

GUIDELINES FOR NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS



SUMMARY OF THE GUIDELINES FOR NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Non-Government Organizations involved in development projects are usually one of three types: support (e.g. fiscal, technical, medical, educational), advocacy (e.g. environment, legal, special interest), or representative. The *Guidelines* are in roughly the order you will need to use them as the project approaches and is made operational, but only sometimes distinguish between the different types of NGOs.

1) Ensure that your objectives and those of the indigenous peoples are the same

The best practice in assisting indigenous peoples is to begin by asking if they would like to have your assistance, and by explaining how your group can provide it. This will usually, but not always, engender a very positive reply. Avoid making the assumption the indigenous peoples will automatically find your presence beneficial or welcome.

2) Create a representative NGO for the community or join one

Developing a coordinated way in which indigenous people can interact successfully with others is a very positive step. Be sure to involve them in developing the appropriate mechanism.

3) Work with the indigenous peoples to help estimate the impacts

NGOs are uniquely able to provide sources of information and expertise to assist in estimating the impact of development projects. With deliberate planning the information and expertise should carry no bias.

4) Help by providing access to information

Indigenous peoples often live in relatively remote areas and sometimes have little access to information that is readily available to others. NGOs can tap these external sources to help the indigenous communities.

5) Assist indigenous peoples to communicate in different media

By offering a variety of means of communicating both within the community and with other stakeholders and interest groups, the base of information available to indigenous peoples is increased. In return, the capacity of indigenous peoples to share their knowledge is also increased.

6) Assist indigenous peoples to understand the powers at play

Many influences work on the decisions during the planning and implementation of any of the development project. It will assist indigenous peoples to be aware of what these influences are, who is involved and how the community can interact with them.

7) Be sure you understand the nature of traditional knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is a way of life that embodies the knowledge of centuries in practices and ways of interpreting indirect signals from nature. Be aware of how it differs from the more scientific methods often used in development projects. This is an important factor in integrating indigenous knowledge.

8) Encourage the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in finding innovative solutions

While indigenous knowledge is full of interesting and useful information, it is most effectively used in development projects as a source of innovative

solutions because of its perspective of being intensely local and long term.

NGO *GUIDELINE #1:*

ENSURE THAT YOUR OBJECTIVES AND THOSE OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ARE THE SAME

MAKE SURE YOUR OBJECTIVES SUPPORT THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

If you are a special interest group (support or advocacy), your interest in this project probably comes from the impact of the project on your NGO's mandate or mission. Perhaps your group is interested in preserving the environment, culture, human rights, or health

When you enter the realm of indigenous peoples, some of the players may be naïve about the larger world around us and others will be very sophisticated. The values of the indigenous peoples may be very different from your own. The values of the proponent and even the government of the nation where the project is about to take place may not shared you sense of priorities.

One of the difficult decisions we all must make as individuals is to determine whether we are sufficiently informed and wise to be the final arbiters of what is best for some other individual, some other community, nation, or even of what is best for the world. Most special interest groups have one major focus. In dealing with indigenous

peoples, it is wise to consider whether they share your special interest in that focus. Consult in ways that encourage the indigenous group to help consider the goal of your organization in the context of their traditional knowledge. Perhaps the two ways of examining the issues may provide new ways of thinking about the application of the goals of your organization, especially as it affects indigenous peoples.

Now you must make the next decision: what other priorities take second place to yours. For example, if you are interested in preventing cruelty to animals, are you prepared to stop traditional hunting practices and thereby deny food to the people of the community? If you are interested in preserving the environment, are you prepared to stop a project from going ahead that a traditional community feels it needs and wants, even though there will be some damage to the environment? Your highest priority should be the lives and long-term welfare of the community, no special interest group has the right to endanger the lives of others for whom they have no mutually agreed responsibility or authority.

NGO GUIDELINE #2: **CREATE A REPRESENTATIVE NGO FOR THE COMMUNITY OR JOIN ONE**

NGOS CAN BE TEAM MEMBERS Too

If you are in an advocacy or support NGO, invite the local community to recognize your group as part of their support team. Work with the community to understand what limits they want on your actions. Make sure everyone in the group understands the limits to his or her authority to take action in your special interest. Having your group recognized by the entire community will make relationships easier to define and accept.

