

Sayyaad Soltani, Kuhi Sub-tribe of the Qashqai Nomadic Pastoralists of Iran

For the first three days of my visit to Kuala Lumpur, I attended the Global Biodiversity Forum. With the rest of my team, I attended the workshop on Poverty, Livelihoods, and Biodiversity. During this workshop, we divided into various groups and discussed these issues. These group discussions were a good place for learning about different livelihoods, for example, I did not know much about indigenous fisher folks and forest dwellers and the fact that there are other mobile peoples besides pastoralists. I became aware of the difficulties of other mobile peoples in that their problems are very similar to the problems of us pastoralists. In the same way that our pastures, including our summering and wintering ground and migratory routes, are being destroyed, developed and taken from us, the land or sea resources of other mobile peoples are also being destroyed and degraded.

Another very important lesson for me was to get a clearer understanding of participatory management approaches. We, mobile pastoralist, at one time had full control of our resources. With the participation of the elders of our tribe and sub-tribes, we managed the pastures and with our participatory management approach we were able to live side by side with the wildlife. We were able to save the rich biodiversity of our land. Unfortunately, today we have little control over our livelihood and our natural resources. What I would like to do is to revive the traditional management systems of pastoralists in Iran. I would like to mobilize first, my own tribe, the Qashqai, and later involve other tribes such as the Bakhtiari, Sangsari, the Lors, etc., I would like to approach our government and try to make them understand that the livelihoods of pastoralists is dependent on the natural resources, and that the management of the resources should be entrusted to us. We can demonstrate that with our traditional management approach not only would we improve the biological diversity of our natural environment, but also improve our own livelihoods and reduce poverty among our peoples.

What was very important for me at the COP 7 was my involvement with WAMIP, the World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples, of which I am one of the Steering Committee members. This Alliance was formed at the World Parks Congress in September in Durban, South Africa. It was decided in Durban that WAMIP would have its second general meeting at the COP 7 in Malaysia, during which organizational structure of WAMIP would be developed. During the 11 days that I attended the COP 7, WAMIP met everyday and sometimes two or three times in one day. There were 5 Steering Committee members and several support people. During our meetings we discussed a range of issues including WAMIP organisational structure, its membership structure, WAMIP steering committee, and we were also able to write a constitution/by laws. We are hoping to register WAMIP as an international organization in Switzerland and hope to attend various international meetings such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York in May 2004, as well as the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations in July and the UN Working Group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September. We based our discussions on the findings of a consultancy hired by WAMIP in December 2003.

One very important lesson I have learned from our WAMIP meetings is that we, mobile indigenous peoples of various backgrounds, must be very united. Mobile indigenous peoples must come together and learn from each other's experiences, and learn about various modes of migration. I think it is very important to learn about our traditional management approaches. For example, let us say that one mobile community engages in hunting and killing of wildlife. If we learn from another mobile community that instead of hunting wildlife they co-exist with wildlife, and they can benefit financially from various alternative money generating approaches such as tourism, perhaps the first tribe can also follow the footsteps of the latter group and begin to earn money from the preservation of wildlife and not destruction of wildlife.

Another very exciting event was the fact that WAMIP was much more involved with the indigenous peoples and the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB). Due to some misunderstandings and perhaps lack of coordination and communication, the mobile indigenous peoples and the indigenous peoples had some initial difficulty in collaborating. But after several meetings and discussions, we came to the conclusion that with better communication and coordination, we can have better collaboration and work closely in the future. WAMIP is very excited about this initiative and we truly hope to improve our relationship with the indigenous folks while also attending each other's meetings.

My overall perception from this whole experience is to become more united not only with other mobile indigenous peoples, but also with the indigenous groups, and with those who are supportive of our cause. I would like to thank you for the financial support you offered for me to attend this very important meeting in Malaysia. I am planning to take my experience back to my people and my tribe and to work toward improving our livelihoods while conserving biological diversity of our environment.

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