Caritas Australia is the Catholic Agency for International Aid and Development. We work to alleviate poverty in more than 30 countries with people in marginalised communities, regardless of their race, political beliefs, gender or religion. As a member of Caritas Internationalis – a confederation of 165 Caritas agencies – Caritas Australia is recognised for:

- our rapid response, technical expertise and effective coordination in emergency programming and disaster preparedness;
- our wide-ranging, sustainable, long-term community development programs; and
- our ongoing work in educating and engaging the Australian public in advocacy and support for social justice.

2012 marks the 40th anniversary of Caritas Australia’s First Australians Program. Whilst the majority of our work extends beyond Australia’s shores, we acknowledge that as an Australian agency, we must also commit to address poverty and injustice at home. As such, we are committed to walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the pursuit of a more just world.

When we travel - domestically or internationally - we acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we gather, and show respect and honour to their elders - past, present and future.

Acknowledgements

Caritas Australia would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of key individuals and organisations in preparing this report, including Louise Campbell, Elsie Heiss, Peter Sabatino, Debra Vermeer, Jason Gallate, Gabrielle Mundine, the Djilpin Arts Aboriginal Corporation, The Centre for Research and Popular Education (CINEP) in Bolivia, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC), Down to Earth (DTE) in Indonesia, Caritas Bangladesh, Les Malezer and the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, and the Centre for Indigenous Education and Research (CIER) at the Australian Catholic University (ACU).

Front cover image: Richard Wainwright.

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Suggested citation: Caritas Australia, Walk As One: The Path to Justice, Caritas Australia, Sydney 2012.

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Available online at: www.caritas.org.au/walkasone
CONNECTING WITH OUR WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
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GLOBALLY, indigenous people make up approximately 5% of the population, yet constitute up to 15% of the world’s poor.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the official international aid and development agency of the Catholic Church, Caritas Australia respects and works to advance the inherent rights, dignity and cultures of all peoples. Guided by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, we are committed to working with the poorest of the poor throughout the world.

2012 marks the 40th anniversary of Caritas Australia’s First Australians Program. Over the past four decades we have seen great advances in the recognition of the inherent human rights of our nation’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. And yet, even today, in one of the richest countries in the world, there continues to be a huge disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in many key measures of health and wellbeing, such as literacy, employment, impoverishment, diabetes and infant mortality rates.

Similar clusters of problems arise far too commonly in Indigenous Populations around the globe; indeed these issues appear to be systemic within many different Indigenous communities. In consultation with our partners, our work with Indigenous Peoples in Australia, Indonesia, Bolivia, the Philippines, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and other regions gives us a strong mandate to reflect on the current situation of the world’s Indigenous Peoples. Many of these partners stories are captured within this report; it is our lived experience of these that inspires us to preserve and maintain the richness of thought, community, culture and spirituality which is in many ways unique to Indigenous Peoples, and from which the rest of the world could clearly benefit.

We know that encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities around the world are not mutually beneficial. In many instances, they lack fundamental parameters, such as respect for human dignity and the principle of subsidiarity, which are necessary to enable the positive transformation of all people.

Globally, Indigenous Peoples – numbering over 370 million – make up approximately five percent of the population, yet constitute up to 15 percent of the world’s poor. Indigenous Peoples also account for around 300 million, or more than one-third of the world’s extremely poor rural population. Across the globe, Indigenous Peoples continue to be over-represented among communities facing systemic discrimination and social, political and economic exclusion. Inadequate political representation and unrecognised rights to land and natural resources are common globally.

The contribution of Indigenous Peoples to the global community is indispensable, yet continues to be greatly undervalued. The Catholic Church and Caritas Australia acknowledge that Indigenous Peoples are custodians of some of the world’s most biologically diverse territories, are responsible for a great deal of the world’s cultural and linguistic diversity, and that their traditional knowledge is an invaluable resource in many sectors, such as health and agriculture.
We make our own the words of Pope John Paul II during his historic visit to Alice Springs in 1986 where he spoke to a gathering of Aboriginal Australians: “... what has been done cannot be undone. But what can now be done to remedy the deeds of yesterday must not be put off till tomorrow.” Whilst we acknowledge some recent positive initiatives taken by Australian governments and the private sector, it is important that we continue to strive for policies and practices that will meet the critical and ever dynamic challenges facing Indigenous communities throughout the world.

We call on governments and organisations of all persuasion to implement policies that better serve Indigenous Peoples overseas and in Australia, who are currently struggling with the impacts of discrimination and institutional marginalisation.

Such policies would include:

- Increasing the effectiveness of Australia’s overseas aid program as it pertains to Indigenous Peoples, including greater support for measures which empower communities to develop their own priorities and strategies for development.

- Ensuring compliance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ratification of International Labour Organisation Convention 169 on the rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, including established mechanisms for the practical implementation and enforcement of these instruments in both international and domestic spheres.

- Initiation of constructive dialogue in the international arena, proactively encouraging positive policy change and prioritisation of Indigenous Peoples within diplomatic and commercial discourse.

Grace compels us to overcome the injustices which others neglect, and to make a real difference despite how intractable and vast inequalities appear to be. The massive scope and complexity of uniting the world to act on poverty can often appear incompatible with a focus on local participation and empowerment of Indigenous Peoples, but as the world searches for ways to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and combat extreme poverty, it is critical that Indigenous Peoples are both considered and included.

Every day, trillions of dollars are lost in global markets in what appears to be the blink of an eye. The vanishing nature of this wealth is almost illusionary, yet it demands the attention of much of the developed world. Money, designed as the ultimate transferable commodity, is easy to understand, however the assets that Indigenous communities bring to the global community are immeasurable and once gone, are lost forever.

So while the richness of what Indigenous Peoples have to offer the world is clear, the challenge for us as local and global communities remains: will we listen and will we walk the path to justice together as one?
INTRODUCTION

For decades, Indigenous Peoples have advocated for the rights and recognition of their communities. The international adoption of the landmark United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples¹ in 2007 is testament to their collective success at making their voices heard.

This report attempts to emphasise the experiences of communities which Caritas Australia works with, highlighting some common themes regarding the Indigenous experience of poverty and injustice, and promoting progressive solutions. It also examines the global development agenda and the Millennium Development Goals, with particular reference to the extent that they are relevant to the world views and experiences of Indigenous Peoples.

This report aims to amplify the voices of Indigenous Peoples and promote a deeper affinity with, and understanding of, the experiences of Indigenous Peoples around the world. This should inform an improved policy context within which governments and other interested parties can act.

2012 marks the 40th anniversary of Caritas’ First Australians Program. Whilst the majority of our work extends beyond Australia’s shores we acknowledge that, as an Australian agency, we must also commit to address issues of poverty and injustice at home. As such, we undertake to walk alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia, wherever their Country and whatever their faith or spiritual background.
Our work with Indigenous Peoples also extends beyond Australia, to the communities we partner with in Latin America, Asia, the Pacific and Africa. The challenges Indigenous Peoples struggle with share many commonalities. Often violent colonial histories have destroyed community networks and left legacies of extensive psychological trauma. A clash of world views with coloniser cultures has led to the destruction of traditional systems of law, justice and spirituality – the scars of which can still be seen today.

Language poses many barriers to educational systems and public institutions. Indigenous populations are commonly under-represented in employment and literacy rates. Inadequate political representation and unrecognised rights to land and natural resources are common themes globally.

