

COALITION FOR ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
Sustainable Cultures – Cultures of Sustainability

BACKGROUND PAPER 20

by

Ville-Veikko Hirvelä

Building Indigenous Life on Earth

1. People live indigenously by finding within Earth's own regeneration what they need for their life.

People are thus able to use the wild surroundings of the Earth as indigenous home /abode of human life upon the Earth without displacing Earth's own life.

By surviving widely on Earth's natural regeneration, indigenous communities cause least climate change, biodiversity loss or pollution, etc.

Indigenous ways to understand, treat and use the Earth have not caused global environmental crisis even during the millenniums.

The displacement of the indigenous ways to understand, treat, use and manage the Earth by the modern ways (applying the so called 'science of nature') has led to a serious global environmental crisis in only three centuries.

What is this difference between the indigenous ways to understand, treat and use the Earth, and the modern ways which have caused the global crisis ?

2. How peoples have indigenously prepared Earth's life to be perceptible, has supported the Earth to regenerate in such a way that people can find from Earth's growth things, which make sense as something by which people can live.

Significance through which people can perceive, sense, treat and use the Earth and its growth in such a way, which sustains Earth as source of life, is crucial dimension of people's means of subsistence.

As far as peoples' understanding on what is life and means of life are adapted as integral to the regeneration of Earth's life around them, so far their life and its means are indigenous also for their surroundings.

3. Indigenous means of subsistence have built upon the Earth diverse significance and sense (– perceptibility) for that how Earth can grow also for people such life which can be sustained for millenniums.

Indigenously people have observed in the surroundings such ancestrally created significance and sense-perceptibility which has kept these surroundings as livable for people and they have continued this ancestral creation by building indigenous senses and perceptibility of surrounding things adapted to wild biodiversity, sustaining Earth's life throughout the generations. Indigenous means and ways of life how the Earth and its life are perceived, made sense of, understood and treated, are thus an essential part of that how Earth is sustained with its life and people.

4. People have around the world lived indigenously with Earth's wild growth sustaining it so that people can find how to live within its regeneration.

In most parts of the world before the colonisation, the peoples have lived widely by their own indigenous means of subsistence. Even now the majority on Earth lives by such less commercial, less consuming but more indigenous ways of life which would not cause global crisis if all would live like that. People could continue sustainable life by these means of subsistence which are thus also a most reliable basis of human life and spirit upon the Earth.

Such ways to understand the Earth and to live with it which have been indigenously adapted to Earth's life, have been thus an essential part of what have been Earth's marginalised majority's right to their own means of subsistence.

But majority's indigenous life and its indigenous sense and significance of its surroundings have been displaced by modern life, which displaces Earth's own wild growth of things by modern ordered habitat, production, cultivation and culture.

5. Earth's regeneration as growth of wild biodiversity has become thus now widely displaced by modern homes, cultivations, production and culture - but not by indigenous homes, cultivations, subsistence production and culture as they are adapted to live with wild biodiversity.

Wild growth of Earth's life (forests, plants, etc.) has been itself sustained as indigenous human home, cultivation and abode of ancestral creation of surroundings.

(People have earlier treated the wild forest as their home, cultivating within the wild growth of the vegetation, building the human culture as an integral part of the regeneration of wild forest and people have been living thus for millenniums in a sustainable way.)

We need to search how to get again the surrounding Earth, atmosphere, growth and movement of animals and vegetation to mean life for all living beings; also for people.

6. As "in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence", it need to be ensured that indigenous people shall not be deprived of their own indigenous, locally sustained means of life which are their fundamental human right (under the international human rights covenants and UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples). Integral to their indigenous means of subsistence, we shall also "protect and encourage customary use of biological resources" and "knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities, embodying... the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity" (UN Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 8 (a) and (j) and 10 (c) & (d).)

To stop that displacement of their sustainable life, which leads to environmental collapse, we need to strengthen the rights of Earth (of land, forest, water, air and their living beings) to be treated by ways and understandings, which are indigenously adapted to Earth's life.

7. Modern culture and its 'science of nature' have developed most measurements and methods to understand how we should treat and save the 'nature' - and still, it is this culture with all these its measurements and methods, which has brought most global destruction of the environment. What is wrong with the modern educated ('scientific') ways to perceive, understand and treat the environment as they lead to displacement of Earth's own sustainable wild growth, with whose regeneration people have been indigenously able to live with ?

