

Speaking notes, Kristian Bengtson
From target group and beneficiary to political actor:
Reflections on the Development of the Indigenous movement in Brazil
Tromsø Forum Conference 2006 for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples

First of all, I would like to thank the organisers of the Forum Conference 2006 for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, and for the opportunity to share my experiences with you. I'm particularly pleased that Brazil and its Indigenous peoples is receiving special attention at this year's forum.

Introduction

For more than 20 years, Norway has supported the Indigenous Movement in Brazil, mainly through core funding of Indigenous Associations and Pro-Indigenous NGO's. This long term commitment, combined with Norad's highly flexible approach to institutional support and capacity building activities, has rendered Norad a very good reputation amongst the Indigenous Peoples, organisations and NGO's in Brazil.

For the last four years, I've been the programme officer for the Support to Indigenous Peoples at the Norwegian Embassy in Brasilia. It is from this viewpoint I intend to give you a panorama of the development of the Indigenous movement in Brazil during the last decades, and the challenges it has been facing up to present times.

Indigenous Peoples in Brazil

"There is no such thing as an Indigenous movement in Brazil". The words were spoken a little over a year ago, by renowned Brazilian indigenous author Daniel Munduruku. "There is no Indigenous movement". Instead of a "Movimento Indígena", he sees "índios em movimento". Individuals. Or, maybe, smaller groups or a specific Indigenous People, striving to achieve a specific agenda. But no general Indigenous movement. Why is that?

Many factors contribute to this vision. For starters, the Brazilian territory is very large, with the Indigenous peoples scattered throughout the whole of Brazil. There are fundamental differences between diverse regional contexts, and strongly varying degrees of inter-ethnic contact. However, the main reason is the great cultural and linguistic diversity, erecting barriers between the peoples.

The Indigenous population in Brazil is **very** diverse. There are an estimated little over 220 different tribes, speaking roughly 180 different languages. Numbers are not exact, as new tribes are either being discovered or re-emerges every year.

However, in absolute numbers, the Indigenous population in itself is small: an estimated 600.000 individuals, of which approximately 480.000 reside within Indigenous lands or urban areas close. Considering that Brazil has close to 190 million inhabitants, the Indigenous population make up just about 0,3 per cent of Brazil's population. But the Indigenous population is growing, and at a considerably faster rate than the rest of the population.

But not only the population is growing. The number of Indigenous associations and NGO's has practically exploded in the last 15 years. What are the reasons behind this growth?

Without any doubt, the single most important factor lies in Brazil's new Constitution of 1988. The new Constitution not only grants extensive territorial, social and cultural rights to Indigenous Peoples, but also grants them the right to represent themselves in political and legal questions before the State and other segments of Brazilian society. Until then, they had been treated in legislation as 'relatively unable'.

This new status of self-representation turned native organisations into legally accepted social organizations, thus opening up the way for the conquest of a political voice on the national and international scene. And as Adriana related in her presentation earlier this morning, the Brazilian civil society and, in particular the pro-indigenous NGO's, have played and still play a crucial role in this transformation.

Today, most indigenous associations are based on ethnicity, and are restricted to a community or a group of villages. These associations come in many shapes; some function as cooperatives, some might have a trade unionist agenda (for example for indigenous teachers or health monitors), while others strive for political representation. Some are regional, conglomerating several peoples. And then there are the two major umbrella organisations: COIAB, representing all Indigenous Peoples in the Brazilian Amazon region; and APOINME – representing the peoples in the north-eastern and central-eastern states of Brazil.

So, in the light of the above, why is Daniel Munduruku still reluctant to speak in terms of an Indigenous movement? Possibly, because of the difficulties in forming a national representation.

The national movement

Ever since the early years of military dictatorship in the mid 1960:s, the Indigenous Peoples try to form a national network and representative structures on a national scale. As mentioned earlier, this is made difficult because of several factors:

There are problems related to territorial extension, the diverse regional contexts, varying degrees of inter-ethnic contact and, first and foremost, the cultural and linguistic diversity. The situation in Brazil is very far from most other countries in Latin America, where you predominantly have much fewer different peoples, but who make up a larger part of the country's population, sometimes even being in the majority.

On top of the above, the authoritarian way in which the Brazilian state historically and into present days has been treating native matters represent obstacles to the formation of a unified indigenous movement. Of course, one should not compare the open repression during the military dictatorship 1964-1985 to today's much more subtle mechanisms, but some would indeed say that the paternalistic and authoritarian legacy continues.

In 1980, the first Indigenous organisation was set up seeking credibility on a national level, claiming to be the legitimate representative of the native peoples of Brazil. A handful of charismatic and strong individuals formed the core of UNI - Union of Indigenous Nations (União das Nações Indígenas). However, UNI soon experienced problems, mainly because its relation to the regions and local communities was very weak, almost inexistent. In the early 1990s, UNI faded away, and the Indigenous movement returned to focus on the strengthening of its local and regional organisations.

A new attempt was made in 1992, with the creation of CAPOIB – the Council of Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (Conselho de Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil). CAPOIB was backed by the Catholic church, and, as UNI, this too was more of a top-down organisation. CAPOIB soon started to experience political, administrative and financial problems. Internal disagreements added to the problems, leaving CAPOIB inoperative. The organisation was formally extinct in the beginning of last year.

Thus, we move into present times. And suddenly, from an unexpected source, comes the injection that strongly contributes to a new Indigenous national mobilisation: the Lula Government.

The Government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

In 2003, a much awaited shift in power occurred, when the former trade union leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was sworn in as President of Brazil. Lula was elected with massive support from the poor and marginalised in Brazil's society. He was elected to conduct the social reforms so long awaited for. To grant freedoms and rights to everybody. Including the Indigenous Peoples, who in Lula saw hope.

