



Good Practices

Indigenous wisdom and knowledge at the Indigenous Intercultural University – Itinerant Indigenous Chair

Record of a good practice of German International Cooperation

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Indigenous wisdom and knowledge at the Indigenous Intercultural University: Itinerant Indigenous Chair

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*'Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, traditional sports and games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property rights over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions'*¹

Summary

The Indigenous Intercultural University (UII) is a regional initiative promoted by the Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (hereinafter referred to as the 'Indigenous Peoples Fund'), which is supported by various international partners, including the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH². The initiative aims to contribute to the formation of qualified indigenous professionals with leadership skills, capable of using an intercultural perspective to undertake coordination, participation and decision-making tasks related to the political, economic and social organisation of their respective societies.³

The UII is an international network set up five years ago with the participation of ten universities. It now consists of 22 universities (2010) in ten countries in Latin America and one in Spain, and it is still growing. The member universities or academic centres enter into an agreement with the Indigenous Peoples Fund to participate in designing, supporting and/or implementing postgraduate courses on subjects considered priority areas by indigenous peoples and organisations, such as bilingual education, indigenous law and intercultural health.

One of the UII's most innovative features is the inclusion of a module called Cátedra Indígena Itinerante (Itinerant Indigenous Chair – CII), as part of the technical and academic support provided to design postgraduate courses. The CII is an integral part of all the postgraduate courses offered by the UII and is the core component of support provided by GIZ. The purpose of the CII is to bring indigenous experts, leaders and wisdom keepers recognised in their field in their own countries into university classrooms. Using a participatory methodology and intercultural approaches in keeping with the indigenous world view and spirituality, they help develop new concepts, proposals and approaches. The aim is to generate intercultural dialogue and mutual exchange and enrichment and incorporate the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples into different areas of university education. In

other words, the aim is to contribute to the gradual interculturalisation of higher education.

Through the support it provides to the UII and the CII in different areas, German development cooperation works directly with indigenous peoples and organisations. This is due to the fact that the direct partner in the project and the 'political head' and main manager of the UII is the Indigenous Peoples Fund, a bipartite institution formed by representatives of 19 Latin American governments and three European countries (Belgium, Spain and Portugal) and representatives of national and regional Latin American indigenous organisations. Furthermore, each of the postgraduate courses carried out in member universities has been developed with the involvement of and in consultation with relevant indigenous organisations. Lastly, the CII constitutes an innovative experience involving knowledge building and dissemination by the indigenous peoples themselves, with traditional leaders and wisdom keepers as the main actors.

The UII network is growing and generating interest in a number of countries thanks to its alternative approach. To date, programmes have been offered in eight academic areas, and some of the postgraduate courses have already graduated two or three classes. Out of a total of 2,500 applicants, 443 students have enrolled in courses since 2007, the vast majority with scholarships managed by the Indigenous Peoples Fund. A total of 301 people have already graduated and 92 are currently studying. Most of the students are indigenous people, representing over 100 indigenous peoples from 20 countries, and half of them are women.



The Chakana or Inca Cross was chosen as the basis for the CII logo, because it represents the Southern Cross, which is recognised by many indigenous cultures as part of their world view. The symbols of different indigenous cultures are incorporated into this Chakana

¹ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007, webpage: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html> (accessed 8 June 2010).

² The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH was formed on 1 January 2011. It brings together the long-standing expertise of DED, GTZ and InWEnt. For further information, go to www.giz.de.

³ GTZ, offer for the implementation of the UII project, 2004, approved by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) for start-up in 2005.

1. A novel higher education initiative: with and by indigenous peoples

„For decades, the world’s indigenous peoples dreamed of how it would be to have an Indigenous University, a university where indigenous knowledge and wisdom were developed and reassessed, and where their own world views and sense of logic were able to establish an intercultural dialogue and debate with traditional Western knowledge.“⁴

These dreams have begun to come true with the indigenous universities now being established in different countries and with the foundation of the Indigenous Intercultural University (UII) as a regional network of higher education centres brought together by their involvement in one of the Indigenous Peoples Fund’s flagship programmes.

The UII is implemented under the Indigenous Peoples Fund’s Education and Training Programme, which aims to help provide effective, high-quality training to develop indigenous human resources and thereby contribute to improving the living conditions of indigenous peoples through proposals and approaches that they have developed themselves.⁵

The network began with just ten universities in 2007 and now has a total of 26 associated academic centres,⁶ including universities, study centres and research institutes in 13 countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Spain, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela. The universities belonging to the UII, by country, are:

Bolivia

Universidad Mayor de San Simón (UMSS); Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (UASB); Universidad de la Cordillera; Universidad Autónoma Tomás Frías (UATF); Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA)

Brazil

Universidad Federal de Roraima (UFRR); Universidad Federal de Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ); Universidad Estatal de Mato Grosso (UNEMAT)

Chile

Universidad de la Frontera (UFRO)

Colombia

Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural (UAIIN); Universidad del Cauca; Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia (UNAD); Universidad Central

Costa Rica

Universidad de Educación a Distancia (UNED); Universidad para la Paz (UPEACE)

Cuba

Universidad de la Habana

Ecuador

Universidad Amawtay Wasi (UAW); Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO-EC)

Spain

Universidad Carlos III

Guatemala

Universidad Rafael Landívar (URL)

Mexico

Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS)

Nicaragua

Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe de Nicaragua (URACCAN); Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU)

Perú

Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM); Universidad Nacional San Antonio Abad de Cuzco (UNSAAC)

Venezuela

Universidad Simón Bolívar (en proceso de incorporarse)

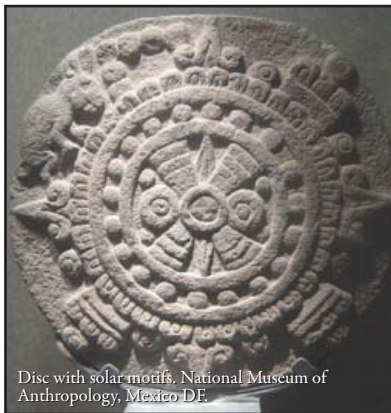
For many of these universities, being part of the network involves designing and implementing an intercultural post-graduate course which aims to meet the demands of indigenous peoples and organisations. This work is carried out in conjunction with representatives of the CII and regional indigenous organisations. Other universities participate by providing academic support and carrying out exchanges, tutorials and other activities. Some universities have signed an agreement expressing their interest in the UII and are potential spaces for extension of the network, although their involvement so far has been limited. The UII offers courses lasting from three months to two years in:

- Intercultural bilingual education
- Intercultural health
- Indigenous rights
- Governance, indigenous peoples, human rights and international cooperation
- Development with identity for communitarian well being - good living
- Linguistic and cultural revitalisation
- Good governance and public administration with indigenous perspective
- Indigenous women’s leadership

⁴ Indigenous Peoples Fund, UII-GTZ, Indigenous Intercultural University: A place for dialogue on knowledge, 2009, p. 1.