With all its growing data on nature the modern world seems increasingly unable to stop its destruction of the Earth. It searches even the solutions only from options of continuing to expand the technical measures of commodification - which is the source of the threatening over-consumption.

People who have most modern education on 'science' of 'nature', on biology and ecology are consuming the most and destroy environment the most.

But people who do not have such modern rules or knowledge of laws of ecology or biology are able to live more sustainably in practice.

How are indigenous ways of understanding and treating Earth's life more sustainable than our modern ways of understanding, treating or preserving the environment ?

8. There is a rich diversity of indigenous heritages and means of life, where people have adapted to live as part of Earth's own wild regeneration – not through modern bio-/ecological education but rather - as far as they give / contribute something from themselves to the significance of the Earth.

Things which people indigenously need to live, are found from the wild regeneration of the surrounding environment by people's own work which builds significance to that how these things take place upon the Earth.

Modern life however does not live with this Earth's wild growth, but displaces it, treating it as mere 'natural' resource to be a reserve and manipulatively processed and consumed to the significance of such other things, which are seen to be more 'proper' (than Earth's own growth) for life of modern consumers to live with.

9. What is indigenously own for people's life is not exchangeable property for them.

What people can find in surrounding Earth's regeneration as renewable source for what signifies their life - is life of their land in a sense how they belong to the life of that land, rather than in a sense of owning or controlling the land.

The way how land is their own land, means that how they belong to that land rather than that how land would belong to them as owned or controlled (commercial) property – 'proper' for being consumed /exchanged.

"We... do not believe that land is mine or personal. It belongs to everyone, because it...is everyone 's mother" (Kalawati, Gond woman)."One's belongings must not weigh more than one can carry" (saying in Abujh Mad).

Earth belongs equally also to all living beings (plants, trees, animals, etc.) who are all sisters from the same Mother.

Indigenous justice by which Adivasis have sustained the Earth and its wild growth of forests, has not been based on rights to live on Earth being determined by pieces of paper (ownership documents, formal addresses of land titles, etc.).

Rather the indigenous justice to live the life of the wild forest is based on that how such life and use of wilds have not been restricted by formal ownership control and its such pieces of paper (created by commercial and bureaucratic demands).

For indigenous justice everyone is free to use the Earth, forest and water for basic needs of life - without any ownership control or administration restricting this justice to live on Earth. "We had laws neither for ourselves, nor for the animals. We and all forms of life were free to roam the forests and to sustain ourselves". (Indu Netam, Gond Adivasi woman).

"We have the feeling that forest is our mother and mother will protect and provide everything. But today we are made to believe that forest does not belong to us and it belongs to the forest department." (Jenukuruba J.P. Raju).

10 . What is currently perceived as 'proper' for modern life, undermines indigenous senses and perceptibility of things by consuming the significance which they have brought to the world without giving any significance back to the things in return.

Those ways to perceive, understand or use Earth's growth, by which people have adapted their life to be part of Earth's wild regeneration, have not been based on education of modern biology/ecology, but rather on giving widening significance to that how Earth itself grows and brings up life.

World's various heritages which have been sustainable as indigenously adapted to live in dialogue with the land, forest, water, trees, plants, stones, etc., bring to these some significance from themselves.

It shows us that and how people can live more by significance which they bring to (be found in) the world and not by what they consume from the world.

Modern world however consumes by its means of life and production also such significance of the Earth, atmosphere and life within them, which indigenous life has brought upon the Earth.

11. How Earth, sky, sunlight, water and living beings are now sensed and perceptible around us for our senses, lives (is inherited and animated) from that how our ancestors have sensed them to signify.

Ancestors have left to Earth's perceptibility the traces of their initiatives what has made the world able to be observed, sensed and significant for us. Such ancestral intentions and initiatives continue indigenously to signify in our surrounding environment.

Ancestral heritage has helped the Earth to grow in such ways that we can find upon it what we need. And we have lived indigenously in a balanced dialogue with this surrounding ancestral significance.

Indigenous cultures have been able to observe, sense and treat all surroundings with significance which lives from that how ancestors have found the surroundings to signify around them.