There are commonalities in terms of challenges faced, but also in the richness and experience that can be gained from and shared between these Peoples as they take initiative from, and inspire one another. If we are to pursue a more just and harmonious world, then we must seek to learn from the past and be honest about the mistakes that we have previously made, including those made by the Catholic Church. It is also clear that any path forward must be taken in a spirit of true consultation, solidarity and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

In the contemporary world, Indigenous communities are often talked about in a traditional context or past tense; relegated to a chapter of history and not relevant to modern-day society. They are also often talked about statistically – as if they are not real people, with inherent human dignity, but rather as only numbers reflected in health systems or school attendance rates.

The reality, in contrast, is that Indigenous Peoples exist today in dynamic communities with rich cultural traditions and complex social systems.

As such, this report will not focus on these statistical representations – although many are referenced to validate the points being made. The presentation of statistics, no matter how dire, is not enough – meaningful action must follow. Instead, this report attempts to elucidate the underlying causes for the existence of extreme poverty in Indigenous communities. Further, it examines how we can build connections, hear their voices, and accompany them to devise and implement solutions in ways that empower their communities.
DEFINING ‘INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’

Caritas Australia acknowledges that there is no universally accepted definition of ‘Indigenous Peoples’; this reflects the impossibility of homogenising a huge diversity of Nations, communities and groups, each in different social and political contexts, into one all-encompassing identifier. Nonetheless, a working construct is necessary. It is pragmatically important, in order to stand with these Peoples in recognising and promoting their rights, to be able to identify them.

In line with the United Nations, this report does not adopt a strict definition, but rather uses the term ‘Indigenous Peoples’ to refer to communities which share a number of common characteristics, such as:

- self-identification and acceptance at individual and community levels;
- historical continuity with pre-colonial societies;
- strong links to territories and natural resources; and
- distinct social, spiritual, political, legal or economic systems.

Indigenous Peoples may form non-dominant sectors of society, but retain a determination to preserve and transmit their ancestral traditions and identity to future generations.

Significantly, Caritas Australia has adopted the pluralised term ‘Peoples’ throughout this report, in order to acknowledge the diversity and uniqueness of the Indigenous communities to which we refer. We also acknowledge the inadequacy of the term ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ in recognising the diversity of nation groups and clans across Australia; each linguistically, culturally and spiritually distinct.
In considering Integral Human Development as it pertains to Indigenous Peoples, Catholic Social Teaching calls us to focus on some key values. These include:

**The Dignity of the Human Person**
Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore has inherent dignity. Poverty, hunger, oppression and injustice make it impossible to live a life commensurate with this dignity. Caritas Australia works with communities in ways that respect, enhance and build their human dignity.

**The Common Good**
The individual does not have rights at the expense of others, but nor are individual rights to be subordinated to the needs of the group. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: “The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more we effectively love them.”

**Subsidiarity**
All people have a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Subsidiarity requires that decision-making occur at the lowest level possible, by the people most affected by the decisions. This is of great importance to Indigenous communities, who have often had decisions affecting their lives and communities enforced upon them by states and government authorities. Caritas Australia works with local communities to support, promote and develop their capacity in making decisions about their own lives.


**CST CONTINUED...**

*Solidarity*
We are one human family regardless of ethnic, cultural, religious or political difference. And, more importantly, this understanding must be a lived one. We are all called by this principle to take the parable of the Good Samaritan to heart [Luke 10:25-37], and to express this understanding in how we live and interact with others.

*Preferential Option for the Poor*
Poverty, in its various forms and with its various effects is fundamentally unjust. Jesus taught that God asks each of us what we are doing to help the poor and needy: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). We are called to take up the cause of the poor as our own, putting ourselves alongside them. Through our words, prayers and deeds, we must show solidarity with, and compassion for them, and always keep their needs at the forefront of our mind.

*Participation*
Everyone has a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. Everyone has the right to participate in those institutions necessary for human fulfilment, such as work, education and political process.

The principles of Catholic Social Teaching, clearly express the understanding that the Church and the global community cannot be whole unless and until all people, including its First Peoples, have a place at a common table. We are all poorer for their exclusion and oppression.

Caritas Australia works with Indigenous communities in Australia and around the world, seeking not only to provide practical support and empowerment, but also to advocate publicly and raise awareness in order to challenge and alter the structures which currently trap Indigenous communities in poverty.

We recall, and make our own, the words Pope John Paul II said when he made his historic visit to Alice Springs in 1986 and spoke to a gathering of Aboriginal people: “... what has been done cannot be undone. But what can now be done to remedy the deeds of yesterday must not be put off till tomorrow.”

Christ said that all the law, in essence, hangs on only two commandments – to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Catholic Social Teaching recognises that our neighbour is the whole of humanity. Historically, we have not loved Indigenous Peoples as ourselves; not in the fully empowering, entirely respecting and abundantly empathic way that Christ intended. However, now as always, we have the opportunity to do so – not only as individuals, but also as local communities, national governments and the united global community – together as one.
And, while the challenges facing Indigenous Peoples may seem daunting and overwhelming, we can take strength in our ability to confront and overcome these challenges from the aforementioned address by Pope John Paul II:

“Take heart from the fact that many of your languages are still spoken and that you still possess your ancient culture. You have kept your sense of brotherhood. If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bush-fire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burned; but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn. The time for this rebirth is now!”

In this era of globalisation, the Dayak people whom we know as a people appreciative and respectful to other groups or ethnicities and also whom we know as honest and quick to trust others they meet, currently live as if ‘at the cross-roads’. On one hand it’s impossible for them to fully maintain their traditional lifestyle, while on the other hand the alternative being offered is at odds with their culture.

Dayak people are traditionally dependent on the forests, land and rivers. When these are destroyed to build a ‘new and better lifestyle’, they feel alienated from their culture and become outsiders. This is sad. The Dayaks must adjust their way of life in the 21st century, but this shouldn’t mean losing all their inheritance and dignity like so many other Indigenous groups in Indonesia. This remains a challenge and, if not addressed, the Dayaks will soon fade into memory in Indonesia.

Therefore, we fully support and are thankful to Caritas Australia who have enthusiastically and consistently supported Indigenous people in Indonesia, including the Dayak people of Kalimantan (Borneo), in upholding their rights and dignity. The Dayaks are some of ‘the poor’ who must be defended and empowered by the Church, as part of our ‘Preferential option for the poor’.

June 2012

Mgr Agustinus Agus
Bishop of Sintang Diocese
Sintang, Indonesia

Statement translated from Bahasa Indonesia by Terry Russell, Caritas Australia’s Indonesia Partnerships Coordinator
Indigenous Peoples’ contribution to the global community should not be undervalued; they are custodians of some of the world’s most biologically diverse territories, and are responsible for a great deal of the world’s cultural and linguistic diversity.
There are more than 370 million Indigenous Peoples living in some 90 countries around the world today. Their contribution to the global community should not be undervalued; they are custodians of some of the world’s most biologically diverse territories, and are responsible for a great deal of the world’s cultural and linguistic diversity. Their traditional knowledge in a variety of diverse sectors, from health to agriculture, is an invaluable resource and contributes significantly to modern societies.10

Whilst their contribution to the human family is clear, so too is their marginalisation and disadvantage. Whilst they make up roughly five percent of the global population, Indigenous Peoples also constitute up to 15 percent of the world’s poor, and more than one third of the world’s 900 million extremely poor rural population.11 The majority are living within Australia’s own region, the Asia-Pacific.12

Indigenous Peoples continue to suffer discrimination, marginalization, extreme poverty and conflict. Some are being dispossessed of their traditional lands as their livelihoods are being undermined. Meanwhile, their belief systems, cultures, languages and ways of life continue to be threatened, sometimes even by extinction.