If your views are in conflict with the proponent's views, the proponent may resist your official participation, claiming you have no real stake or place in the project. Temper your insistence on official recognition in concert with the best interests of the community. Special interest groups often have the most effective influence by remaining as support or by advocating a position in the background of the indigenous peoples' needs.

PARTICIPATION BY WOMEN

Since women will put different items on the agenda for discussion and review than men will, make sure that they are included, if possible, on the NGO team. In many cultures it is inappropriate for men to communicate directly with women on matters of business. Women on NGO teams can often act in ways that men simply are not allowed to act. This is especially important in training and medical assistance, but

can also be a critically important factor in advocacy groups as well.

If your NGO is representing the community directly, women make an important contribution by providing their own perspectives, which are often different from men's views because of their different roles. If your culture is not able to include women directly, try to find ways to draw their views into the agenda through informal means.

ENHANCE THE COMMUNITY POWER BASE

In addition to your own group, think of inviting the community to consider adding other international, national, and regional special-interest nature or environmental clubs and non-governmental advocacy organizations to become a part of the community advocacy group. National or regional groups of indigenous peoples will be concerned about the potential impact on all aspects of the health of the community. Join forces with these other groups. If possible, cement the relationship in documentation; this will inform the proponent and the regulatory agency of your representation.

LEGAL SUPPORT

The community may need to have legal status. Can your organization offer support in this endeavor? If possible, use an existing corporate entity, such as an incorporated town or village. If there is no legal entity, consider creating one that includes the whole community. This will be part

of the community's method of protecting traditional intellectual and cultural property rights, and traditional resource rights. NGOs acting as the representative of a community of people is a well-established practice in some countries, especially India. The approach is relatively simple, and basically allows the NGO to be one step removed from the day-to-day activities of the community. It is set up specifically to handle the project, and essentially reports back to the entire community, but has the power of being a legal representative without the authority to govern.

TEACH THE PROPONENT HOW TO COMMUNICATE AND BEHAVE

Non-governmental organization can help proponents and communities by teaching officers and managers of the project the ways of indigenous peoples. In Kenya, Africa, for example, the National Museum's Friend's Association offers courses to diplomats and business people on proper etiquette for interacting with the many tribes in the region. Representative NGOs can take this activity as part of their role in assisting proponents to understand how to communicate effectively with the community, and at the same time improve their financial base. This enhances the experience of business and indigenous peoples working together.

OFFER MONEY AND EXPERTISE ONLY IF YOU ARE WANTED

Many traditional communities may not have financial resources to plan or to participate. Many NGOs are capable of underwriting the costs of participation for traditional communities. Surprisingly small amounts of money can be made to serve great purpose with local communities. Transfer of expertise to the local communities is also an important part of ensuring excellence in participation. Members of the team of NGOs can bring a broad spectrum of skills and expertise that the local communities might not have.

An old dictum states that it is better to train someone to fish than to give him fish for dinner. This applies to modern problems as well to old problems.

At the same time, it is important to understand that the communities may wish to proceed on their own and avoid the risk of having too many aspects on the agenda. Once you have assured yourself that the community understands the potential you have to assist, but has nonetheless decided to enter the project without your assistance, it is best to back away gracefully.

TRAINING TO BE INVOLVED

The people who are most directly involved will have to learn quickly. Some of the concepts may be difficult and even troubling. Training and capacity building are important. Here is where international, national, regional, and even local NGOs can provide quick courses in transport and construction policy, marketing strategy, project evaluation as well as other subjects. Help the local community get as prepared as they can to participate in a process that may not be familiar.

SET UP A TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE CENTER: CREATE A NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION WITH A BROAD MANDATE

If you are a community of people who have extensive traditional knowledge, there will be others like you. Think about joining forces to develop a support group for your own traditions and knowledge base. These are themselves joined together in a worldwide network of centers. The hub is in the Netherlands and each national or regional center is listed in the Newsletter. Refer to Appendix #5 for a list of Traditional Knowledge Centers. By creating a center, you will be part of the world wide network and can gain both knowledge and strength from your association.

NGO *GUIDELINE #3:* **WORK WITH THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO HELP ESTIMATE THE IMPACTS**

GOOD PREDICTIONS MEAN GOOD DECISIONS

Here is where many advocacy and support NGOs can shine. They often bring great skills and knowledge to the task of predicting outcomes of projects within the area of their special interest. Once these effects or impacts are defined, the community can make better decisions and plan what to do. In making your special interest case, however, remember that there are many other considerations that must be a part of the overall planning and decision-making. Try to cast your understanding of the specific situation so that it can be integrated into the rest of the community's concerns.

