



HUMAN RIGHT ORGANISATION INCOMINDIOS SWITZERLAND LAUNCHES A NEW WEBSITE: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

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During the last few years human rights organisation Incomindios Switzerland has focused on the opportunities and challenges Indigenous Peoples face in the Information Society. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become one of the shaping forces of the society and offer Indigenous Peoples new ways for cultural self-expression and networking. At the same time many Indigenous Peoples are affected by the digital divide and are not being able to profit from these technologies. More often than not Indigenous peoples find themselves in an „information gap“.

Indigenous Peoples represent 80-90% of the cultural diversity of the world. They speak 4000-5000 of the existing 7000-8000 languages. 80% of the still remaining areas of biological diversity are located in Indigenous lands. Indigenous traditional knowledge e.g. of forestry, water resource management and sustainable agriculture has preserved the biological diversity of all living forms for thousands of years. Despite, or perhaps because of the rich cultural heritage and natural resources Indigenous Peoples are often target of economic exploitation, constantly struggle for their human rights and belong to the most marginalized peoples of the world.

ICTs can be seen as an opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to build their own information networks and better coordinate their political work on a global scale. Moreover ICTs contribute to the human rights work done by Indigenous Peoples by enabling better participation in affairs concerning Indigenous communities. On the other hand culturally appropriate ICT use strengthens cultural identity – local content in Indigenous languages, such as radio programs, helps to promote and preserve Indigenous languages and the diversity of Indigenous cultures.

Incomindios and its Indigenous partners, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), have been able to initiate several projects aiming at bridging the digital divide. On the way a great deal of expert knowledge has been gathered.

The new website “Indigenous Peoples in the Information Society” is a comprehensive source of information for experts, practitioners, policy makers and students interested in the thematics.

- The introductory articles outline the opportunities and challenges the Information Society poses for Indigenous Peoples. They take a look at the work of Indigenous representatives at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and introduce different Indigenous ICT initiatives.
- The website contains a collection of position and background papers written by Indigenous representatives during the WSIS process and its follow up. The papers discuss themes such as capacity building, traditional knowledge in the Information society and Indigenous ethics.
- Different studies, articles and reports about Indigenous Peoples in the information society offer further reading on the thematics.
- A collection of links on Indigenous ICT organisations and other actors in the information society leads to further sources of information.