- State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples13

The poverty and marginalisation of Indigenous Peoples is not limited to developing countries. In developed countries, like Australia and Canada, Indigenous Peoples experience consistently lower levels of well-being than the non-

Indigenous population on most indicators, including health, literacy rates and employment opportunities.

1. Among the H’mong people of Vietnam, 83 percent of men and 97 percent of women are illiterate.14
2. In the Pacific, diabetes is present in 44 percent of the Torres Strait Islanders of Australia.15
3. Throughout Latin America, child mortality is still 70 percent higher amongst Indigenous children.16
4. Suicide rates amongst Inuit are the highest in Canada at eleven times the national average.17
5. Life expectancy is comprehensively lower in Indigenous Populations than in the populations that surround or border them.18

A similar cluster of problems exists in Indigenous populations around the globe including: low literacy rates, low employment, impoverishment, high suicide rates, and poor comparative health, such as lower life expectancy and higher infant mortality rates. Obviously, such issues are causally interrelated and indeed exist in many communities around the world, but they also appear to be systemic within many different Indigenous communities.

In consultation with our partners, Caritas Australia’s work in Indonesia, Bolivia, the Philippines, Australia, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and other areas in the Asia Pacific region often targets a specific pressing issue or cluster of issues. However, too often these other challenges are also prevalent within the Indigenous communities we are working with, presenting significant barriers to the holistic development of those we serve.
**CARITAS AUSTRALIA’S WORK: AN OVERVIEW**

Caritas Australia is committed to working with Indigenous Peoples across the world. Some of our programs are wholly targeted at Indigenous communities, whilst others target Indigenous communities specifically within much larger integrated community development programs.

This map illustrates some representative examples of the many projects in the field that Caritas Australia is engaged with around the world.

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<tr>
<th>1. INDONESIA</th>
<th>2. NEPAL</th>
<th>3. BANGLADESH</th>
<th>4. BURMA/MYANMAR</th>
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<td>The Justice and Peace Commission of the Indonesian Catholic Bishops Conference (KWI) has been active in helping the Indigenous Peoples of Papua and Kalimantan to voice and uphold their fundamental rights, and to save their forest from exploitative forest management practices.</td>
<td>Caritas Australia is assisting the Bote ethnic group in Nepal to read, write and to learn sustainable crop farming methods through an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) project.</td>
<td>Caritas Australia supports Indigenous (Adivasi) communities in the Dinajpur region of northern Bangladesh to protect their land from ‘land grabbers’ and increase their access to education and employment opportunities.</td>
<td>In Myanmar, through our local partner Karuna Kengtung Social Services, Caritas Australia is helping to implement a project aimed at saving the indigenous language of the Akha Indigenous minority group.</td>
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<th>5. BOLIVIA</th>
<th>6. INDIA</th>
<th>7. AUSTRALIA</th>
<th>8. PHILIPPINES</th>
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<td>Indigenous groups involved with Caritas Australia’s Partner, the Centre for Research and Popular Education Ethno Eco Tourism program include the Yuracaré and Yuqui Peoples in the Bolivian Amazon. These communities are now creating more sustainable forms of income, preserving their traditional culture and defending their natural resources.</td>
<td>Caritas Australia is empowering local Indigenous communities including the Santal, Orons, Mundas, Hos and Kharias in Jharkhand, India to access employment opportunities and protect their rights to land and culture.</td>
<td>In the Central Australian desert country, Caritas Australia, through our partner, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council, supports the Tjanpi Desert Weavers program. More than 300 weavers from 28 communities are able to maintain their desert weaving culture and benefit from culturally appropriate employment opportunities.</td>
<td>In the Camarines Norte Province of the Philippines, Caritas Australia is working with local partner SPACFI (Caritas Daet) to strengthen the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of the local Kabihug people.</td>
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THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS
AN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PERSPECTIVE

“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE THE RIGHT TO BENEFIT FROM THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) AND FROM OTHER GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS CONTAINED IN THE MILLENNIUM DECLARATION TO THE SAME EXTENT AS ALL OTHERS”- RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES, NEW YORK, 2005

Indigenous Peoples, to a large extent, comprise the poorest and most marginalised communities in the global community, and are often the most difficult to reach due to their geographic or social isolation. It is clear that to achieve the MDGs, an increased focus specific to the needs of Indigenous communities is required.

However, reviews of the MDGs from approximately 40 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific demonstrate that, with very few exceptions, Indigenous Peoples’ input has not been incorporated in national monitoring and reporting. Not surprisingly, the reviews showed an attendant lack of mechanisms to ensure Indigenous Peoples’ input into poverty alleviation policies and programs, which is a critical component of Caritas Australia’s programmatic approach.

Concomitantly, the data that pertains to Indigenous Peoples has often not been disaggregated from the statistics that represent National populations as a whole. Therefore the specific situation of Indigenous Peoples is often not known or reported. The data which does exist, however, points to a disturbing trend.

Most MDG indicators for indigenous people and ethnic minorities are worse than population averages. This is true for under five mortality; adult literacy; school enrolment, completion, and achievement; gender equity; water deprivation; child nutrition; and, especially, poverty reduction. Most countries in Latin America with sizable indigenous populations, for example, show almost no poverty reduction for those groups – Global Monitoring Report 2011

As mentioned previously, these problems are not limited to the developing world. Australia, one of the wealthiest nations per capita globally, also has one of the largest discrepancies on well-being measures between its Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples.

In the last decade, Indigenous Peoples have highlighted the urgent need for States to redefine the MDGs and their pathways to implementation to incorporate the perspectives, experiences and concerns of Indigenous communities. They have also asserted their right to define what constitutes such paradigms as ‘poverty’ and ‘development’ as they impact on their communities, and to be fully and effectively involved in the implementation of the goals. Such initiatives, if implemented, would exemplify the Catholic Social Teaching principles of subsidiarity and participation.
As the world now begins to look beyond the MDG deadline of 2015, Caritas Australia advocates that the Federal Government of Australia and those overseas act in accordance with the expressed will of Indigenous Peoples, by supporting and implementing political and legislative mechanisms by which they can participate in the implementation, analysis and evaluation of the MDGs and poverty reduction strategies.

Indigenous Peoples have the right to benefit from the Millennium Development Goals and from other goals and aspirations contained in the Millennium Declaration to the same extent as all others.
Achieving Indigenous justice requires an integrated and cross-sectoral approach. This is important because a large array of complex factors can, and have, prevented the complete well-being of Indigenous Peoples in both colonial and post-colonial times.

Working together provides better opportunities and resources to be able to deal with the comprehensive and interrelated nature of these causal factors. Similarly, accurately identifying and understanding the separate issues that constitute these factors helps to coordinate Indigenous Peoples, governments, organisations and individuals to tackle them in a more comprehensive way.