⁵ Indigenous Peoples Fund, Resumen de Gestión 2007.

⁶ The associated academic centres are public and private conventional, intercultural and indigenous universities which have experience in developing university-level education programmes for and with indigenous peoples.



Disc with solar motifs. National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico DF.

In order to design and implement courses, the **universities** contribute resources, including staff, facilities, infrastructure and experience.

The **Indigenous Peoples Fund**, as the manager and

political head of the UII, manages resources donated by the international community, disseminates information about the work of the UII and is responsible for designing the courses and issuing calls for applications. It also chairs the Scholarship Selection Committee, which is formed by representatives of the university running the postgraduate course, indigenous organisations and the CII and evaluates the applicants and selects the scholarship recipients. The Indigenous Peoples Fund administers these scholarships on behalf of the cooperation agencies of Belgium and Spain and other organisations, such as the Ford Foundation, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and a number of NGOs.

In addition to the creation, operation and strengthening of the CII and consultancy and assistance for curriculum planning and design, the **UII-GIZ project** also involves the creation of virtual education platforms for the implementation of the distance learning parts of the courses, the development of materials, training, etc. It is worth noting that GIZ is the only cooperation agency that provides technical assistance in situ.

2. Description of the Itinerant Indigenous Chair initiative

The most innovative feature of the UII is the CII which, as mentioned above, is an integral part of all the postgraduate courses, because it is one of the modules making up the core curriculum. A postgraduate course generally has between four and six modules, one of which is the CII. The CII is considered a cross-cutting feature of the UII's academic offerings and, in this respect, there are still challenges that need to be addressed in order to establish it more firmly and integrate it more fully with the other postgraduate course modules. The CII aims to provide information, analysis and conceptual and methodological developments relating to indigenous knowledge, spirituality, world views, rights and struggles. It presents indigenous knowledge drawn from the most relevant experiences of indigenous wisdom keepers, adopting a conceptual and practical approach focused on action and tied into the fight for indigenous rights.

Therefore, unlike other universities which also provide postgraduate courses for indigenous people, **the UII, through the CII, ensures that part of each postgraduate course is planned and implemented by and for indigenous professionals, leaders and/or wisdom keepers** who have earned recognition in political, academic and/or spiritual spheres. Most of the CII team members were not previously involved in the academic world, as recognised by 'Western' universities, but these are precisely the people who know most about the history, traditions, achievements and needs of their peoples and organisations. They have inside knowledge and therefore enjoy greater legitimacy in the eyes of students when they talk about themselves, drawing on individual and community experiences, with a vision that complements the traditional academic approach of other university lecturers. The CII team is made up of between 30 and 40 men and women (professionals, leaders, spiritual guides, etc.) from 12 Latin American countries and has a general coordinator.



Myrna Cunningham (standing), general coordinator of the CII, leading a group activity at the second CII meeting held in Panama 2009. Photo: UII-GIZ.

The purpose of the CII is to provide students with the opportunity to interact and exchange ideas and experiences in an intercultural, intergenerational dialogue with recognised leaders, individuals, with whom they can identify, enabling them to gain a deeper insight into their identity, their history, shared goals and potential. This initiative also seeks to open the door to the integration into university education of people, knowledge and experience from 'other' environments and backgrounds which are significant in the life and development of indigenous peoples but generally excluded from the platform of academic debate because they are considered 'unscientific,' as they do not meet requirements or lack methodological rigour or, in the worst cases, simply because of discrimination and racism.

It was in this context that the **objective of the CII** was formulated: 'Provide a space for the information, analysis, conceptual and methodological developments and values of the knowledge, wisdom, ideology and world view of indigenous peoples in order to strengthen identity and generate processes of intercultural dialogue.'⁷

For each of the eight postgraduate courses mentioned, the CII establishes a common core of content in addition to other material on the specific field addressed by the course. Therefore, the subject matter of the CII classes varies according to the speciality or experience of those teaching them. Over the last year, exchanges with the lecturers of the member universities have been intensified to strengthen dialogue and links between the different subjects that they teach. The courses combine distance learning and face-to-face classroom learning; the CII is carried out during the face-to-face sessions (four intensive weeks), along with training in the use of the virtual platform and an introduction to the other modules taught by the university. The CII module consists of five units:

- **Unit 1: Knowledge and spirituality of indigenous peoples**
- **Unit 2: The indigenous movement and its relations with states**
- **Unit 3: Rights and legislation of indigenous peoples**
- **Unit 4: Geopolitics and power relations**
- **Unit 5: Contribution of indigenous knowledge to building intercultural societies.**

3. Results and impacts of the UII and CII

The students, who are mostly indigenous people (just under 15% of the participants are non-indigenous), are from 20 different countries, mainly in Latin America. Between February 2007, when the first postgraduate course on intercultural bilingual education started, and mid-2010, 301 people graduated. Many of them (52%) now hold positions of responsibility in the government of their country or in other institutions where they are able to influence the definition, formulation and implementation of public policies concerning the rights of indigenous peoples.

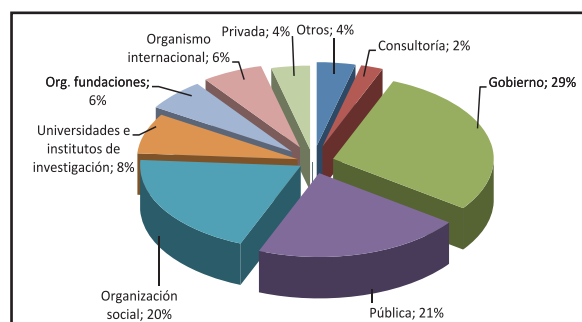


Figure 1: Place of work post-UII
Graduate follow-up survey, UII-GIZ, August 2010⁸

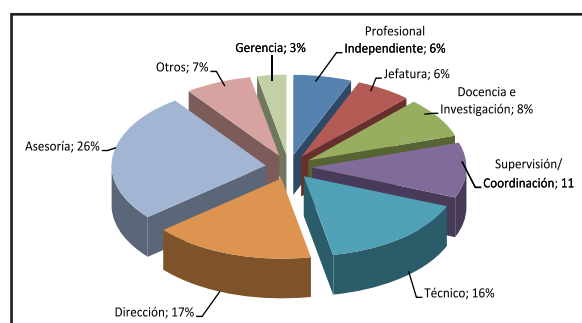


Figure 2: Position held post-UII
Graduate follow-up survey, UII-GIZ, August 2010

The UII network decided not to create a new institution, with its own infrastructure and all the facilities that a normal university has. It operates using existing resources, in other words, the UII is a virtual network that draws on higher education experience and existing capacities, thereby avoiding duplication of efforts and, at the same time, offering traditional universities a new perspective and curriculum content based on the world view and proposals of indigenous peoples.