When developing your information-base, be sure to put your findings on paper. Document the evidence for your predictions well. They will be of great interest and value to the community. Your predictions may also be subject to intense scrutiny. Make sure that the information base is copied and in the hands of the community. If they do not have proper storage facilities for the paper or other media on which the information is stored, create the storage facilities for them. Do not keep the information private from the community. You should be working on their behalf as well as your own.

LEAVE BROAD MARGINS OF ERROR

Special interest groups are perceived, correctly or incorrectly, to have biased views, or even grossly

radical views. Because neither science nor traditional knowledge has particularly accurate means of predicting long-term effects, it is important to make the estimates of the impacts of a project with broad margins of error. While it is always wise to err on the side of caution, extreme doomsday presentations by advocacy NGOs, may erode the credibility of your group.

Here is where your group can add traditional knowledge to its repertoire if it does not already use traditional knowledge. Complementing your views with the wisdom of ancient and modern indigenous peoples can increase the power of the final predictions. Don't forget that important knowledge can be derived by living on the land, and watching it react to natural forces over long periods of time. The locals have made this investment in time.

ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS

In many countries, advocacy NGOs are not invited to participate as official stakeholders. Support and human health NGOs are often asked to participate in rescue operations. Prevention is often better than clean up. Get into the picture as soon as it is possible without destroying your credibility. "Early" is the right time to set up the way in which you will participate, and the way the proponent, government, and community will interact with you.

What is the schedule? How much time do you have to react? What if you need more time? What regulations will be in effect? What enforcement agencies will be involved — and what is the

community relationship with them? How will the community participate? Can we assume round-table discussions? Or will it be representative counsel and behind-closed-door decisions? To what degree will individuals and the entire community be involved in contractual arrangements? You need to get answers to all of these questions.

REPORT CARD ON THE PROONENT'S PAST

Most proponents are good-intentioned and have the welfare of the local people in mind as the projects are implemented and managed over time. But nobody is perfect, and patterns of problems (small or large) can sometimes be discovered that will assist in shaping the negotiations.

It is unusual for a traditional community to have access or to know how to get information about the proponent's past performance. NGOs generally have relatively sophisticated means of gathering this information, especially from the press. In North America, the Better Business Bureau, or similar organizations in other countries, will have records of complaints. A list of all law suits can be obtained in most countries through legal libraries, on-line annual reports, securities commission findings and other sources. A history of law suits can be very informative.

All of this information, positive and negative can be drawn together and used to develop the strategy that will work best in negotiations with the proponent. This can also be helpful in predicting the impacts of their projects – not just from what their plans suggest, but also from their past performances.

HELP PROTECT THE COMMUNITY FROM SOCIETAL IMPACTS OF ALCOHOL, DRUGS, DISEASES, MIGRATION TO CITIES

Social support NGOs can be effective in local communities of indigenous peoples by alerting

them to the dangers of non-traditional value systems. Traditional communities may suffer from alcohol and drugs inadvertently brought into their community. Young and old alike can fall victim to overuse of these substances. Health problems arise from the invasion of germs from non-indigenous peoples; these include simple viruses to sexually transmitted diseases. Indigenous peoples may be more vulnerable if the community does not regularly meet with people from outside their communities.

Increased wealth often draws people away from the local community to seek work or riches in distant towns or cities. This may leave the community without the necessary infra-structure and support system normally provided by the men. Under these conditions, disease and malnutrition are common results. Rapid erosion of the cultural and social norms follows abandonment of the local community by men and youth. If your NGO can move in early to assist in prevention, it will be less difficult to treat the problems that certainly will arise.

HELP PREVENT A DISREGARD FOR COMMUNITY STANDARDS

Traditional communities do not often have mechanisms to deal with whole scale mistreatment by more powerful forces. Most proponents will try to be careful of community standards. However, if a proponent does have a cavalier disregard for community standards, one of the actions a NGO might consider is to draw public attention to the misbehavior.

Another possible option is to draw on the executive exchange programs that many countries offer. Many of these executives have considerable experience in handling difficult situations. Their experience in executive positions may allow them to deal directly with the executive levels of the proponent management in ways that can alleviate the difficulties.