What is sensed as Earth's sceneries, atmosphere, waters, forests and their growth, derives from what is inherited from ancestors or what has taken place upon the Earth long ago. Many

indigenous heritages consider that in earlier time, the Earth, the ancestors or spirits were transformed to currently prevailing landforms, plants, animals etc.

"Like we, also the trees and animals are brothers and sisters of a common mother. They have existed from time immemorial, when everything was just beginning. They are all from that time and we are also with them" (Kalawati, Gond woman).

12. Indigenous life and understanding provide significance to Earth's life and surroundings, supporting them in those forms in which Earth itself brings them up.

Indigenous life continues to create / bring significance upon the Earth for Earth's own growth / life and to make thus its significance (of the Earth, its life, atmosphere, etc.) to grow.

People can thus live by finding with Earth's growth things to signify further something livable surrounding them - changing Earth's things minimally in causal sense.

Indigenous Baiga myth says: "All the kingdoms of the world ... may fall to pieces, but he who is made of Earth... shall never forsake it. He will make his living from the earth, dig roots and eat them... But one must not tear the breasts of Mother Earth with the plough". This view defined the role of those indigenous people upon the Earth as "guardians of the forest and soil".

Similarly many indigenous peoples have lived mostly by Earth's own regeneration of its life of plants, trees, waters, animals treating these as their sisters, ancestors or otherwise equal beings, not displacing or exchanging them to artificial products like commercial modern world does.

Those forms of Earth's life and surroundings, in which things grow from the Earth, are thus (searched and) provided significance of being (observed, sensed, used and) lived with.

13. People can perceive, understand and treat the Earth and its growth as home and ancestral creation/cultivation for which people's life can provide further renewal - by giving from people's life further sense/significance to that how surroundings can be further perceived and sustained. Surrounding landforms, places, plants and animals are perceived as what ancestors have found, identified and shaped to be around us perceptible as what they are now perceived to be. (For example each patch of cultivated hill forest can be sensed as inhabited and animated by an ancestral spirit, whose intentions help the land to grow its crops in accordance with the quality of the hill.)

Things carry their meaning as footprints and echo from the events how their significance has found their space upon the Earth through ancestral life.

Indigenous life lives in such dialogue with ancestral surroundings, where it provides for them further significance of present life to all what the Earth carries upon itself.

"We are part of all our ancestors... the stone is also my ancestor" as well as the river, mountain, etc. "You should learn to be part of the stone, the tree, the jungle". (Raimotin, Gond Adivasi woman)

People give thus something from their life to the ancestral sense/significance of things around them – to that how the stone is stone, the mountain is mountain, river is river, etc. - bringing more livable significance to become found in that how our surroundings take place.

Our modern understanding and its 'science of nature' denies this - saying that you do not need to - and you can not and should not - add anything from yourself to that how stone is what stone is.

(And that without giving anything from yourself to that significance how stone is a stone, you would have right to sense, use and consume that ready-made significance what stones are – even through changing and exchanging all stones for your other purposes. As we thus deny the tasks how we should bring some significance to land, forest, water, stone etc., we just consume the significance which is there as already available on Earth as inherited from our ancestors, but we do not give anything back.)

Majority of world's peoples have indigenously built and found such meaning and sense for the surrounding environment that is integral for environments' own regeneration - and thus does not displace it like the use of scientific concept and perceptibility of 'nature' have done.

14. Only our modern life has not learned to live by creating, finding or bringing itself to the world wider new significance by which it could live.

The way how the modern world establishes and institutionalises the significance of the Earth, does not thus open up further significance upon the Earth, but rather sucks the significance to become consumed (as 'nature') to the senses of modern life.

Modern life (and understanding) thinks it can not give further significance to that how Earth's life and surroundings are what they are - but provides significance for changing them through presenting them to be in a more original, 'natural' form as being re-organised to be 'proper' for purpose of modern life. (through re-arrangement of 'elemental' matters, molecules, etc.)

Indigenous life defends its rights to continue to treat water, sunlight, trees and wind as our sisters or ancestors, rather than as mere energy, raw-materials or chemical compositions for industrial constructs

15. To be 'proper' for our modern common decisions, things are required to be controlled by modern senses, clarified as perceptible and ready for being consumed by them as exchange-valued properties.