⁷ M. Cunningham (2009), UII-GTZ working document.

⁸ Figures refer to 37% of the graduates. Source: statistics from the UII information system: www.fondoindigena.org (August 2010).

POSTGRADUATE COURSE	COORDINATING UNIVERSITY	GRADUATES
International course on governance, indigenous peoples and democracy (three courses completed)	Universidad Estatal de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Costa Rica	29
Certificate in indigenous rights (two courses completed)	Universidad de la Frontera (UFRO), Chile	60
Certificate in governance, citizenship and indigenous rights (one course completed)	Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (UASB), Bolivia	42
Specialisation course on intercultural bilingual education (three courses completed)	Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe de Nicaragua (URACCAN)	64
Master's degree in intercultural health (one course completed)	Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe de Nicaragua (URACCAN)	29
Expert course on indigenous peoples, human rights, governance and international cooperation (four courses completed)	Universidad Carlos III, Spain	48
Certificate in intercultural health (one course completed)	Universidad de la Frontera (UFRO), Chile	29
	Total	301

The following observations provide an insight into the **initial impacts** of the CII:⁹

- Personal changes in terms of **individual identity** and the reassertion of **collective identity**. Some students said that their self-esteem had improved through recognition and appreciation of the cultural, economic, environmental and spiritual elements of their cultures.
- Greater awareness of and sensitivity to issues relating to the **collective rights** of indigenous peoples. The students increased their knowledge of international and national legal mechanisms created to protect these rights.
- Recovery and sharing of ancestral **indigenous philosophies**. The CII taught students about different ancestral concepts and practices. It also facilitated a holistic identification of indigenous roots and views, some of which were common to indigenous peoples in general, while others varied from one people to another. The sharing of this information made it possible to appreciate different aspects of spiritual practices and the wide diversity of traditions.
- Contacts and exchanges among **leaders** and local actors from different countries are contributing to building knowledge of different ideological, political, social, cultural and spiritual contexts.

- The methodology has permitted the generation of analysis and discussion processes that are participatory, non-exclusive and open to all types of opinions and contributions.
- There has been a gradual positioning of the CII and the UII in academia and university education in Latin America and the Caribbean. The UII is gaining recognition as a higher education initiative specialising in indigenous studies, whose postgraduate courses are characterised by the incorporation of the perspective of indigenous peoples, and the CII seems to be the essential factor in this respect.

In summary, it can be said that the main impact of the CII is that it helps to broaden the traditional academic approach to university education by offering a different option based on the experiences, practices, struggles and history of indigenous peoples. The ultimate aim of this process is to encourage students to engage in reflective analysis, with a view to decolonising university and academic knowledge through the incorporation of approaches based on spirituality, citizenship, gender equality and interculturality. Obviously, this is a process that is still ongoing, and there are many challenges to be addressed before the established goals can be achieved.



CII activities are accompanied by the traditions of indigenous peoples.
Photo: UII-GIZ.

⁹ These findings were reported by the CII coordinators; some were recorded in observations made by students and questionnaires completed at the end of CII sessions.

4. Context of the initiative

Policy context

The CII and UII network initiative is a milestone in the history of the rights of indigenous peoples, as recognised by international human rights instruments. Both **Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization**, adopted in the late 1980s, and the more recent **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)** establish that **indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalise their cultural traditions and customs.**

Similarly, the Strategy on Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean established by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) defines the German Government's concept of cooperation with the peoples of Latin America in the following way:

“German official development cooperation recognises the special situation of the indigenous peoples and supports their participation at various levels. It proceeds on the assumption that indigenous peoples’ active participation is essential for the realisation of their human rights and for strengthening social cohesion within the relevant societies. Moreover, their involvement is vital in order to resolve the increasing resource and distribution conflicts peacefully and to promote sustainable development. Particularly in countries with a large indigenous population, the Millennium Development Goals cannot possibly be achieved without recognition of indigenous people’s contribution to the development process and without tangible improvements in their lives. German official development policy will focus its cooperation to a greater extent on indigenous peoples’ rights, needs and organisational processes in future.” (BMZ, 2006.)

At its meeting in May 2009, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recommended: ‘that States support the creation of indigenous language and cultural studies centres in universities and encourage universities to provide permanent teaching positions for indigenous peoples in those study centres.’ The UII is playing a pioneering role in implementing this recommendation. Member states, on the other hand, have not yet done enough to put the recommendation into practice.

The United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO, 2008) recognised that: *“the UII is an initiative that seeks to recover and institutionalise indigenous wisdom and knowledge through different mechanisms, among which are academic training, promoting the systematisation of existing information and research as a means of producing knowledge.”*¹⁰

Political and educational context

As part of their processes of modernisation and democratic consolidation, many Latin American countries have passed laws recognising indigenous peoples as an integral part of their multicultural societies. Indigenous organisations realize that in order to improve their participation in government, the economy and society, they need more people with professional training. At present, they do not have enough qualified specialists with leadership skills, capable of working successfully in the political arena and, above all, ensuring effective coordination between state and society.



However, existing education systems have not yet met the demand for training for indigenous people in quantitative or qualitative terms. Indigenous people do not have the same opportunities to pursue higher education, and there are few universities offering degrees and programmes focused on subjects that are important to them. The problem, in terms of quality, is that current university education systems focus on subjects and methodologies that do not respond to the interests of indigenous peoples or value the contributions they make.

