



Concept Paper for an International Seminar-Workshop on Indigenous Studies

Organized by:
Cordillera Studies Center, University of the Philippines Baguio
and Tebtebba Foundation

Rationale:

The encounter between the academe and indigenous peoples oftentimes resembles the encounter between Western Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge. How this dichotomy came about is deeply rooted in the history and philosophy of science that has dominated the University and research activities since the advent of modern history (Age of Enlightenment and Renaissance period in Europe). The intellectual triumph of positivism (based on Newtonian science) since then up to now has indeed defined what valid knowledge is (and what is not). Overall, indigenous knowledge and cosmologies all over the world have been subjected to the Western scientific, rational and modernist “gaze” and rendered them, for the most part, unscientific (i.e., superstitious, irrational, etc.).

In recent years, however, with the crisis in Western/scientific paradigms, the world witnessed an “indigenous turn” or a return to or revisiting knowledges that were considered unscientific, e.g., the return to traditional/indigenous medicine, forest management, agricultural practices and technologies, to name a few. Some indigenous scholars, academics, researchers, and activists have become highly critical of the dominant research frameworks and approaches taught in the academe and used in research work. Arguably, the way indigenous peoples have been used as objects of research has been appropriated by colonizers and ruling elites to justify colonization and domination, contributing to the perpetuation of racism and discrimination against indigenous peoples.

Indigenous researchers and academics thus ventured into doing research of their own situations, using their own epistemologies and world views as starting frameworks. In the process, they have come up with lessons and insights on how research can be done to generate knowledge, which is more relevant and useful for and sensitive to indigenous peoples. In this regard, Tebtebba, established the Indigenous Peoples’ Global Research and Education Network (IPGREN), which brought together indigenous researchers to share their

experiences and insights on how to do research in more participatory and culturally-sensitive ways.

In recent years, some universities provided space for a field called Indigenous Studies, seemingly privileging the "indigenous" as a legitimate category of inquiry. Indigenous academics, especially in the developed countries, pushed for the establishment of indigenous studies in their universities. There are now several indigenous studies centers in universities in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and in the Arctic.

There are also universities and colleges established, run and managed by indigenous peoples, sometimes with the support of government, sometimes set up independently. Examples of these are the Sami University College in Norway and the indigenous universities set up in Latin America. The creation of spaces within the academe for cross-cultural and intercultural learning has led to more in-depth discussions and use of indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies. It bears noting that some academics from the dominant populations still view this phenomenon with a "methodical distance" if not skepticism.

The University of the Philippines Baguio (UPB) has expressed its commitment to studying issues confronting indigenous peoples and communities, particularly those inhabiting the Cordillera. The establishment of the Cordillera Studies Center (CSC) in June 1980 signifies this commitment. In light of developments in Indigenous Studies in other parts of the world and UP Baguio's efforts in doing Cordillera Studies, it seems a good idea to hold a forum where participants can share experiences and lessons and discuss the critical issues that tend to unsettle scholars, researchers, and practitioners. Is the dichotomy between Western Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge a true dichotomy? Can one think "scientifically" and yet be open to an indigenous worldview? Does the adoption of Western epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies really entail the wholesale rejection of their indigenous counterparts and vice-versa? Or, is the indigenous way of knowing also a valid way of knowing in addition to the western way?

While cognizant of the limitations of Western Knowledge, many mainstream academics and researchers wonder whether the adoption of an indigenous worldview is still possible for one trained in Western-based knowledge systems, especially for one not generally considered an "indigenous person." Can a non-indigenous person do indigenous studies? What happens when the indigenous becomes the center of study by academics, advocates and activists? How can indigenous peoples and academics work together to enhance the dialogue, cross-fertilization and connections between indigenous, traditional knowledge systems and scientific knowledge?

What are the emerging indigenous (non-Western) epistemologies? Are they changing and challenging the ways of knowing the world? These fundamental questions had challenged and inspired the organizers to gather prominent scholars, advocates and activists to a seminar-workshop on indigenous studies. What lessons have indigenous researchers learned in pursuing their research activities with their own communities?

Theme: “Reflections on Indigenous Studies and Research: Taking stock of lessons from the field”

The “lessons” referred to in the proposed theme are those pertaining to the theoretical, advocacy, and policymaking aspects of indigenous studies and research. The expected participants are scholars, advocates, researchers, activists, practitioners, and policymakers.

Aim of the conference: to provide a venue where a **select group** of local and foreign scholars, indigenous scholars, researchers and educators, advocates, activists, policymakers, and practitioners can engage in **provocative** discussions and **fruitful** exchanges on the subject of indigenous studies. The discussions will revolve around contentious issues in the field of indigenous studies and research to advancing the field.

Conference Design:

- Plenary discussions to allow more productive interaction and sharing among participants/separate concurrent sessions are discouraged.
- Active involvement of participants from different continents.
- Participants: indigenous scholars, researchers, educators and activists; academe (scholars), government (policymakers), and other practitioners.
- Film showing in the evenings.

Expected Output:

- A publication (i.e., book) containing papers presented; an articulation of agreements and disagreements; and identified best practices or strategies or guides in advancing indigenous studies and research.