Regardless of the issue or sector, however, Caritas Australia’s on the ground experience reveals that the most successful and sustainable approaches are those which put the aspirations of Indigenous communities themselves as the central determining factor, empowering them to drive changes at all phases of project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
“THE CHURCH WILL SUPPORT THE CAUSE OF ALL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES WHO SEEK A JUST AND EQUITABLE RECOGNITION OF THEIR IDENTITY AND THEIR RIGHTS, AND... [EXpresses] SUPPORT FOR THE ASPIRATIONS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE FOR A JUST SOLUTION TO THE COMPLEX QUESTION OF THE ALIENATION OF THEIR LANDS” — POPE JOHN PAUL II

One of the key defining factors of Indigenous Peoples is their spiritual, cultural, social and economic connection with their lands and the common tradition of collective rights to land. To most Indigenous Peoples, their territory has a sacred or spiritual meaning which reaches far beyond a productive and economic valuation or understanding of the land. This relationship to the land contrasts markedly with globally dominant models of individual land ownership, privatisation and development. The inevitable clash between these two understandings of land use and ownership rights around the world frequently leads to dispute and even conflict.

For centuries, the machinations of colonisation and imperialism resulted in Indigenous Peoples being dispossessed of their lands either by force or by treaty. In more modern times, the encroachment of mining, logging, plantations, oil and gas extraction and other similar industries onto Indigenous traditional lands is widespread and increasing. This results not only in confrontation and dispossession of lands, but also, in many cases, environmental degradation. These industries often have the tacit or explicit backing of national governments because of the States’ economic imperatives. This degradation is harmful to all local communities, but especially for Indigenous People whose connection, both economic and cultural, to the land and local environment is so intrinsic to their life and well-being.

Globally, the Church has witnessed widespread dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their traditional lands. In Papua and Kalimantan, Indonesia, this struggle has centred on the acquisition of traditional lands for forestry, transmigration (state-sponsored resettlement schemes), commercial palm oil plantations, as well as mining, oil and gas projects.

AMPLIFYING THE VOICE OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Caritas Australia through our partner, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Indonesian Catholic Bishops Conference (KWI) have been active in helping the Indigenous Peoples of Papua and Kalimantan to voice and uphold their rights and to protect their forests from exploitative land grabbing practises.

This has been achieved through the establishment in 2010 of the Forum for Justice and Peace in Papua-Kalimantan. A second Forum with the theme “Restore the Basic Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Papua and Kalimantan” was held in October 2011. These fora sought to raise awareness of the Indigenous Peoples of Papua and Kalimantan to strive for their rights, seek concrete support at national and international levels, and to change the policies of the
Indonesian Government. The forum in 2010 resulted in presentations that highlighted the issues and suggested areas for improvement to key government offices; while the 2011 Forum led to a call for cooperation with the national organisations of other religions.

Some key recommendations from the 2011 forum included:

- reclaiming and rehabilitating ex-mining areas in line with international environmental and human rights standards;
- stopping the expansion of new land clearing efforts which are intended for exploitation;
- evaluating resource management permits already issued by the government, especially in the conflict areas; and
- initiating respectful dialogues between local Indigenous communities, businessmen and government to ensure the law is enforced and that conflict resolution mechanisms can be implemented and mutually beneficial agreements reached.

They also specifically recommended that a judicial review be held on the Law of Forestry No. 41 (1999), which at present does not take into consideration the rights of Indigenous communities.

By empowering the Indigenous communities of Papua and Kalimantan to come together and advocate effectively on these issues, Caritas Australia and our Indonesian partners are helping to develop and consolidate knowledge and skills which will have long-term benefits for these Indigenous communities and territories.
CULTURAL RIGHTS AND HERITAGE

“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ARE CUSTODIANS OF SOME OF THE MOST BIOLOGICALLY DIVERSE TERRITORIES IN THE WORLD. THEY ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR A GREAT DEAL OF THE WORLD’S LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY, AND THEIR TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE HAS BEEN AND CONTINUES TO BE AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE THAT BENEFITS ALL OF MANKIND. YET... THEIR BELIEF SYSTEMS, CULTURES, LANGUAGES AND WAYS OF LIFE CONTINUE TO BE THREATENED, SOMETIMES EVEN BY EXTINCTION” - MR. SHA ZUKANG, UN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS27

Indigenous Peoples’ right to retain and develop their social, economic, cultural and political institutions is fundamental under international human rights law.28 The spiritual, social, economic and environmental beliefs, practices and customs of Indigenous Peoples often stretch back tens of thousands of years. They bring an irreplaceable cultural richness, diversity and depth to the world community, and yet, these cultures are under threat.

For example, although it is estimated that Indigenous Peoples make up approximately six percent of the global population, they speak an overwhelming majority of the world’s estimated 7,000 languages.29 Tragically though, it is estimated that between 50 to 90 percent of these languages, mostly those spoken by Indigenous Peoples, will be extinct within the next century.30

The United Nations has identified that Indigenous cultures face the dual and somewhat contradictory threats of discrimination and commodification:

“On the one hand, Indigenous Peoples continue to face racism and discrimination that sees them as inferior to non-Indigenous communities and their culture as a hindrance to their development. On the other hand, Indigenous Peoples are increasingly recognized for their unique relationship with their environment, their traditional knowledge and their spirituality, leading to a commodification of their culture which is frequently out of their control, providing them no benefits, and often a great deal of harm”.31

History shows that whether by direct colonisation, economic domination or discrimination, Indigenous Peoples have largely been excluded from the political and decision making processes of the nations in which they live. This domination and exclusion has led to their cultures being viewed as “inferior, primitive, irrelevant, something to be eradicated or transformed”.32 It is for such reasons, together with the displacement and dispossession related to the modern globalised economy, that many Indigenous cultures are today in danger of extinction.
Unjust economic policies are especially damaging to Indigenous Peoples, young nations and their traditional cultures... and it is the Church’s task to help Indigenous cultures preserve their identity and maintain their traditions - Pope John Paul II

Faced with the possibility of losing these cultures, Indigenous communities, non-government organisations, and many national governmental bodies are working hard to preserve them, knowing that this will preserve the well-being and flourishing of Indigenous Peoples.

In the Central Australian desert country, Caritas Australia, through our partner, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council, supports more than 300 weavers from 28 communities to maintain the Aboriginal desert weaving culture and create culturally appropriate employment opportunities that provide sustainable incomes.

For the communities of the central and western desert region, who have faced dislocation, poverty, and threats to their culture since European settlement, weaving is a culturally appropriate activity that helps to sustain generational continuity. Weaving stimulates group trips to country to collect the grasses, visit cultural sites, perform cultural song and dance (inma), and collect bush tucker and medicine.

The Tjanpi Desert Weavers project was established in 1995, following an expressed desire to increase the earning capacity of women living on the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands. The project’s success in engaging and strengthening communities is largely due to its capacity to provide a decision-making process which is steered by the members themselves. The interrelation of culture, employment, self-esteem and well-being is also a defining feature of the Tjanpi Desert Weavers project.

According to its mission, “Tjanpi is about family and community – about walyta.”

This link between cultural preservation and sustainable employment generation also underpins the work of Caritas Australia in Bolivia.