NGO GUIDELINE #4: **HELP BY PROVIDING ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

BE ALERT FOR NEW PROJECTS

Projects are usually planned in confidence until they reach a point where the planners feel there is reason to broaden the circle of advisors. Members of special interest groups are often normal parts of advisory groups. Encourage this participation by respecting the confidentiality requests of proponents while at the same time encouraging proponents to involve local communities before critically important decisions have been made or resources committed to the project.

PRE-EMPTED DECISIONS ARE NOT ALWAYS PERMANENT

Encourage communities to participate in subsequent decisions even if the proponent or government has pre-empted some of the decisions. If the local community is clearly opposed to the development plans as they have been presented, NGOs can be effective with media and public pressure to have decisions reconsidered. If your group has experience with taking an advocacy stand, this experience gives you considerable power to influence the decisions. If at all possible, be sure the local community agrees with what you are going to say if it is to be seen as speaking for them or speaking on their behalf. Moral persuasion with both the public and government agencies can be brought to bear through the media. Be careful, however, not all governments accept criticism. You could bring disaster to the community.

If your group is a support group that has legal expertise, this can also be helpful.

THIRD-PARTY INTERVENORS CAN HELP

There may come a time when negotiations stall. If your NGO is skilled at intervening as an objective counsel, your assistance can be a means to get past non-productive situations. Perhaps your group can offer training to help the local community understand how to participate effectively if mediation or arbitration is required.

HELP ASSESS THE AGENCIES

The following questions are useful guides to evaluating the effectiveness of a regulatory agency that may be overseeing development planning processes:

1. What is the history of the regulatory agency responsible for this project? Has the process changed recently — if so why? Was the process reliable for indigenous peoples? Did the agency follow through on its commitments?
2. What legislation or policies does the agency use? Are the legislation or policies under revision?
3. What resources do regulatory agencies offer to the traditional community? What resources can the traditional community offer to the agency to help the process?
4. What techniques are used to involve the public, and when are they be used?

Based on the answers to these questions, governments can adjust and improve the processes and practices of the agency without referring back to complicated changes in regulations, policies, or legislation.

NGO *GUIDELINE #5:* **ASSIST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO COMMUNICATE IN DIFFERENT MEDIA**

USE NETWORK COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

Many NGOs, especially advocacy groups, are essentially networks. Invite the indigenous community to take full advantage of the many contacts that are part of the organization. Use the same techniques to come to understand the community and its needs. What are the best ways of keeping everyone informed? Whatever they are, use them all the time.

In some communities, the only means is by sending people to talk to others. Ask the community if they would like to have your group help organize networks of people to get the word out.

Some advocacy groups specialize in confrontation. Unless the situation is desperate, this is usually a poor way to get information across. If yours is a human rights advocacy group take great care not to implicate local people; it can be dangerous. Advocating changes to governments that are poor performers in human rights is also extremely dangerous for the advocates, including foreigners. The same is true for radical environmental activists. Be prepared to take the consequences yourself, but take care not to inflict them on the indigenous community.

TAKE CARE: THE MEDIA IS A TWO-EDGED SWORD

Often the media are extremely sympathetic to indigenous peoples' causes. But the intrusion of a

well-meaning NGO can be used to create sensational side-effects by taking a twisted slant on a story. While your prime objective may be to promote your special interest, remember that the platform you are using may involve the lives and health of the indigenous community. Be careful in framing your story if you are going to use the media.

The key to a successful interview when it might turn hostile is to establish about four or five messages and write them down. Then write down about two or three examples to illustrate each message. Finally try to find at least one very powerful phrase of about five to ten words to state each of the four or five messages. The phrase is what you want the media to pick up as headlines. During the interview, be message driven, not question driven. Always come back to your message as you answer the questions. Do not allow the interviewer to draw you into saying something you don't want to say.

If you need time to think, tell the reporter you will call back in an hour, or that you are busy just now, but will be ready in an hour.

NGO GUIDELINE #6: **ASSIST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO UNDERSTAND THE POWERS AT PLAY**

INFLUENCE THE RULES AND THE PROCESS

Support groups can assist by interpreting the rules and advising how to make best use of them. Advocacy groups usually attempt to get the rules changed. You must know the rules before you start, or you will be at a great disadvantage, and can potentially cause harm. The rules for project development and assessments are set by government regulatory agencies. Find out what they are before you begin to intervene.