Proposed Program: A three (3)-day activity:

Session No. 1: “Overview of the Field: Perspectives and Experiences from different regions, e.g., Africa, Pacific, Asia, Arctic, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America

INDIGENOUS STUDIES as a DISCIPLINE: Is indigenous studies an academic discipline in its own right? Does it stand on solid ground as a discipline? Integrity of indigenous studies as an academic discipline; melding scholarship norms with the indigenous experience; interrogating the notion of indigeneity vis-a-vis scientific evidence; lessons on decolonizing research.

Papers under this session may tackle any or a combination of any of the following topics:

- Experiences, challenges, and lessons in establishing and maintaining indigenous studies programs and indigenous universities (academe, NGO and IPO) and research work done by indigenous scholars and activists
- The nature of indigenous studies
- Methodologies which are indigenous peoples-sensitive and use of worldviews of

- indigenous peoples as part of theoretical frameworks
- Historical and intellectual underpinnings of indigenous studies/indigenous peoples' movements
- Indigenous studies as a global discipline?
- Indigenous rights advocacy as global advocacy?
- Clarification of key concepts and ideas: What is "indigenous studies"?; "Who are the indigenous peoples?"; indigenism, traditionalism, nativism, ethnonationalism, etc.
- Why conduct "indigenous studies"?
- Decolonizing research
- The multiple site/loci of knowledge production

Session No. 2: "Revisiting the key underpinnings of Indigenous Studies and IP advocacy"

- "Land is life," land is identity
- Indigenous worldview as collectivist/community-oriented worldview
- Time immemorial possession of land
- Spirituality and respect for ancestors
- Indigenous peoples as stewards of the environment

Session No. 3: "Indigenous Ways of Knowing"

This session privileges and at the same time interrogates, indigenous ways of knowing. It tackles the fundamental questions:

1. What are the indigenous ways of knowing? How is indigenous knowledge known?
2. What are the elements of an indigenous worldview?
3. What are the ethical issues and norms in doing research on/with indigenous peoples?
4. Are there indigenous research methodologies OR culture-sensitive research methodologies? What are these?

Sub-topics:

- The indigenous experience vis-a-vis relevant topics of interest: knowledge systems, legal systems, human rights, material culture, climate change, environmental studies, violence against women, sustainable development, etc.
- Identifying and/or formulating culturally-sensitive/culturally-responsive; context-relevant; and "intergenerational" practices or solutions
- Conducting research with/on indigenous peoples: methodological and ethical issues (e.g., conducting health-related work among indigenous peoples; experiences in obtaining free, prior, informed consent of indigenous peoples in research work)
- Accessing an indigenous community's worldview: linguistics, psychology, dealing with genealogies and narratives, etc.
- Accessing indigenous ways of knowing
- Issues of internal and external validity and Indigenous Knowledge

Session No. 4: The Role of Intellectuals in advancing Indigenous Peoples' Studies

This session problematizes the notions of positionality, agency versus structure, the relationships among intellectuals, indigenous movements and social change.

- THE INDIGENOUS PERSON AS ACADEMIC, RESEARCHER and ADVOCATE
- THE ADVOCATE AS ACADEMIC and the ACADEMIC AS ADVOCATE: mixing scholarship norms with a pro-indigenous peoples orientation
- THE NON-INDIGENOUS PERSON AS PRACTITIONER, ADVOCATE, and/or THEORIST: Can non-indigenous persons conduct indigenous studies?
- CRITIQUING THE DISCOURSE OF INDIGENEITY: What constitutes the discourse of indigeneity produced by indigenous scholars? What are the directions taken by indigenous scholars in their writings about indigenous topics and how do these directions exemplify the issues and concerns that confront indigenous scholars? What frameworks of analyses have been deployed by indigenous scholars in their writings about indigenous topics and how do these frameworks characterize these scholars' positions on indigenous issues?
- ISSUES OF AUTHENTICITY: How do we deal with "invented traditions/indigeneities"?
- ISSUES concerning APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGIES: What approaches have been used in the study of indigenous concerns and what benefits have been produced by the use of these approaches? What other approaches and methodologies may be explored to produce more benefits for indigenous communities and to account for their changing circumstances?

Session No. 5: "STUDIES that changed the World"

This session looks into the transformative roles of research, education and training on indigenous peoples and the roles these played in relation to policy reforms. It shall grapple with the questions:

1. How has research, education and training on and by indigenous peoples influenced policy, development theory and practice at various levels of society (local, national and global)?
2. What are the best practices on Indigenous Studies, and why are they considered "best practices?"
3. What have been the practical and theoretical impacts of these studies?
4. What has been achieved so far in the dialogues, cross-fertilization processes and establishment of connections between diverse knowledge systems (e.g., indigenous/traditional knowledge systems and the scientific knowledge system)?. What needs to be done to enhance these dialogues and effectively influence policies and change mindsets?

Sub-topics:

- Research, Policy and Governance
- Research and Community Empowerment
- Research and the Indigenous Peoples' Movements
- Training and Education for Empowerment

Session No. 6: “The Way Forward”

- Rapporteur’s synthesis reports (covers previous days’ discussions)
- Identification of guiding principles; best practices (in research and theorizing, policymaking, and advocacy); strategies for advancing indigenous studies in the areas of theorizing, policymaking, advocacy, and practice, when dealing with the state
- Articulation of agreements and disagreements
- Participants’ validation