Bolivia is the poorest country in South America with 60 percent of the country’s 10 million people living below the national poverty line. It is estimated that there are 36 different local Indigenous Peoples, who together make up 62 percent of the national population, and the majority of people living in extreme poverty.
Indigenous groups involved with Caritas Australia’s Partner, the Centre for Research and Popular Education (CINEP)’s Ethno Eco Tourism programs include the Yuracaré and Yuqui Peoples in the Amazon sub basin, in the Department of Cochabamba.

Caritas Australia and CINEP support the communities’ tourism enterprises by providing tourism training services and funding construction materials. The project also includes a Tourism Information Centre, accommodation, guides, traditional crafts and medicines, and engagement with daily activities such as fruit picking, fishing and chocolate making. These groups have identified that by participating in CINEP’s programs, they can empower their communities to advance their families, preserve their traditional culture and defend their natural resources, including land, forests and river systems.

“In this journey our dreams are shared with CINEP and Caritas Australia – that makes us feel it is possible to move forward and build our future. Thanks to the efforts of each family we are slowly gaining our rights – we are achieving our empowerment as a people” - Rosa Chao, Coordinator Yuqui-Yuracaré Indigenous communities, Cochabamba, Bolivia.
“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION. BY VIRTUE OF THAT RIGHT THEY FREELY DETERMINE THEIR POLITICAL STATUS AND FREELY PURSUE THEIR ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT.” UN DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, ARTICLE 3

The right to political recognition and self-determination for Indigenous Peoples is fundamentally about their right to be a part of the decision-making processes which affect their lives and their development. In this regard the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) echoes the Catholic Social Teaching principle of subsidiarity.

Historically, many Indigenous Peoples around the world have been excluded from such decision-making processes and thus prevented from achieving self-determination. In Australia, Indigenous Peoples were not even counted in the national census until a referendum in 1967.\(^37\)

Another referendum is currently being planned by the Australian Government, which will seek to explicitly recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Constitution. At the same time, many Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) people believe that the Federal Government’s recent interventions in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory are a threat to self-determination.\(^38\)

In particular, there has been much criticism of the way in which consultations have been conducted. These processes often ignored Indigenous communities’ own leadership and decision-making structures.\(^38\)

Across the globe, the ability of Indigenous populations to receive effective political recognition, to engage in decision-making processes which affect their lives and consequently to achieve self-determination is severely constrained; especially in areas where they are not economically, socially and politically dominant.

CHANGE IS HAPPENING

While many Indigenous Peoples have still not achieved self-determination, there is a growing move, both from Indigenous communities themselves and governments, to work towards this end. Part of this drive for change comes from the UNDRIP which was adopted in September 2007. The Declaration is the most recent and comprehensive addition to international human rights principles concerning the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous Peoples and nation states.

The Indigenous communities and governments of many nations are now focusing on implementation of the Declaration to ensure that the human rights of Indigenous Peoples are recognised and secured. Whilst Australia was initially one of only four countries globally to vote against the Declaration, in 2009 the Government changed its position and announced its formal support for the Declaration and its implementation.\(^39\)
Bolivia was the first nation to ratify and implement the Declaration’s 46 articles into domestic law in November 2007. The efforts of the first Indigenous Bolivian President, Mr Juan Evo Morales, in promoting Indigenous rights are considered to be an important factor in Bolivia’s early adoption of the Declaration into domestic law. Mr Morales’ election to office in December 2005 and sweeping legislative changes promoting Indigenous rights created an environment where Indigenous groups felt empowered to act for social change. Indigenous groups had a high level of participation in constitutional reforms. Legal reforms included constitutional recognition of the fundamental right of all Bolivians to food and water.

In recent years, however, the dissatisfaction of Indigenous communities in Bolivia has grown in response to actions undertaken by the Morales Government. In 2011 and 2012, Caritas Australia’s Bolivian partners and communities they work with have raised urgent concerns regarding large scale construction projects occurring on Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) National Park and Indigenous territories, in central Bolivia. They fear these projects will cause widespread displacement for their communities, destroying both their land and way of life.

This highlights the reality that constitutional reform alone is not sufficient. Indigenous Peoples must continue to be empowered and supported on the ground to engage meaningfully in decisions which affect them, and their leadership structures must be acknowledged and respected. Domestic and international advocacy is critical in bringing this about.

“I believe that a worldwide movement for the protection of Indigenous rights is something that has to be achieved”
Rosa Chao, Coordinator Yuqui-Yuracaré Indigenous communities, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Many Indigenous bodies and institutions do have their own decision-making processes which help facilitate their participation in public affairs in ways that are philosophically and culturally consistent with their understanding of governance and which express a degree of Indigenous self-determination and autonomy. A number of successful practices can be seen in various countries. In the United States, many American Indian Nations retain residual sovereignty over territories, albeit often over areas that are far smaller than the areas controlled by them historically. In practice this allows some American Indian Nations to function under their own legal systems, although Congress can still legislate to override American Indian law.

Globally, there are also examples of Indigenous parliaments and organisations that enable Indigenous Peoples to influence decision-making in matters that potentially concern them. Efforts are being made to create greater Indigenous representation in national parliaments and to create bodies for the direct participation of Indigenous Peoples in governance. In Australia, the establishment of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples aims to provide a national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. It has the potential to play an important role as a vehicle for community level input into formal state governance structures in the interests of the recognition of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
“Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right” - United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2008

All people have fundamental human rights to life and health. Unfortunately, we know that where poverty exists, people do not always enjoy these fundamental rights. This is particularly so for Indigenous Peoples. While health statistics for Indigenous populations are generally inadequate, it is clear from what does exist that Indigenous Peoples generally have a lower life expectancy, a higher suicide rate, and are in worse health than the general population.47

**DIABETES**
In some regions of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have a diabetes prevalence rate as high as 26 percent, which is six-times higher than in the general population.48

**LIVING CONDITIONS**
In Rwandan Twa households, the prevalence of poor sanitation and lack of safe, potable water are respectively seven-times and two-times higher than for the national population.49

**SUICIDE**
Among Inuit youth in Canada, suicide rates are among the highest in the world, at eleven-times the national average.50

**REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**
For ethnic minorities in Vietnam, more than 60 percent of childbirths take place without prenatal care compared to 30 percent for the Kinh population, Vietnam’s ethnic majority.

**INFANT MORTALITY**
Average infant mortality among Indigenous children in Panama is over three-times higher than that of the overall population (60-85 deaths per 1000 live births versus the national average of 17.6).51
Whilst these challenges exist, we also know that Indigenous communities have much to offer the health sector internationally. With an estimated three quarters of plant based pharmaceuticals discovered through knowledge exchange with traditional healers\textsuperscript{52}, the impetus for preserving Indigenous languages and systems of knowledge is clear.

**TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

Caritas Australia’s partner, the Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation (WDNWPT), which means ‘Making all our families well’, is a small community-based Aboriginal Health Service located in Alice Springs, Australia. WDNWPT began in 2000. Their primary aim is to improve life for people with End Stage Renal Failure, who have been forced to move away from their country to access treatment in Alice Springs.

The prediction is that dialysis patient numbers in Alice Springs will double by 2020. WDNWPT acknowledges this reality and offers a way for people to live with dignity while the larger problem continues to be addressed through advocacy and the practical action to make dialysis at home a real option.