USE INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL PROTOCOLS

The development of international instruments to protect the rights of indigenous peoples has been the single most effective areas where NGO advocacy and support groups have worked well together to assist in protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. The list is both impressive and useful when confronting situations where local people need to be helped to understand their rights and the ways in which the rest of the world can act on their behalf. Sometimes this is not very effective, but the influence of world opinion is growing. To prevent inappropriate process, use international protocols and conventions. They carry great political weight in some countries, but are ignored in others.

There are many international conventions, laws, and declarations that govern the traditional rights to resources that indigenous peoples have or

should have. The following is a selected list of the most important such sources of information:

1. Convention on Biological Diversity
2. UN Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and Desertification, Particularly in Africa
3. UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
4. UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
5. UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime Of Genocide
6. UN Draft Declaration of Principles on Human Rights and the Environment
7. UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People
8. UN Declaration on the Human Right to Development
9. Draft International Covenant on Environment and Development
10. International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources
11. Non-Legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles of Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests
12. UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
13. UN International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
14. International Labour Organization Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal People in Independent Countries

15. Rome Convention for the Protection of Performers, Producers of Phonograms and Broadcasting Organizations
16. Rio Declaration
17. Universal Declaration of Human Rights
18. Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property
19. Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore
20. Declaration on the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation
21. Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage
22. Model Provisions for National Laws on Protection of Expressions of Folklore Against Illicit Exploitation and Other Prejudicial Actions
23. UN Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

KNOW ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Intellectual property rights are the key to many of the benefits that can accrue from the use of traditional knowledge. Intellectual property rights include the right to own, and therefore to sell or barter, ideas, information, special wisdom or understanding, and knowledge about plants and animals, that are the result of intellectual, artistic, or creative efforts. In non-traditional society, ownership is protected by patents and copyrights. In certain situations, indigenous peoples have the right to own the genetic traits of plants or animals. If they routinely groom or “manage” wild stocks of plants or animals, it is likely the stocks have unique genetic characteristics — the indigenous peoples have the rights to those unique plant or animal traits.

HELP PRESERVE CUSTOMARY TRADITIONAL RIGHTS

All indigenous communities have a series of assumed or customary rights and privileges. These

are termed “traditional rights to resources.” Because they are assumed, they are not recorded anywhere. These can be traditional rights of way, hunting rights, fishing rights, dress, ceremonies, and a host of other rights and privileges that are so much a part of everyday life that the people using them no longer think about them.

Many, but certainly not all countries, allow indigenous peoples to exercise these rights. In most countries, these traditional rights are allowed under certain conditions. In the past, when these rights have been challenged, many indigenous groups simply lost the rights. Best practices, encourage all stakeholders and participants to discuss and try to find ways to accommodate the rights that allow access to traditional resources.

In a few cases, these challenges have been heard in courts of law. Most of the rights are to some form of land ownership or land access. In indigenous communities there is little likelihood that there will be legal documentation of these rights, so the local communities are at a distinct disadvantage. Several countries have formally recognized these rights but require demonstration of continued and constant use of the access. Sometimes this is not an accurate way of depicting the need to have access. Furthermore, evidence is not often allowed unless it is written.

A recent court decision in Canada (the Delgamuukwa decision) recognized the use of traditional legends, song, and performance as evidence of the existence of these uses. The decision of the court further recognized that the right to the resources did not require continuous unbroken occupation of the area. If the area was used periodically and on a regular basis, and this was recognized in the stories, songs or other traditional means of conveying information, then the court ruling was that the rights should be acknowledged.

NGO *GUIDELINE #7:* **BE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

USE TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE ON THEIR TERMS

Traditional knowledge comes from experience in nature, from teaching and apprenticeship, from working with the land, by absorbing the feel of wild animals and plants, and by listening to legends and stories. Traditional knowledge is a way of life. The most effective way to use traditional knowledge is to request help solving the problem — not just to ask for the data. In this way, the traditional knowledge expert is bringing his or her own understanding to bear on the problem. This wisdom may bring a swifter solution than simply providing information.

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN ANCIENT AND MODERN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Be sure to distinguish carefully between ancient traditional knowledge — passed down from generation to generation — and modern traditional knowledge — acquired in present-day circumstances. Ancient traditional knowledge is often more spiritually oriented. An argument is developing in some countries that there actually is a distinction between sacred and secular traditional knowledge. This is not consistent with indigenous traditional knowledge, but it is often true of other forms of traditional knowledge. In this view, there is “empirical knowledge” acquired from experience, and “belief” acquired through spiritual teachings. Be careful to understand that the traditional knowledge has its own context and can

not necessarily be transferred directly to a western framework.