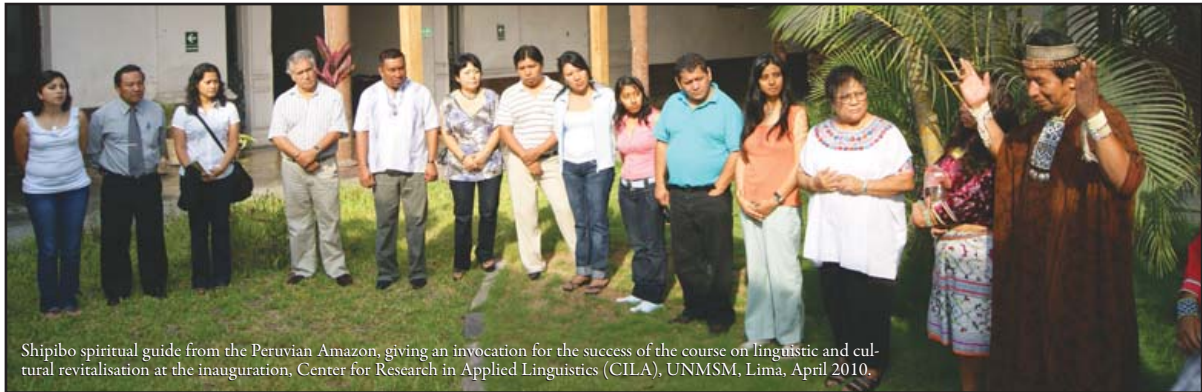
The first questions that need to be addressed are: What is indigenous knowledge and what is the most appropriate way to address it?

These questions have been raised as a result of extensive discussion. Indigenous people consider that higher education in and for their communities must be structured around the transmission of integrated systems of holistic knowledge and draw on the wellsprings of indigenous spirituality. They believe that higher education should not only be realistic and pragmatic, but should also reflect the spiritual richness of indigenous cosmogonies and philosophies, which are inexhaustible sources of wisdom and harmonious balance between people and land in their communities.¹¹ These concerns stem from criticism levelled by indigenous people at formal education at all levels. They feel that it has contributed to the loss of their peoples’ identity, offers knowledge and skills that they cannot apply and results in a loss of respect for their way of life, including their leaders, culture and ancestral wisdom.¹² There are also demands for full indigenous participation in the formal state education system, which has not yet been achieved. Consequently, the dialogue between indigenous and academic knowledge is not yet satisfactory.

¹⁰ International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC-UNESCO), Cultural Diversity and Interculturality in Higher Education, 2008, quoted in Indigenous Peoples Fund Indigenous Intercultural University: A place for dialogue on knowledge, 2009, p.39.

¹¹ United Nations Commission on Human Rights, report on the Workshop on Higher Education and Indigenous Peoples, 28 June to 2 July 1999, San José, Costa Rica (E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/1999/5).

¹² DIREPI, UNESCO, Diagnóstico sobre la realidad educativa de los pueblos indígenas, Rigobertha Menchú Tum Foundation, URACCAN, 1999.



In this respect, one of the challenges facing higher education programmes for indigenous people is precisely the recording, application, protection and transfer of knowledge that exists and is commonly used in their communities. The knowledge of each indigenous people is unique, traditional and local. It covers all aspects of community life, including their relation with the natural environment.

- Indigenous knowledge systems are associated with specific contexts, everyday life in the community and the challenges posed by the environment in which they live. They are therefore very diverse, as they are shaped by local characteristics. Consequently, recording and analysing information for future use and generalising it presents a very complex challenge.
- Indigenous knowledge is stored in the memory and activities of indigenous people and expressed through stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dances, myths, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local language and taxonomy, agricultural practices, tools, materials and laborious processes involving plants and animals. When collective experiences are successful, they are incorporated into collective knowledge. The language and practice of the oral tradition have served as effective collective mechanisms for the transmission of indigenous knowledge and the building of specific cultures.

The challenge is to make this knowledge accessible in the classroom at higher education establishments, translating it into a different form of transmission and ensuring that its particular characteristics are not lost in this conversion. The UII's response to this complex situation is to provide the associated academic centres with support for exchanges between their teaching staff and the CII team. The aim is for everyone to work together to design postgraduate courses that respond to the interests of indigenous peoples. In order to achieve this, the courses must receive inputs of indigenous knowledge, presented by the very individuals who possess it, namely the leaders and wisdom keepers who represent the different indigenous peoples. The CII therefore also provides comprehensive conceptual and political support for each postgraduate course based on the perspective and thinking of indigenous peoples and actors.

5. Inputs of the German Cooperation

The aim of the UII-GIZ project is to ensure that governments and indigenous organisations in Latin America have highly qualified people with leadership skills capable of coordinating and participating in work to address indigenous and intercultural issues in their respective societies. Under this mandate, the German Government, through GIZ, has supported the UII network and the CII in particular, from the start of the process.

PREPARATORY PHASE: In 2002, the Indigenous Peoples Fund invited GIZ to be a strategic partner in the development of a higher education project for indigenous people in response to demands from indigenous organisations. Over the following two years, the UII was designed, with contributions from indigenous organisations, experts and academics, the Indigenous Peoples Fund and the GIZ team.

PHASE I: The first phase of the project was implemented between August 2005 and December 2008. The main activities carried out by GIZ were:

- Providing support for the design and creation of the CII and implementation of the face-to-face learning sections of the postgraduate courses.
- Designing the **curricula** for the postgraduate courses, particularly those on intercultural bilingual education, intercultural health and indigenous rights.
- Providing **local grants** so that the universities could improve the teaching and technological resources and facilities required to implement the courses as a combination of face-to-face classroom learning and distance learning.
- Producing **promotional material** for the positioning of the UII and support materials for the CII and the universities (reports on CII seminars and meetings, etc.).
- Providing support for the creation and operation of the **Academic Coordination Committee**.



Meeting of the UII's Academic Coordination Committee, April 2010. The committee is formed by the Indigenous Peoples Fund, the CII, member universities and indigenous organisations. International cooperation partners also attend as observers.

PHASE II: The second phase of the project began in January 2009 and is scheduled to run through to December 2011. The activities initiated in the previous phase are continued in this one, with emphasis on overcoming the difficulties encountered so far by carrying out a series of activities, for example:

- Designing and implementing the **impact monitoring system**.
- Designing and implementing the UII network's **information system, virtual platforms and intranet**.
- Carrying out a **quality assessment**. The second UII network meeting was held in November 2009, with the participation of representatives of all the key UII actors, including graduates, and a critical and constructive evaluation was made of the UII.
- Designing two new **postgraduate courses**, one on linguistic and cultural revitalisation and the other on leadership skills for indigenous women.
- With regard to **institutional strengthening** for the lead executing agency, attempts were made to carry out advisory and critical monitoring activities to assess the performance of the UII. However, little progress was made in this area, and it is a challenge that has been carried over into the current phase.



