 1980)

2.2 DEFINITION OF DEVELOPMENT

According to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, development is bringing us more choices and new opportunities for prosperity. It is making us more familiar with global diversity. But it also brings uncertainties. Millions of people around the experience it not as an agent of progress but as descriptive force, where many millions are completely excluded from its benefits (Mangella, 1994).

In my opinion what Kofi Annan said was definitely true, no doubt about it. Development might bring ‘thousand of goodies’ but on the other hand not everybody gain benefit from it. Development also means changes in its environment or in other word contributed to a social restructuring. Social structures include relationship patterns among individuals, small groups, formal organizations, institutions and whole social systems as well as beliefs, values, norms, sanctions and many other phenomena (Earl, 1994).

Development has been perceived mostly by some as an evil force. Actually development is an irreversible process, not an option. It is positive and not an evil force, but it is also blind and therefore needs to be carefully harassed (Edward, 1976).
Various branches of development theory can, in part, be traced to their reliance on quite differing definitions of the term development. Many definitions focus on the goals or ends of development projects. However, as Staudt points out, people-centred development is likely to place at least as much emphasis on the means as well as the ends. So development programmes become “a process of enlarging people’s choices” (Staudt, 1991).

Increasingly, development theorists and practitioners contend that development does not work for people unless it is conceived and realised by them (Campfens, 1997; Jones, 1995; Chambers, 1993; Bayliss, 1991).

At the conceptual level, development is not a progress in a single direction, but a process of continuous adaptation, problem-solving and opportunity-exploiting under pressure. Causality is complex and circular, not simple and linear. Development is not movement towards a fixed goal but continuous adaptation to maximise well-being in changing conditions (Chambers, 1993).

Clearly there are parallels between this conceptual understanding of development and Jones’ (1995) depiction of the community as dynamic and ever-changing. Chambers concludes that practical development initiatives focus on decentralisation and empowerment, thus enabling local people to exploit the
diverse complexities of their local conditions and to adapt to rapid change (Jones, 1995).

2.3 THE RELATION BETWEEN CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

In general terms, Culture and Development is about the role of culture and cultural processes in achieving development, as in issues of poverty, human rights, gender equality, health, environmental concerns, and associated fields. The objective of Culture and Development is development: it is about the relationship between culture and very pragmatic and practical issues of survival and the improvement of the human condition, and ways in which culture can contribute to, or influence, the success of interventions in these areas.

In his excellent paper, originally developed for the Stockholm UNESCO intergovernmental conference on Cultural Policies for Development in 1998 (and reprinted here), Mervyn Claxton noted: "The concept of culture and development concerns the interactions between the two [culture and development], and not just the development of culture itself... the response to the problem of describing and measuring the interactions between culture and development has been ... to quietly sweep the development component under the carpet... and to concentrate on the promotion of cultural policies" (Claxton, 1998).

There are several dimensions to Culture and Development: it is about the relationship between cultural factors - beliefs, traditions, ways of living - and
development, and the extent to which they influence one another. This dimension of the debate (sometimes referred to as the cultural dimension of development) has been stimulated by a growing awareness that development programmes which fail to consider the cultural environment and cultural factors influencing their sustainability are likely to end in failure.

The papers contributed by Claxton, Sengendo and Gutiérrez (1998); represent some fascinating viewpoints on this aspect of Culture and Development. An added dimension to this is cultural rights, and recognition that people's cultural identity, beliefs and values can be a powerful ally for and as well as a barrier to development.

Claxton also stated that before long, the term Culture and Development has subsequently been used to describe a broad range of cultural issues and challenges in developing countries. In the 1990s the World Bank started exploring these themes, using Culture and Development to refer more narrowly to the relationship between development and the protection and preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Development currently prioritizes poverty, health, gender as urgent issues. Culture and development is therefore tied to the same critical agendas. In the long term, however, development is not simply about ensuring that people can survive, but that they have quality of life.
In 1984, the author, poet and dramatist Ariel Dorfman visited six Latin American countries for the Inter-American Foundation, to explore the link between culture and survival. He returned with the conviction that the benefits of culture in development did not come down to mere statistics:

"The real advantage consists in having made some people feel more human. How do you measure the amount of dignity that people accumulate? How do you quantify the disappearance of apathy? With what machines do you evaluate someone’s rediscovered identity, the power that they now feel to set their own goals and not merely take what others are willing to hand down?" (Hughes, 2003).

The transformation processes, as well as development, have brought to the fore the problem of cultural changes and the establishment of new identities through the interaction of past values and present existential difficulties of cultures affected by transformation.

Different interpretations of culture give rise to different understanding of cultural change, implying both development and transformation. Any major change, however, should be viewed in the context of the relationship between culture and economy, which, through their inherent differences and consequent relations, influences the character of the rapid developmental and transitional changes. In this respect, the choice of a culture, the establishment and
development of cultural identities and of the cultural communication context, defines also the character of development and the nature of transformation.

2.4 INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF ASIA

This section of the report examines the situation of Indigenous Peoples in the whole of South and South East Asia with a focus on four countries: India, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. Within this region, the politically marginal and ethnically distinct peoples who inhabit the forests of the Asia-Pacific are in a phase of rapid social change, characterised by accelerating deforestation, dispossession of their lands and rapid integration into the market (Lim & Gomes, 1990).

Their common experience of cultural impoverishment, has brought many of these peoples to realise that despite their diversity and differences they all share a common struggle against the process of development. In the face of powerful outside interests — outside their villages and outside the region — which seek to profit from their forests and their internal political divisions, many of these peoples are in a phase of rapid reorganisation, linking up to create new institutions — local associations, national organisations and international networks — through which they can better project their demands and influence decisions that affect them (Lim & Gomes, 1990).