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Engaging the Unengaged: Building inclusive development through a meaningful civil society participation

Tuesday 29 October 2024, 10h30 to 12h30

Transcript of the statement by Ms. Aehshatou Manu,
Mbororo Indigenous Peoples

Thank you so much,

I am very delighted to be on this panel today. Coming from a marginalized community and representing the indigenous people, it is a pleasure for me to share with you some important points which we think are very relevant when we talk about the unengaged in these processes.

I will start by defining development as a process that results in growth, positive change, progress or in addition, in physical, economic, environment and social and democratic components to an existing system or environment.

Most of the time, we realize that the indigenous people for example, not excluding the youths and the women, and also persons with disability are often excluded of these processes and sometimes are imposed development. When we talk of inclusive development, it should be equitable development approach, which build on the understanding that every individual and community of all diverse identities and experiences are instrumental in the transformation of their own society in which they live. Their engagement throughout their interior development process leads to the outcomes and if these people are not involved, we will not have the result that we want, so nothing for us without us. Inclusive development is therefore important and essential for the growth of all. Marginalized communities remain excluded from these processes, processes designed to improve their lives, which means that sometimes, what we understand by development is not what these communities often understand as development.

For example, from a minority community or a marginalized community where I belong, I belong to the Mbororo Pastoralists community to be precise, and we are people who live from one area to the other, we live in nomadic lifestyle. You cannot come to these communities and bring your own development without asking them what they understand as development, and most of the times, that is why we see that projects and programs are failing, because these communities are not consulted from the base to understand what are their priorities and how they should align themselves with this concept of development, in order for them to understand and accept what the investors or the government is bringing to them.

So, in a nutshell, unengaged includes indigenous people, women, persons with disability, youth, ending minority group among others, the importance of meaningful participation is very critical,

because we cannot talk of designing programs or projects without involving these people and this has to be with the respect of their free, prior and informed consent, which is their FPIC, and also the bottom-top approach, because if we are talking of development it should come from the grassroot. My colleagues have already shared on that, so I will not emphasize on that.

I would also want to say that communities are actively involved, and they are most likely to support and sustain this initiative if they are included from the beginning, that is from the inception of the projects. They need to be as well included from the diverse group to enrich the process and to make sure that the development that we all seek is going to be sustainable.

The role of civil society is critical because civil society plays the role of an arbitrary between the communities and the government and also the developmental institutions. They are a key actor and these communities sometimes believe more in these civil society organizations than their own personal governments, this is because there is that lack of trust which sometimes has led to issues. So, engaging these communities through civil society as well is critical because civil society works with these communities on daily basis, while sometimes the government can just come in, or all these international organizations can just come in just to fulfill what they want to fulfill to ensure that at the international level they have acquired what they want, but at the grassroot level there is no result, there is no impact.

Some important elements that we need to take into consideration is also building capacity of these communities. We need to build their capacities in order for them to engage in their discussions and be involved in the process and also ensure that we decentralize these processes and not just talk at the international level or national level, but also talk at the grassroot level to ensure that everyone is included and also taking their opinions and views of how they understand this development.

The government, civil society, the private sector, everyone has a role to play in ensuring this. So, when it comes to barriers that do not allow people to be part of this development processes, we can talk of lack of information. These communities live in areas where there is no Internet, there is no connectivity at all, I would take the case of Africa where I come from, sometimes the information is not reached to them, so how do we ensure that this information is reached out to these communities so that they can be actors of the of the development ?

We also have issues related to language and cultural barriers because some of these meetings for example are in English and indigenous people most of the time do not speak English or French, which are official languages, they speak the language, and we do not have interpretation in those local languages. So, how do we ensure that we bring in the interpretation to ensure that these people also understand the discussion and contribute to the discussion?

We also have financial constraints that arise. Most of these people don't have the capacity to travel to certain areas to participate, so how do we ensure that we bring this discussion to their own level, because we cannot travel, we cannot sponsor everyone to travel but at least if we go to the community we will have a greater impact. So, bringing this discussion at the community level is very important if we want to ensure that we have what we want.

They are often excluded also from political arenas because they do not have the capacity or do not belong to political parties because they feel like they have not been involved from the beginning, so how do we ensure that to bring, we encourage them to be part of these processes

and also be in the political arena and be at the decision making tables ? Those are things that we need to look at to ensure that we talk of concrete solutions.

One thing we can also discuss is ensuring we have community-led consultations, which is important. I would take a simple example where we had the Pygmies, who are also indigenous people and a development organization came in to construct modern houses to these communities and it was a total failure because at the end of the day these people did not go and live in those houses, because they have their way of life, they have their livelihoods and you cannot think that you will remove them from their traditional home to put them in your modernity just like that. It was a total failure, so how do we ensure that when we are bringing these development projects, it aligns with their livelihoods, their identity, their way of life, their cultures, their values? How do we ensure all these things are taken into consideration when we are talking of development?

We also need to establish representatives at advisory committees, making sure that they are part of the Working Group. How do we ensure that at least we have a representative from these unengaged communities, speaking on behalf of these communities at that Working Group.

Those are some of the things I would suggest and also to ensure that we create global platforms where they can come together with the different international agencies, the UN agencies and also have a space where they can sit together and also, particularly from the global South, bringing the global South to the podium as well to ensure that we have just society and equitable platform where we can all discuss and align our development, to ensure that we all respect what we want to achieve at the end of the day.

We also understand that the private sector has a role to play. Some of them have a lot of money, but they need to come to these communities to ensure that the initiatives are driven in a community manner in a way that these communities can contribute efficiently to the to the process.

I would also say that we need to amplify the voices of these unengaged people, to ensure that we have them at the national, regional and global level and that their concerns are presented in policy discussions.

This is what I would say to conclude my presentation by saying that engaging the unengaged is essential to building a future that is equitable and inclusive. It requires deliberate efforts to overcome existing barriers and ensure that civil society diverse voices are central to the government process.

Thank you so much.