UII-GIZ team carrying out a progress review, January 2010. Photo: Florian Kopp.

6. Factors that have contributed to the success of the initiative

6.1 Legitimacy of the CII team

“What I liked best was that there were indigenous teachers teaching the subject of interculturality, which strengthened my knowledge, but also shook the confidence I had in my grasp of the subject.”

“The rest is what any university typically offers ... sometimes you hardly even know the teachers in charge of the virtual modules... with the CII, it is different, because we have close contact with the wisdom keepers.”¹²

Perhaps the most important feature of the CII, and the one most highly valued by the students, is the teaching team, formed by indigenous people and people of African descent, the leaders and wisdom keepers of different peoples. These men and women are held in high esteem by the students, because they are recognised for their work in political, social or spiritual spheres. They are the CII's most valuable asset. Not all the members contribute in the same way, and this is not the intention. Some are there because of their local or life experience, while others have an extensive track record in the international arena or have played important roles in major political struggles. This wide diversity of lives, histories, achievements and obstacles becomes part of the CII's assets and challenges.

It is not easy for such a heterogeneous group to work as a team and to teach the same set of students. This is why the way in which the CII team members participate varies, and efforts to strengthen their capacities must be a permanent part of the project. This will continue to be necessary until the CII is institutionalised as part of the UII member universities' curricula.

The CII teachers are committed to the indigenous cause, highly motivated in their teaching work and enthusiastic about participating in the UII. It is useful, although not essential, for them to have experience in teaching and research, and they are generally supported by their grassroots organisations. They strive to highlight intercultural practices that relate to and provide insight into indigenous knowledge and to encourage students to put the emphasis in their learning – whatever their discipline – on the development of relevant and viable public policies. It is hoped that this will contribute to the formulation of development proposals for communities, countries and the region.

Efforts are also made to involve representative local actors, community leaders and representatives of indigenous organisations in the country where the course is taking place in the CII.

¹² Quotes and opinions provided by students. All the student quotes given in this part of the text are taken from the surveys conducted by the CII general coordinator. M. Cunningham, 2007-2009, quarterly reports.



Second CII meeting, Panama, September 2009.
Photo: UII-GIZ

This permits critical reflection on what is happening with indigenous movements in the different countries, enriching the students' training with information on the policies of these organisations and ensuring that local leaders appreciate their contribution to the university and act accordingly.



CII teacher, Luis Fernando Sarango, with a student on a field visit to learn about local traditions in Cochabamba, Bolivia, 2008. Photo: UII-GIZ.

6.2 Valuing diversity begins with self-valuing

"I like the CII model very much, because in the classes given by the teachers we were able to explore the experiences recounted from the point of view of our own communities and that of different indigenous peoples."

The CII is a process designed to **strengthen intraculturality and interculturality**. The CII team believes that one of the most important parts of its work is to 'unblinker' students, as Libio Palechor, a Quechuan lawyer from Colombia, puts it in his CII classes. This requires them to break with their educational past (which 'blinkers' them)

in a system where they suffered discrimination, where they were forced to adapt to the mainstream system, where their language was not spoken and where they were unable to carry out their spiritual practices or share them with others. These are just some of the criticisms and negative memories mentioned during the discussions held at the start of the CII course. When students come to the uni-



The work of a UII student on his people's rituals, Lima, 2010. Photo: UII-GIZ.

versity to do a UII postgraduate course and begin the first face-to-face learning phase, they are confronted almost immediately with the CII module. In unit 1, they address their **own spirituality**, and that moment marks a turning point, a complete departure from their experience of traditional education. They are asked to recall, investigate, read and inquire about their traditions, the traditions that their parents or grandparents practised, those that had no place in the classroom and are now the focus of academic discussion. For example, Lucrecia García, a researcher and Maya spiritual guide, prepares various lectures and modern Power Point presentations to encourage discussion

about myths and rituals, about what religion is and what spirituality is and about where the holy places are. The students do drawings, represent a myth, discuss, listen; diversity springs up everywhere. It is not only the teachers who are diverse, but also the students and their peoples. This part of the UII courses is the richest and has the greatest potential.

The CII team is aware that capitalising on the diversity of the students as input for discussions and activities poses a great challenge. A UII postgraduate group normally has between 25 and 30 students from up to 14 different countries. Over several weeks, these groups have the opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences, an opportunity that very rarely presents itself in everyday life, not to mention in such favourable conditions (time to study, share ideas, chat, etc.). This is where pedagogy, mediation, the promotion of an intercultural approach and collective knowledge building among the students and, where possible, the university community as a whole have an essential role to play. Activities such as writing autobiographies and participating in invocations and spiritual ceremonies are part of the intercultural dialogue that takes place. This is a highly motivating time; one student was inspired to promote the establishment of a degree course on intercultural bilingual education in his own country after his experience with the CII.



Colombian student during the autobiography writing activity, specialisation course on intercultural bilingual education, UMSS, Bolivia, 2009. Photo UII-GIZ.

“I feel stronger now that I have acquired new knowledge and because I can use everything that I have learned in my work as an indigenous wisdom keeper.”

“I value the wealth of knowledge acquired by the group through the diversity of experiences shared.”

“I liked the CII because of the diversity of the group and the opportunities for collective and personal development.”¹⁴

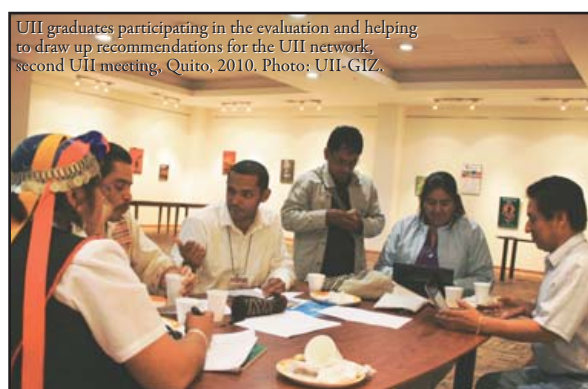
6.3 UII structures and instruments

There follows a description of some of the operating principles of the CII and the UII network.

- Thanks to the **combination of face-to-face classroom learning and distance learning**, people who work or have other commitments are able to take the courses. This is something that most ordinary university courses

do not allow for. It is a factor that is particularly important for women who are mothers (given that child care is considered to be the sole responsibility of women) and those with low income. The UII therefore gives people who would not normally be able to take a post-graduate course the chance to do so.