Specific WDNWPT Projects such as Nganampa Kurrunpa Wanka Kanyintjaku Tjutalu – keeping our spirit alive and strong – encourage health education, respite for dialysis patients and their families, and time to reflect on the positive contributions Elders and families make to the community. Bush medicine workshops are conducted where plants are collected and balms made which relieve headaches and treat dry, itchy skin. These workshops empower and build capacity within the community, as well as provide training and employment opportunities, particularly for young women.\textsuperscript{53}

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

The life expectancy of Indigenous Australians is 11.5 years lower for males and 9.7 years lower for females compared with other Australians.\textsuperscript{54} While most Australian women can expect to live to an average age of 82.6 years, Indigenous women can expect to live to only 72.9 years and the life expectancy of Indigenous men is lower still at 67.2 years.\textsuperscript{55} Although these figures are extremely difficult to estimate, for example Indigenous life expectancy varies widely between States and Territories, it is clear that there is a large and unacceptable gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
CLOSING THE GAP IN AUSTRALIA

In 2005, the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission brought down its Social Justice Report which called for governments of Australia to commit to achieving equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the areas of health and life expectancy within 25 years. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, has since committed to ‘closing the gap’ in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and to be accountable for reaching certain targets within a specific timeframe.

The Closing the Gap strategy aims to reduce Indigenous disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement and employment outcomes. In addition, the Australian Government has established The National Indigenous Health Equality Council to address the gap in health outcomes by bringing together representatives from government, Indigenous and mainstream health sectors. Importantly, they have also committed to providing an annual progress report to Parliament in an attempt to improve accountability and transparency.

Whilst it is too early to evaluate the full effectiveness of the Closing the Gap strategy, some progress has been made. For example, in her statement to Parliament in February 2012, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard highlighted the improved quality and consistency of national data regarding particular antenatal healthcare and education outcomes.56

CLOSING THE GAP IN BANGLADESH

As part of an Integrated Community Development project established in 1999 in Dinajpur, Northern Bangladesh, Caritas Australia is working in partnership with disadvantaged ethnic Adivasi communities to improve their healthcare and nutrition. Since the project began, tens of thousands of community members have participated in basic training on health and environmental issues, including drinking safe water, use of sanitary latrines, personal hygiene and cleanliness, and health during pregnancy. This training, performed with an acute awareness of local culture and linguistic needs, has significantly decreased the rate of maternal mortality and morbidity within the Adivasi communities accessing the program.
Collection and Adequacy of Data

“There is an urgent need for research to improve the availability and reliability of data on human development among Indigenous groups—and to determine what kinds of programs have improved their welfare and in what contexts.” The World Bank, Global Monitoring Report 2011

The World Bank has identified Indigenous Peoples as the poorest of the poor. But how do we quantify that when the parameters used to measure poverty differ? In its Indigenous Peoples’ Perspective of the MDGs, the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) explains that:

“While for States and under MDG 1, extreme poverty encompasses individuals whose income is less than a dollar per day; for Indigenous Peoples, the notion of poverty (huaccha) is linked to the lack of land to work on, the loss of culturally appropriate quality food, a linguistic loss which undermines further knowledge development, and the exclusion from decision-making processes. In other words, the charitable and quantified vision intended to take care of persons who live on less than a dollar a day is far removed from the reality of Indigenous Peoples who live in exclusion and poverty.”

Statistics on the situation of Indigenous Peoples are not readily available because few countries collect data which is disaggregated, or broken down, by ethnicity. The gathering of good statistical data on the well-being of Indigenous Peoples in Africa and Asia is particularly difficult.

In Africa for example, the available data does not cover core groups who are considered to be Indigenous because of their small size (for example, the Ogiek in Kenya).

The result is that very little is known about the health, education, and poverty levels of these communities. This lack of information impedes the ability of governments and the world community to address the real and pressing needs of Indigenous Peoples.

A further problem arises with the adequacy of data on Indigenous Peoples in developed countries with modern welfare states. Some of these countries have at least partially disaggregated data, but it is not clear whether this data should be compared to other Indigenous and marginalised communities internationally or rather in relation to the rest of the national population within which these Peoples are embedded. Comparatively, Indigenous Peoples in developed countries have much higher incidences of poverty and much reduced access to both the tangible and immeasurable ‘goods’ that affluence affords the rest of the population.

The PAHO argues that if the level of Indigenous poverty is to be properly identified and understood, new culturally appropriate indicators are needed. These would identify the actual conditions of Indigenous populations living in poverty. States, national and international agencies should ensure that adequate statistical data is collected and broken down to reflect the cultural diversity of communities.
The true extent of Indigenous poverty can sometimes be hidden in statistical data because of differing parameters as to how poverty is experienced and measured.

This figure from the World Bank, for example, provides a statistical measure of the global poverty reduction which has occurred between 1990 and 2008, based on the baseline measure of an individual’s income being below USD$1.25 per day. Whilst a macro analysis like this reflects a number of limitations regarding how poverty is measured, it is particularly concerning that specific data regarding Indigenous Peoples is not collected and/or included in such statistics.

The overall percentage of people in a given national community living below $1.25 per day may have reduced; however the actual number of Indigenous Peoples within that community living below this marker may have stayed the same or risen – there is no way of knowing from this dataset. Although Caritas Australia welcomes the relative shift from extreme poverty that these macro statistics usefully represent, we must be ever vigilant to analyse the stories and experiences which they do not capture.

**INFORMATION CAN PRECIPITATE CHANGE**

In Cambodia, a joint donor and government project monitoring indicator was specifically developed which required the legal registration of Indigenous communities, as well as their user rights to land. The existence of the monitoring indicator and the specificity of the resultant information gave the Cambodian Government the impetus to develop the required policy concerning registration processes and land use.63

This demonstrates that aid policies and priorities of donor governments can have a positive influence on targeting and reducing poverty in Indigenous communities, if they are developed and implemented with the specific needs of Indigenous communities in mind.
“Millions of people are denied their right to education because of poverty, marginalization, poor and ill-funded services, geographic isolation and conflicts. Indigenous Peoples are particularly affected and, throughout the world, they suffer from lower levels of education than their non-Indigenous counterparts.” United Nations, State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples 64

Caritas Australia draws strength from the inspirational examples which followers of Jesus have laid before us. Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop, for example, dedicated her life to make education available to the poorest and most marginalised in remote and rural areas of Australia. Her concern for the welfare of Aboriginal people, particularly in relation to education for Aboriginal children is well documented. The Order of the Sisters of St Joseph continue her legacy today, and remind us as a Church: “To learn from them, to receive from them, to support them in their struggle for justice and equity”. 65

It is clear that education remains one of the great challenges facing Indigenous communities around the world today. There are complex, interrelated factors at play in identifying and overcoming barriers to education for Indigenous Peoples. The United Nations observes that education systems and curricula often do not respect Indigenous Peoples’ diverse cultures.

“The result is an education gap – indigenous students have lower enrolment rates, higher dropout rates and poorer educational outcomes than non-Indigenous people in the same countries.” 66

Language is a building block for learning

Of particular concern is the issue of Indigenous language in education. Speaking an Indigenous language is, according to UNESCO, a clear marker of educational disadvantage. In Mozambique, for example, 43 percent of people aged between 16 and 49 who speak Portuguese have at least one grade of secondary schooling, while among speakers of Indigenous dialects the rates are between six and 16 percent. 67 In Bolivia, 68 percent of Spanish speakers aged 16 to 49 have completed some secondary education, while only a third or fewer Indigenous Aymara, Quechua and Guarani speakers have done so. 68

Why is speaking an Indigenous language a marker for poor educational outcomes?
Access to formal schooling can be both a positive and a negative experience for Indigenous children.