ENGAGING HOLDERS OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

If possible, get traditional knowledge experts to participate in round-table or equal status discussions. They can be part of the research effort, using their knowledge to find answers. Ask if the local community would like assistance in establishing the worth of traditional knowledge advice so that a monetary value, or some other form of compensation, can be assigned to the traditional knowledge. One approach is to suggest Elders and other people who hold traditional knowledge be paid in the same way as scientific professionals, establishing payment of royalties, and many other financial aspects. Another is to suggest that the community consider other forms of compensation, such as training programs, building of schools, hospitals, or the assistance of other specialists. As a transfer executive or expert in some other field, your membership in an NGO can be valuable as source of information when the local people encounter resistance or outright rejection by the proponent of the request to pay for knowledge.

Be careful not to fall into several traps. A superficial understanding of traditional knowledge does not provide the enough capacity to use the knowledge effectively, and may cause problems.

The second trap to avoid is being fooled by poor quality traditional knowledge. Not all sources of traditional knowledge within the

community are high quality. The community members can tell you who is good and who is not so good if you ask for help in understanding who you should rely on. Always ask the questions in a positive manner, not a negative one. For example ask who you should see to solve a particular question, not who you should avoid.

Thirdly, translations may miss nuances of meaning that are important. Young people may do the translating, and may not have the maturity to know what they are missing. If possible, have a second person translate it back to the Elder who spoke the knowledge. The Elder can then correct any misinterpretations. Many Elders say that you can never know the traditional ways unless you speak the language. This implies that the better the translation, the better will be the understanding of the traditional knowledge being imparted or shared.

DEVELOP AND PROMOTE A CODE OF PRACTICE

Staff members and volunteers of NGOs may not have had experience inter-acting with indigenous peoples. It may also be that they are not well aware of the ancestral domains, traditional rights to resources, or the special ways in which local community make decisions when asked to share traditional knowledge.

Consider using these guidelines as the basis for creating a draft code of conduct that you can share with the indigenous peoples for suggestions and ideas for improvement. Let them know you are doing this to help them work with you. Suggest that your organization will adopt the final draft as official government policy when dealing with indigenous peoples.

NGO *GUIDELINE #8:* **ENCOURAGE THE INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN FINDING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS**

WORK TOWARDS MEANINGFUL CONSULTATION

NGOs are sometimes included in the table of participants in an official capacity. Because support or advocacy NGOs may not have any real stake in a particular project, it not appropriate for most NGOs be considered a formal stakeholder. The role of NGOs is usually as a special interest group, bringing special expertise in one focused area. These organizations are often simply informed and are not part of the intimate dialogue of the project, but are part of the public dialogue.

This is not true for NGOs that have been formed specifically to represent communities, nor is it true of NGOs that have invested financial resources in the project. If you have some real stake in the project, and can demonstrate it, do not accept being informed rather than being involved and consulted. If there is a clear indication that the parties are not prepared to involve your group, and it does have the right to be involved, you may be forced to fall back on legal approaches or use the media to gather public attention and force a higher-level of participation.

Use this route carefully; confrontation of this sort almost never has clear winners.

ENHANCE THE CREDIBILITY OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Increasingly, traditional knowledge is included in environmental assessments or impact statements. Development project planning is also beginning to be interested in alternative knowledge bases. This is a wonderful development from the perspective of indigenous peoples, but it may be a problem for proponents and regulatory bodies if they do not know how to deal with the requirement. NGOs can play a prominent role not only in encouraging the inclusion of traditional knowledge in assessments and in project development, planning, and implementation, but also in providing guidance on how this is best accomplished..

Care should be taken that the NGO does not mistakenly allow itself to be seen to possess or represent traditional knowledge. NGOs that are formed by indigenous peoples are the only organizations that truly have this capacity.

OPEN DOOR NEGOTIATIONS INCLUDING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ARE BEST

Occasionally, proponents will carry out closed door, or private negotiations in key areas while excluding community representatives. This often happens during government-to-proponent negotiations in which permits, regulations, or licenses are set out. Both advocacy and

representational NGOs can take a role in encouraging an open-door policy during these discussions.