- A **participatory approach** is adopted in UII and CII planning and evaluation. The aim is for all the key actors, including indigenous organisations, universities and graduates, to provide input. This feature increases the potential of the initiative, as ownership of the project makes actors more likely to take action to ensure the continuity of the UII, secure funding and support efforts to extend UII offerings in the future.



UII graduates participating in the evaluation and helping to draw up recommendations for the UII network, second UII meeting, Quito, 2010. Photo: UII-GIZ.

- The **regional scope** of the UII contributes to the wide cultural diversity and offers the possibility of extending the network. To date (2010), students from over 100 indigenous peoples and 20 countries have taken the courses. Various international and national development partners (NGOs and government ministries) have provided funding for scholarships. The CII team members also come from different places. In short, the UII has raised interest in many different institutions and areas.

6.4 Innovative teaching principles and approach

“The methodology, conferences, videos, autobiographical reflections, recounting of experiences – when the teachers talk about their own experiences and what they have learned – the enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers and the chance to give our opinions about their ideas resulted in spiritual strengthening.”¹⁵

Collective knowledge building: The starting point for collective knowledge building is experiences, lives, symbols, interpretations and different levels of conceptualisation built up around social and personal relationships, relations with nature, at work, in social settings and in contexts involving the symbolic and spiritual production of the knowledge of indigenous peoples.

¹⁴ Cunningham, Op. Cit.

¹⁵ M. Cunningham, excerpts from evaluations, first class of intercultural bilingual education course, Guatemala, July 2007.

Interculturality: The aim is to go beyond recognition of the cultural diversity of the students and encourage the analysis of political, economic, spiritual, environmental and social processes and conflicts through which the cultures coexisting in a given space (institutional framework, territory, country, community) adopt standards, public policies and new organisational models. The idea that diversity is a right, a resource and also a conflict over power is raised.

Teacher mediation: The common principles that define indigenous legal systems and frameworks are addressed, and the content is based on or refers to international and national instruments and documents concerning the rights of indigenous peoples and existing case law. Students are encouraged to analyse the contradictions and similarities between indigenous legal systems and the constitutional principles of Latin American states under the rule of law.

Focus on rights: The common principles that define indigenous legal systems and frameworks are addressed, and the content is based on or refers to international and national instruments and documents concerning the rights of indigenous peoples and existing case law. Students are encouraged to analyse the contradictions and similarities between indigenous legal systems and the constitutional principles of Latin American states under the rule of law.

Focus on gender and intergenerational relations: Cultures are considered to have their roots in family relations. Indigenous cultures originated with women forming an integral part of their processes, but today's societies have stigmatised women, treating them in a discriminatory way in terms of sexuality, health, political and religious aspects and the organisation of labour, among other things. Grandparents, ancestors and elders have a fundamental role to play in advising and guiding younger people, and this is something that should be recovered through the CII.

The CII has put particular emphasis on the principle of teacher mediation, considering that it contributes to the process of learning – unlearning – relearning, which is essential to the process required for the recognition and development of indigenous identity.

By working directly with wisdom keepers in the classroom and exploring the applicability of associated knowledge, the relationship between traditional and modern knowledge, it is possible to work outside the traditional framework of the teaching-learning process. This comprehensive approach also influences the methodology used. For example, art is a powerful medium and is perceived as the link between the spiritual and social spheres. Knowledge and attitudes are restructured based on the recognition of the students' own

identity and values and the struggles undertaken by their peoples to claim their collective rights and build intercultural citizenship. All this contributes to revitalising the identity of indigenous peoples, a factor that promotes intercultural dialogue and the construction of inclusive societies and plurinational states.

“When we talk about an indigenous vision, we are not talking about just anything; we must be very mindful of the fact that our form of teaching is the result of an age-old cultural heritage and we must question many aspects of modernity to show that we are indigenous people who also have clear rules of play. This must serve as a teaching model if we wish to convince.”¹⁶

6.5 The CII strives to grow and improve: meetings for exchange and learning

The consolidation of the CII's methodological approach is a process that is still under way, largely because most of the leaders, professionals and wisdom keepers involved in the CII have no training as teachers. Annual meetings are therefore held for the exchange of ideas and to train the members of the team (there have been two so far, one in Quito in 2008 and one in Panama in 2009). The questions discussed at these meetings include the situation of indigenous peoples in Latin America, the context of the rights of indigenous peoples, the objectives of the CII, the conceptual focus of the CII and ways to improve teaching.



First meeting of the CII team in Quito 2008. Photo: UII-GIZ.

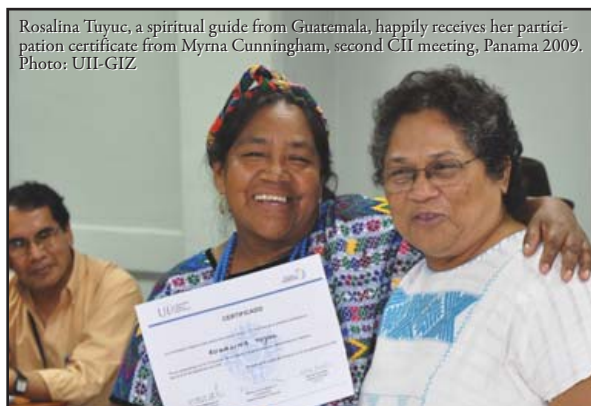
Awarding certificates for participation in events is an aspect that should not be neglected, as it is highly appreciated by the members as a form of recognition for their contributions.

6.6 Focus on indigenous rights and politics

Many debates within the CII seek to contribute to public policy-making processes. In view of the experiences analysed and recognising the region's diverse, multicultural and multilingual environment, attempts are made to provide input for policies to improve the quality and relevance of education, health care and the participation of indigenous women in political life.

¹⁶ Gerónimo Romero, evaluation of the CII in the master's degree course in intercultural health, 2008, in Cunningham, op. cit.

In this connection, one of the goals, a clearly political one, is to teach people to fully exercise their individual and collective rights. Students value the fact that, through the course content and activities outside the classroom, they are learning to exercise their rights and learning about international instruments promoting human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples.



Rosalina Tuyuc, a spiritual guide from Guatemala, happily receives her participation certificate from Myrna Cunningham, second CII meeting, Panama 2009. Photo: UII-GIZ

7. Challenges, problems and solutions

7.1 For the CII...

Evaluation: The CII considers it important to incorporate **alternative forms of cultural transmission** (oral, artistic and cultural expressions, etc.) in addition to those usually employed in the academic world. However, this endeavour comes up against various obstacles, for example, university assessment rules and the requirement to assign grades for each module included in the approved curriculum. For the CII, the challenge is to develop forms of intercultural assessment that evaluate changes in the students' awareness and attitude. In general, universities neglect or give little consideration to the affective dimension of higher education. However, as one of the principles of the CII is a comprehensive approach to learning, work with values and attitudes accounts for a substantial part of the curriculum. As yet, no agreement has been reached between the universities and the CII regarding the acceptance of this type of assessment for the fulfilment of academic requirements.