Territorial, social and cultural rights, as already granted by the Constitution, would finally be implemented. Also the environmentalists celebrated, as this would mark the beginning of a new era of sustainable development, respect for the environment and traditional peoples.

However, already within a year, it was clear to most that President Lula and his government was either incapable of or lacked the political will to deal with the situation of the Indigenous Peoples in Brazil. No reformed or assertive indigenous policies were put into place, while, at the same time, much of the former Government's policies under implementation was either delayed, halted or reverted.

To support this view, I will provide you with a few indicators. In recent years, we've seen:

- The lowest number of identified and demarcated Indigenous lands since the military dictatorship years. Some argue that the reason for this is in that a constitutional right seem to have been politicised, as the Government has been using potential Indigenous lands, identified or in the process of identification, as bargaining chips, making trade offs with local governors for support in Congress.
- Visible deterioration in several sectors of public service to Indigenous Peoples, most notably in the health sector. Increased numbers stating malnutrition, the spreading of diseases like malaria, and higher child mortality. Lower vaccination rates.
- The sudden political vacuum that emerged has been quickly filled by anti-indigenous interest, as can be seen by the steep increase in law proposals submitted before Congress, aiming at restrictions of the Constitutional rights of the Indigenous Peoples.
- The harsher political climate has fueled an increase in violent conflict, with increased numbers of Indigenous persons killed in clashes with farmers, timber loggers, and gold diggers.

On top of this, some sustain that the official governmental organ for native peoples, FUNAI, has once more reverted to a paternalistic and controlling agenda. One way of doing this is by not fully recognising the legitimacy of the ever-growing indigenous organisations and associations, but only of the traditional chiefs in the villages, in what ends up being, some argue, an effective divide and conquer mechanism.

The creation of FDDI – the Forum for Defence of Indigenous Rights

The deterioration of Indigenous politics under the Lula government has given rise to the political conditions necessary for joint action to be pursued once again, in the forming of an alliance between the native peoples and sectors of civil society. In June 2004, the Forum for Defence of Indigenous Rights (Forum em Defesa dos Direitos Indígenas) was created.

The Forum for Defence of Indigenous Rights is a powerful coalition between Indigenous associations, pro-indigenous organisations, and other components from civil society. The objective is to, united, through common and coordinated action, defend the constitutional rights of the Indigenous Peoples in Brazil, and establish a direct line of communication with the Government. The permanent secretary of the Forum is COIAB, the largest Indigenous organisation in Brazil.

Results have been immediate

In the month of April in 2005, the Forum organised the “Acampamento Terra Livre“, the “Camp of Free Land”, which gathered 700 traditional leaders from 89 different tribes. A large community tent was erected, as well as several smaller ones for accommodation. For several days they camped in front of Congress, carrying out meetings, discussing and analysing Indigenous issues, and deciding on priorities and a common agenda. Media coverage was good, and opportunities were created to put pressure on the government.

On this picture, we can see the then President of the Senate Renan Calheiros receiving a document elaborated by the 700 participants of the Forum.

An important demand from the “Acampamento Terra Livre” was that the Lula government should fulfill a promise made during his election campaign: to create the “National Council of Indigenous Politics” (Conselho Nacional de Política Indigenista). The Council, whose composition would include a significant number of indigenous leaders, was intended to act as a regulatory and monitoring organ, making sure that coherent and efficient policies were to be implemented in regards to Indigenous politics.

After almost four years of government, the **Council** has not yet been established. However, after much pressure from the indigenous movement, a temporary body, the National **Commission** of Indigenous Politics (Comissão Nacional de Política Indigenista), is being formed as we speak. The Commission will not have equally far-going powers as the Council, but is easier to establish, and is seen as a step on the way towards the forming of the actual Council. Thus, the Commission, when established, will constitute an important step towards greater participation of the Indigenous Peoples in the shaping of public policies in Brazil.

Yet another important result of the gathering in 2005 was the decision by the 700 tribal leaders to create the “Articulation of the Peoples and the Indigenous Organisations of Brazil” (Articulação dos Povos e Organizações Indígenas do Brasil) – APIB.

APIB is different from what has been tried before. For starters, it is not a top-bottom initiative, but has its origins in the 700 leaders and 89 tribes present at the mobilisation. Second, it is not an organisation, with a vertical organisational structure, but a mechanism of internal articulation of the Indigenous Movement. It consists of a national commission, with more than 40 indigenous representatives from all of Brazil; a smaller permanent commission, with representatives from the five regions of the country, and an administrative body that will

prepare documents and statements. The “Acampamento Terra Livre”, which takes place every year in April, functions as APIB's General Assembly.

So, Brazil might have an Indigenous Movement after all, and even the seed to a national one.

What is Norad’s role in all this?

Norad’s programme portfolio in Brazil currently consists of 16 projects with 14 different partners – being eight Indigenous associations and six pro-indigenous NGO’s. The main focus in the portfolio is the providing of institutional support to the organisations. Gender issues and capacity building are two other areas given special attention.

All Indigenous associations directly involved in the creation of the Forum for Defence of Indigenous Rights have or are currently receiving support from Norad. The same goes for four of the five pro-Indigenous NGO’s, like ISA, who has become true agenda setters on environmental and Indigenous issues.

The institutional support for the Forum itself is chiefly provided by Norad.

Thus, we can see that **the Norwegian support has been important in the forming of a more vibrant and assertive Indigenous movement in Brazil, which, in turn, directly has been affecting and improving public policy and the preservation of Indigenous rights.**

For the Indigenous peoples in Brazil, the walk ahead will be a long and challenging one. However, with the indigenous peoples and their associations working together with civil society, I believe that we can look towards a better future.

THANK YOU