The systems of formal education historically provided by the State or religious or private groups have been a two edged sword for Indigenous Peoples. On the one hand, they have often enabled Indigenous children and youth to acquire knowledge and skills that will allow them to move ahead in life... On the other hand, formal education... has also been a means of forcibly changing, and in some cases, destroying, Indigenous cultures. 69

- UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples
Culturally and linguistically inappropriate education systems have and will continue to fail Indigenous children and lead to stigmatisation and further marginalisation, exclusion and poverty. Many nations have recognised this and are working hard to close the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

**THE LANGUAGE OF HOPE**

Caritas Australia is also working to support Indigenous Peoples in promoting education and literacy in culturally appropriate ways. In Myanmar, our partner Karuna Kengtung Social Services is helping to implement a project aimed at saving the Indigenous language of the Akha ethnic minority group.

The Akha are an Indigenous hill top tribe originally from Mongolia, who through centuries of war and dispossession have spread throughout Myanmar, Thailand, China, Laos and Vietnam. Because of their minority status in those countries, they live on the margins economically, socially and culturally.

Akha language and culture has traditionally been passed down orally, but with ongoing dislocation and the need to disperse in order to participate in the cash economy, both the language and culture are in danger of being lost.

Caritas Australia is helping the Akha to transfer their language and customs into a written context in order to understand, record, document, preserve and disseminate the Akha cultural heritage, philosophy and way of life.

It is hoped that the project, which was designed by Akha elders, will strengthen and empower the Akha people economically, socially and politically, by giving them a voice. From an educational point of view, the development of Indigenous language and literature will ensure the Akha children are taught their own norms and values, while still receiving a holistic education that will prepare them to participate fully in broader society.

### Years of schooling, latest year available

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China/2002</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru/2001</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico/2008</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia/2002</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil/2002</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador/2006</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala/2006</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Environmental Sustainability

“WE BELIEVE THAT THE EARTH IS A GIFT FROM GOD, VALUABLE IN ITSELF, AND THAT HUMAN LIFE IS IRREVOCABLY LINKED WITH THE EARTH.”

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Indigenous communities have an intimate relationship with their lands and waters which transcends generations and in most cases remains central to their economic, cultural, social and spiritual well-being. This relationship gives them a special knowledge of the biodiversity of their lands and waters, and an expertise in land management.

But while Indigenous communities depend on a healthy environment for their survival, their environments are increasingly being threatened by outside influences, such as industrialisation, mining and logging. In cases where forced removal or dislocation from land occurs due to such influences, Indigenous Peoples are not only removed from their livelihoods, but also from the continued environmental management of their lands. From an Indigenous perspective this is catastrophic, not only for the environment, but also for the continuation of the culture, spirituality and identity which it is deeply connected to.

Indigenous Peoples’ lands and territories are also particularly vulnerable to climate change, primarily because of the fragility of the ecosystems in which many live and upon which they depend. Already, Indigenous communities around the world are experiencing climate-related changes to their environment which are threatening their survival.

A JUST CLIMATE?

“I felt I could best participate in the program by sharing my knowledge to empower the communities, especially the children, so they could improve their lives. We can’t alleviate poverty if the community doesn’t have a good education. If we are not well prepared for the future, what will happen with our next generation?” Fauzia (Ipau) – An Indigenous Dayak woman participating in a climate justice program, Kalimantan, Indonesia.

While noting that Indigenous Peoples are bearing the brunt of climate change, agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) have also identified the ability of Indigenous Peoples to survive in such environments. In addition, their in-depth knowledge of specific indigenous species can provide valuable information as to how to adapt to future climate scenarios. Sadly, much of this knowledge is in danger of vanishing, as Indigenous languages and cultures are lost. Poverty, dispossession and dislocation also threaten the transmission of Indigenous environmental knowledge, as communities begin to move away from their traditional lands.

The FAO concludes that Indigenous Peoples will suffer disproportionately from the long-term effects of climate change, primarily because of their existing vulnerability and their dependence on their local environment. This suffering will be inextricably linked to the accelerated loss and deterioration of natural resources, biodiversity and associated food systems.
LEADING THE WAY IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

To counter this, many Indigenous Peoples are increasingly attempting to exert greater control over their natural resources, as well as over their economic and political life. Many Indigenous communities themselves are leading the way in terms of implementing either government sustainability and climate change policies, or international best practice standards. These initiatives are unfortunately often resisted by those who have economic interests in these lands.

There is a fundamental conflict between the way most Indigenous Peoples view the land and the paradigm of modern developed economies. Where there is an interwoven collective interdependence and reverent reliance upon the land nested within a complex world view, rather than individual ownership, any form of modern economic transaction will necessarily only deal with representative parties, rather than the collective paradigm as a whole.

Church teaching perceptively reminds us that “an economy respectful of the environment will not have the maximization of profit as its only objective, because environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations . . . The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces.” - Pope John Paul II

Caritas Australia is working with the Aboriginal Carbon Fund in Central Australia, a unique enterprise aimed at promoting the ecologically sustainable development of Aboriginal lands. The project will pioneer Aboriginal involvement in carbon economies on Aboriginal owned land in a secure and sustainable manner, helping to alleviate poverty and deliver a range of benefits to Aboriginal communities.

Apart from providing for sustainable natural and cultural resource management activities, it will also bring benefits to the wider community through addressing the impacts of climate change and supporting regional economies. This project combines multiple elements, utilising market forces whilst also addressing the social, cultural and environmental dimensions involved in holistic community development.
REDUCING RISKS POSED BY CHANGES IN CLIMATE

In Nepal, Caritas Australia is supporting Indigenous communities to respond to the present and increasing threat of environmental degradation and climatic change to food and income security. Local communities have told us that late arrival of the monsoon is resulting in later transplanting of rice seedlings, which negatively impacts on rice production. Dryer conditions in some areas are forcing a shift to rice varieties that are more suitable for the changing conditions.

The Integrated Pest Management Project, implemented in partnership with Caritas Nepal, encourages farmers to adopt organic farming techniques and better suited crop varieties, and to establish farmer cooperatives to facilitate the implementation of local adaptation programs. Over 65 percent of community members engaged with the project are women and the majority of participants are also from marginalised ethnic (Indigenous) groups (Tharu, Magar, Bote) and lower castes (Dalit).
Indigenous women are leading the way for greater recognition and an end to discrimination; realising that their advancement is inextricably linked to the well-being and development of their community. Networks operating internationally, such as the Indigenous Women’s Movement, believe that:

“As long as discrimination and social exclusion exists in their communities it will be impossible to recognise the specific rights of Indigenous women”.  

Equally, the collective advancement of Indigenous Peoples will strengthen the participation of Indigenous women within their communities, as well as within the national, multicultural society.

Indigenous women very often suffer disadvantage in a range of areas, including human rights, health, education and economic development, and these problems are compounded simply because of their status as women. At the same time, much of Indigenous culture and knowledge is retained and passed on by women, making them repositories and teachers of valuable information and identity. Sadly the traditional knowledge of Indigenous women is often not recognised or is undervalued.

Despite their substantial contributions to agriculture and household food security, Indigenous women in many countries continue to face several levels of discrimination on account of their gender, as well as their ethnicity.