Intercultural research methodology: Indigenous higher education faces the complex challenge of **systematically recording and analysing the knowledge existing and in practice in indigenous communities, applying it in new environments and, at the same time, protecting intellectual property rights over this knowledge**. The CII promotes the recovery and study of traditions, knowledge and other aspects of the communities and cultures that the students belong to.

Based on examples from different Latin American countries, the CII aims to motivate students to carry out research using, for example, oral traditions (story telling) or alternative ways of recording information (plastic arts and systems other than written media), as a practical way of learning about and respecting the characteristics of their cultures. The university lecturers teach them traditional Western research techniques appropriate to each course. Achieving the complementarity of these approaches and of the resulting types of knowledge is one of challenges that the CII has set itself; the process is still underway.

Focus on rights: The CII regards indigenous rights as an integrated, holistic system closely associated with the values and beliefs that govern the everyday life of indigenous peoples. The challenge is to focus the UII's educational processes on **strengthening the reconstruction of the social fabric of indigenous communities**, that is, at the collective level, proposing alternatives capable of satisfying individual needs within the bounds of the **common good**, in an integrated way and without reducing this to the concepts of ordinary legal systems. The aim is to dispel the view that the sole purpose of the law is to resolve conflicts.

This holistic vision faces the risk of being disregarded if the question of indigenous rights is addressed in a fragmented manner, as in the Western Cartesian tradition. In this regard, internal evaluations carried out by the CII point to the need to improve the unit that deals with the subject of indigenous rights.

Focus on gender: One of the challenges highlighted in discussions of CII practices is the need to improve implementation of the gender focus. The teachers need to incorporate **critical reflection on the roles of men and women** in indigenous communities and cultures from a historical perspective, as a cross-cutting theme running through all the subjects they teach, encouraging the analysis of processes of cultural domination and their effect on relations between men and women in indigenous communities and cultures. It is also necessary to explicitly assess the traditional, present and future roles of indigenous women in the cultural fabric of their communities and peoples and the societies of the countries in which they are embedded.

CII team: A network such as the UII requires indigenous experts and wisdom keepers who have the time and interest to participate in the initiative and possess teaching and methodological skills, national experience and, even better, a regional vision. They must also have a good grasp of concepts such as gender focus, interculturality, citizenship, self-government, etc. Finding people with all these attributes is no easy task. Most of the people belonging to the CII team have never taught before, and remarks have been made at times about their command of the subject matter and methodologies.

Some indigenous professionals – academics working in other areas – do not have time for the UII. Nevertheless, it is often precisely those without academic experience who know most about the history, traditions and needs of their peoples and enjoy greater legitimacy when talking about them. Training is important, but it is not enough.

Complementary strategies must be developed to meet this challenge. For example, the **criteria used to select members** could be broadened. Other eligibility requirements for members of the team, such as higher education qualifications, might have to be included.

In this connection, another challenge is posed by the fact that the CII's prestige has increased since the postgraduate courses began. Its members have always been treated as international consultants when they teach courses outside their own country. As a result, other institutions have become interested in engaging them (Organization of American States and Pan American Health Organization training courses). It is therefore increasingly necessary to devote time and effort to improving the performance of the CII, so that it is capable of meeting new demands successfully. In this respect, one of the major challenges is to strengthen the members' **regional conceptual approach, without sacrificing the specific nature** of indigenous knowledge.

Relations with the higher education institutional framework: The courses offered by the CII at associated academic centres have remained somewhat isolated from the university institutions as a whole. Appropriate strategies for increasing the influence of the CII and the UII in general to other areas beyond UII programmes have not yet been formulated. In some cases, the CII remains isolated from the work carried out by lecturers teaching other UII postgraduate courses. In mid-2010, the strategy of holding meetings for exchanges between the CII and the member universities was resumed, although their impact has not yet been evaluated.

Bearing in mind the objectives and strategy of the UII, this constraint is very significant, because it reveals an obstacle in the path to the interculturalisation of higher education. The UII aims to establish an alternative form of higher education based on indigenous cultures, with cultural relevance, ownership and visibility in the sub-continent's education system. To this end, each activity aims to build interculturality. However, further efforts are required to consolidate the academic and scientific platform and encourage the universities participating in the network to adopt this model and replicate it in other areas of their institutions.

External and internal communication: The CII works according to a methodology and an approach that are different from the traditional forms of knowledge building imple-

mented in universities. Applicants should be warned about this in advance, because the courses offered by the CII may not fulfil their expectations, if they are expecting a **Western academic experience. These internal communications and explanations** are in great demand.



Another challenge is the dissemination of up-to-date information on the professional careers of UII graduates. It is impressive to see how effective UII training can be in the exercise of important political and social offices in the region. It was decided to carry out a

graduate follow-up survey to compile information on this subject.¹⁷

There are plans to continue the collection of information over coming years in order to build a useful database for governments, organisations and international cooperation agencies interested in hiring people trained at the UII and specialising in subjects of interest to indigenous peoples. Another challenge to be addressed shortly is the creation of an alumni association so that graduates can keep in touch with each other.

Digital gap: The combination of face-to-face classroom learning and distance learning used in the courses provides people who would not normally be able to undertake university studies with an opportunity to do so (see 6.3). However, this type of course also highlights the digital divide between people and university institutions in Latin America and their counterparts in other regions. The upgrading required exceeds the immediate possibilities of the network. There is still much to be done in terms of information technology training, equipment and application for all the actors involved in the UII, starting with the teachers and the students.

7.2 ...and for the UII

The UII faces other challenges that also affect the CII; two key issues are highlighted here.

Institutional and financial sustainability: The main challenge for the UII is to establish a sustainability strategy for its various components, particularly the scholarship programme and the CII. Unless these measures are institutionalised, the UII runs the risk of not being able to complete postgraduate courses or having to postpone them, etc. At present, the Indigenous Peoples Fund has to secure the

¹⁷ The first findings were published in August 2010 in Superando Fronteras, UII Bulletin No.1, which provides information on graduates.

funding required each year, often as a matter of urgency and under pressure, as it does not yet have firm long-term pledges. The CII and the UII are currently operating on external funding. In the medium term, this must change, and the CII will require a consolidated structure to ensure its continued operation for UII courses.