What Earth itself brings up is thus reduced to mere accidental resources for being manipulated through their more 'natural' composition into products for being consumed.

Through this its set-up of 'proper nature', the modern life exploits Earth's wild growth/surroundings from their significance of being the sources for all life to live with. We are taught to live by consuming from the world significance as modified for the modern sense perceptibility and to depend on common consumption of such ready-made 'proper' significance.

(How life grows from the Earth, can not be reduced to any ready-made or controlled significance or senses but opens the way how significance has been ancestrally adapted to Earth's life through millenniums, to be further observed and realised around us.)

Modern common sense is set to treat things as proper thus as commodified for being sensed in modern ways - clarified for and controlled by our modern common affairs' decisions – to be things 'in question' ; that they are what they are why they are – as things which 'matter' for modern understanding (by the physically/chemically/organically controlled, manipulative capacities of the matters of their 'natural composition', etc.).

16. Modern social life depends on materialised consumption of 'proper' things for its common sense perceptibility and understandability - even where there would be no material need for such consumption.

How we can conceive things in question to become easily clarifying for our modern senses, makes often things just more difficult for more sustainable ways of Earth's life.

As indigenous life has provided significance for Earth's own growth to be lived with, this significance becomes however now consumed for other modern purposes which do not sustain Earth's own growth.

Modern practices take away the forms of things, which Earth has given and their indigenously adapted significance and changes them through causal control to the needs of modern consumption. This reduces diverse quite unique locally adapted sources and significance of all Earth's life to cases of geo-biological statistics and raw materials for dead commodified modern mass-product artefacts (of our global elite's modern daily life).

Through material consumption we exploit thus also that significance of world's life, which has been created by others. Modern social life lives as parasite of indigenous significance, transferring it to become consumed to our modern social needs of our global elite life:

Significance is taken from the sustainable life of others to become consumed to such significance for our modern senses, which is set as a condition for treating things of other heritages under modern public consideration in a form which is 'proper' - for our modern life.

17. But before being set into question as 'proper', the surrounding life on Earth already happens to mean - earlier, faster, more open and more internal to things (finding their significance) than that they are, what they are, why they are.

We breathe and sense indigenously our surroundings upon the Earth as signifying earlier, more openly - and more internal to things finding their significance - than that they are what they are why they are.

Things which Earth brings up happen and signify indigenously rather by founding/bringing unique significance to the world than by consuming from the world already-prevailing significance, how things are in question - that they are what they are why they are.

The indigenous significance on Earth takes place as adapted to the locality of all its life. Earth opens thus itself up as such living space for all beings, where each thing finds significance, how it takes place upon the Earth - and people's life builds significance for such localities where some life grows, nurturing them as source and home of what grows there.

This indigenous sense of signifying as locally adapted, is more globally shared, more globally equal and (also socially) more sustainable sense of Earth's significance than the modern or 'scientific' significance (of 'proper' things in question).

What is needed is common space for dialogue of diverse locality-adapted ways of understanding our common Earth and its life.

Indigenous significance of the Earth and its life provide more globally democratic and more commonly shared senses for the consideration and treatment of our common matters of Earth's life than what is 'proper' significance of 'nature' for the modern world.

18. What makes things 'proper' for modern science of 'nature' – that they are what they are why they are – means practically their capacity of being manipulated through causal control or commodification.

Modern world puts the things in question and makes them thus to be like problems to be solved - to make something out of them; directing their identity to become controllable for modern sense.

Whereas modern world appreciates one's competence to get more 'proper' things than others taken away from their earth-grown (commonly accessible) form to become controlled for one's own consumption, many indigenous cultures, have seen rather such a modern 'competence' as a problem or mistake. (For example Paliyans of South India do not see it as just to think one to have expertise, skill or competence by which one would have right to earn more than others. They did not practice storing surplus or profits.)

19. Indeed, the same modern control, whose expansion has led to world's most serious problems, sets all earth-grown things to be in question as if their identity had problem or crisis due to a lack of that same modern control.

This modern practice how things are made to appear being 'in crisis', is a method to legitimise modern control's expansion over the things - and is itself crisis of the modern 'crisis' and its 'control'.

(Things are made to appear being 'in crisis' to legitimise these things to be further overtaken under modern control.)

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