This discrimination against Indigenous women is also clearly seen in education. Indigenous Peoples generally suffer from lower levels of education than their non-Indigenous counterparts, but girls are particularly disadvantaged. According to the World Bank, a significant proportion of out-of-school girls in developing countries are Indigenous females. The percentage of Indigenous girls out of school reaches as high as 90 percent in the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

In recent times, governments and international bodies have acknowledged that Indigenous women must have a greater role to play in the development processes that affect their lives and the lives of their communities.

The United Nations International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004) and the Fourth World Conference on Women helped Indigenous women to increase public awareness of their situation, highlighting that: “Indigenous women’s special concerns include survival of their communities and of their cultural identity and recognition of the central role of women in the efforts to advance the interests of indigenous people everywhere.”
Amplifying the Voices of Indigenous Women in India

Historically, the 32 tribal groups in Jharkhand, north-east India have suffered exploitation and alienation from their traditional lands at the hands of colonial and non-tribal landlords, reducing their role on the land to that of tenant workers. Today, the descendants of these tribal tenants remain trapped in a cycle of indebtedness to landlords and money lenders, perpetuating their disadvantage and marginalisation.

Human rights abuses include the continued sale of tribal lands to non-tribals, despite legislation prohibiting the practice. In response, Caritas Australia, through our partner Caritas India, support local tribal communities to address these challenges.

Shanthi Devi is the Self-Help Group President in a small village called Chakme Nawatoli Ranchi in Jharkhand, which is mostly comprised of people from the Munda tribe. She became involved in the Caritas Australia supported integrated development program because she wanted to change the situation of women in her village.

In 2000, when self-help groups were introduced, women participants were taught how to write their signatures. They needed this skill in order to access a government scheme guaranteeing employment to households offering to do unskilled manual labour. If they could write their names, they could open bank accounts and benefit from the scheme. In essence this project has provided access to government programs that these women had previously been excluded from.

For Shanti, the project also developed her confidence and leadership skills; as well as strengthening her community and enabling them to assert their rights more effectively to government authorities.

“Women are strong enough and we can fight for our rights now. We have our own savings account and if we have problems in the village, we do not go to the police, but address the problem within our village” - Shanthi Devi.
RECOMMENDATIONS

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

DEEPENING RESPECT

INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES
These recommendations are derived from Caritas Australia’s lived experience in the countries where we and our partners operate. They predominantly focus on establishing equity between Indigenous Peoples and the rest of the global community.

To this end, we call on governments, international organisations, corporates and civil groups to act in accordance with the principles and recommendations laid out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and commit to addressing factors that perpetuate the marginalisation and poverty of Indigenous Peoples as a matter of urgency.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS NETWORK:

• Build on and advance our tradition of advocacy and empowerment with regard to Indigenous Peoples globally.

• Prioritise the rights and recognition of Indigenous communities in our development work.

• Share learnings and best practices about Indigenous issues and development.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND DEVELOPMENT SECTOR:

• Support and implement political and legislative mechanisms that support Indigenous Peoples to engage in the implementation, analysis and evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and broader poverty reduction strategies.

• Collaborate with the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNFPII) and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) to respond expeditiously to human rights violations currently being committed against Indigenous communities around the world.
The Australian Government:

- Prioritise aid to Indigenous communities worldwide, especially women, and ensure that Indigenous communities are targeted thematically across all of AusAID’s work, including in bilateral agreements and sector specific policies and programming.

- Dedicate resources to improve disaggregation of data concerning Indigenous Peoples in country-by-country reporting, and increase investment in research and development initiatives that foster a culturally appropriate approach, such as bilingual language programs.

- Work to protect Indigenous Peoples’ rights to land and natural resources by ensuring that effective and participatory engagement with Indigenous communities is a priority in AusAID’s Mining for Development strategy.

- Request the Federal Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to review the extent to which our overseas aid program responds to the poorest of the poor, particularly Indigenous communities, and recommend new indicators against which to measure aid effectiveness as it relates to Indigenous Peoples.

- Ratify ILO Convention 169 on the rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples 1989, enabling Australia to lift our national performance with regard to international human rights standards pertaining to Indigenous Peoples, and provide an additional mechanism of arbitration to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders if standards are not satisfactorily adhered to.
• Promote best practice concerning any operations on Indigenous territories around the world, including pursuit and implementation of minimum international standards and principles incorporated within initiatives such as EITI – the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (http://eiti.org).

• Ensure adequate consultation with Indigenous communities is undertaken when operating on Indigenous territories, including the attainment of free, prior and informed consent\textsuperscript{87} with regards to development on or relocation from their lands. Adequate language skills and translation are significant considerations, along with just and fair agreement with regard to compensatory measures or options for return to land.

• Put in place affirmative policies concerning increased and supported employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples\textsuperscript{88}, either through development of internal human resource policies, or by engaging with and financially supporting Indigenous led initiatives and organisations.

• Implement cultural awareness training programs and acknowledge traditional custodians by including a welcome to or acknowledgement of country at all events as a matter of course.
THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY:

- Raise awareness in your local community, school or parish by hosting a film screening of Caritas Australia’s film *Walk As One: Connecting With Our World’s Indigenous Peoples*. Download the film and screening guide online at www.caritas.org.au/walkasone.

- Contact your local Member of Parliament and let them know that Indigenous justice and development issues are important to you.

- Sign the Walk As One petition online or write to Senator Bob Carr, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, and ask him to ensure that Australia’s foreign aid program is prioritising Indigenous Peoples around the world.

- Write to or email Mr Michael Danby MP, chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, asking him to review the extent to which our foreign aid program responds to the needs of Indigenous communities around the world.

- Pray for improved access to rights and justice for Indigenous Peoples around the world. Access our Walk As One prayer and liturgy resources online at www.caritas.org.au/walkasone.

- Donate to Caritas Australia and support our life-changing work with Indigenous communities around the globe.

- Engage fully in the national conversation regarding the Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

- Establish a Reconciliation Action Plan for local schools, parishes or community groups: visit www.reconciliation.org.au to find out how.
To access the Walk as One petition and a variety of other great resources and tools to help you take action, visit www.caritas.org.au/walkasone


5 Speech by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to ambassadors visiting the Vatican, 15 December 2011.


9 Ibid, paragraph 8.

10 UNPFII, op. cit., p.v.


12 The World Bank, loc. cit.

13 UNPFII, loc. cit.


18 UNPFII, ibid, p.22.


20 UNPFII, op. cit., p.40.


25 UNPFII op. cit., p.8.


29 UNPFII, loc. cit.


31 UNPFII, ibid, p.8.

32 UNPFII, ibid, p.58.

33 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Oceania of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, ibid. s.28 (98).
73UNPFII, op. cit., p.94.
75UNPFII, op. cit., p.107.
77Carbon Economies are economic systems in which carbon is an important commodity for generating energy.
80Ibid.
82FAO Policy on indigenous and tribal peoples, p.6.
83UNPFII, op. cit., p.130.
84World Bank, op cit., p.110.
85Ibid. p.112.
88There are many positive examples of Australian organisations and companies pursuing positive employment and development initiatives. Establishing and implementing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is one avenue which may assist with this process; it is critical that measurable actions are identified and reported against. Visit http://www.reconciliation.org.au.

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