The Indigenous Peoples Fund is the first to call attention to this concern and is exploring different avenues. The first step is to devise a way to integrate the CII into the UII as part of its institutional strategy, so that it can continue operating once support from the German Government comes to an end. The most feasible solution would be to incorporate the cost of the CII (travel and fees) into the scholarships.

This solution could also be combined with complementary strategies, such as: (i) working with the universities to create regulations to institutionalise the CII as a tool for UII courses, so that it has official recognition and (ii) strengthening the CII teams at the local level (national) to overcome the problem of expenses (the CII would lose in diversity, but gain in closeness and economy).

Other activities, such as creating national UII management teams (formed by universities, indigenous organisations and cooperation organisations in each country), could be implemented to complement these solutions. The Indigenous Peoples Fund has started work on formulating a sustainability strategy with greater involvement by the states, calling on them to make a commitment to join the Fund.

A stronger management structure with clearly defined roles: This challenge affects the relationship between the Indigenous Peoples Fund and the CII, which currently operates mainly through its relationship with the UII-GIZ

project, because of the financial links and because the Technical Secretariat, the Indigenous Peoples Fund's operational arm, has a very heavy workload and does not have the resources to monitor the CII's work or provide qualitative support. This is one of several tasks to warrant, that the UII is having its own management structure, with clearly defined responsibilities, powers and functions. The existing small management structure must therefore be upscaled, although the new body would continue to be associated with the Indigenous Peoples Fund.

When the UII first began to implement its courses, the scope was limited and the Indigenous Peoples Fund was able to respond to its demands in a timely and conscientious way. However, since 2007, the number of universities involved in the **UII network has more than doubled**, and today they require support that the Secretariat, already stretched by the financial and political negotiations it is required to conduct, is unable to provide in an adequate manner.

In spite of overall expansion, figures for 2010 show a slowing of the upward trend registered by the UII. It began the year with fewer resources than in previous years, and fewer courses were therefore offered. Projections show that there will be fewer graduates in 2010 (around 50) than in 2008 and 2009 (178 and 85 respectively). This decline should be taken as a warning sign, signalling the need to take action to reverse the trend. Since 2008, the project has been planning to create a **management structure for the UII**, with clearly defined links to the Secretariat. In any event, the Indigenous Peoples Fund would continue to be the political head and manage resources. This move presents a major challenge, and is one that could be addressed by the Academic Coordination Committee.



Graduates of the master's degree course in intercultural health, showing their certificates, Bilwi, Nicaragua, December 2009. Photo: Florian Kopp, UII-GIZ.

8. Recommendations for German development cooperation

In spite of the constraints and challenges identified, the UII should still be regarded as an innovative, unique and relevant initiative which addresses real needs in the sub-continent. Its great potential clearly makes it an important opportunity. Support for its development should be continued in order to integrate it into the region's institutional higher education landscape and anchor it to a secure financial basis that will ensure that it continues to move forward and contributes to the knowledge dialogue and the building of intercultural societies. To this end, a number of recommendations have been formulated for German development cooperation.

The most urgent task is to support the UII in formulating strategies to achieve institutional and financial sustainability. It is recommended that this aspect be given even greater priority in future cooperation efforts.

Another urgent task is to examine the figures and discuss what should be done to respond to the current dynamics of the UII and the difficulties faced by the Indigenous Peoples Fund's Technical Secretariat in managing a network with such potential for growth. The Academic

Coordination Committee would have to be convened in order to move the discussion forward and define possible solutions, as it is the only body with representatives from all the 'sectors' belonging to and supporting the UII network. The project can provide support for moderation strategies and recording and analysing information relating to the process, in addition to providing input through international experts in these areas.

It is recommended that a strategy be formulated establishing specific actions to enhance the networking potential of the UII, which is regarded as a fundamental pillar in ensuring the UII's continuity. As it is the member universities that implement the postgraduate courses and therefore play an essential role in ensuring the continued operation of the network, they should be given a more active role and greater responsibility.

The challenges ahead have, for the most part, been identified. The degree of success in achieving good results and significant impacts over the coming years and continuing to provide effective training to produce professionals and leaders capable of working to improve the rights of indigenous peoples will largely depend on the quality of the joint efforts undertaken by the different actors involved in the UII and CII.



Ceremony held during the CII intercultural bilingual education course in Cochabamba, 2007.

ANNEX

List of abbreviations and acronyms

AECID	Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation)
BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)
CAA	Centros Académicos Asociados
CIESAS	Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (Centre for Advanced Studies and Research in Social Anthropology), Mexico
CII	Cátedra Indígena Itinerante (Itinerant Indigenous Chair)
FLACSO	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences), Ecuador
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German International Cooperation – GIZ, former GTZ)
ILO	International Labour Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
UAIIN	Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural (Indigenous Intercultural Autonomous University), Colombia
UAW	Universidad Amawtay Wasi, Ecuador
UFRO - IEI	Universidad de la Frontera, Instituto de Estudios Indígenas (Institute of Indigenous Studies), Chile
UII	Universidad Indígena Intercultural (Indigenous Intercultural University)
UMSS	Universidad Mayor de San Simón, Bolivia
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization
UNMSM	Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Peru
URACCAN	Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense (University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua)

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Myrna Kay Cunningham Kain from the Miskitu people in Nicaragua is a physician and surgeon who decided, while still young, that she wanted a job that would enable her to reach more people than she could in an operating theatre. She therefore started working in the public health sector and soon became involved in political-social processes associated with the struggle for the rights of women and indigenous peoples.

She was one of the founders of the URACCAN University in Nicaragua, where she was rector for eight years. Since 2007, she has been coordinator of the UII's CIL.

In Latin America, she works as a consultant for numerous international organisations, including UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme, the Pan American Health Organization, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Population Fund, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the World Health Organization, among others.

On 8 April 2010, she received an honorary doctorate from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the first awarded to an indigenous woman, and on 28 April, she was appointed member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for the period 2011- 2013.

Nicole Nucinkis who was born in Germany, has spent most of her life in Latin America, particularly Bolivia. She trained as an educational psychologist and curriculum developer and has worked for almost twenty years in the area of public education policy, incorporating, from the start, the concept of an intercultural approach in education programmes for multicultural contexts. Since 2007, she has been working for GTZ (since January 2011 GIZ) as the principal advisor of the Indigenous Intercultural University project in La Paz, Bolivia, which is supported by German development cooperation.



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