



Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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Special Theme:
Millennium Development Goals and Indigenous Peoples

IFAD AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Statement by

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Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are very pleased to be given the opportunity to speak at this session as the concerns and perspectives of indigenous peoples and poverty reduction have been and continue to be crucial to the work of IFAD.

The Fund is unique among international development institutions because its mandate dictates it to have an exclusive focus on rural poverty. With 75% of world's extremely poor living in rural areas, today we all agree that rural poverty must be given priority.

We have come to recognize that sustainable agriculture and natural resources management play a key role in the livelihoods of the poor.

The Fund has helped to strengthen the capabilities of millions of poor rural people to increase their income and food security. It has focussed on the difficult task of empowering poor rural people and has given particular attention to gender, ethnicity and the importance of enhancing their productivity in an increasingly globalising world.

In our work at field level, we have learned that poverty is very much linked to marginalization. In this regard, indigenous peoples are amongst the most vulnerable and marginalized of the rural poor.

Therefore, since its inception, about 20% of the Fund's resources (loans and grants) of its portfolios in Asia and Latin America have been devoted to the support of indigenous peoples; in the last few years between 120 to 150 million USD are approved yearly for their support.

Over the years, we have gradually developed an ability to address the following issues of crucial importance to indigenous peoples:

- Securing access to ancestral lands and territories
- Empowering indigenous peoples through capacity building and genuine participation
- Valuing and revitalizing indigenous knowledge systems and cultures
- Promoting inter-cultural awareness
- Supporting bi-lingual and cross-cultural education
- Enhancing indigenous identity and self esteem
- Promoting, in a culturally sensitive way, indigenous women's capacity for autonomous action in community affairs
- Strengthening indigenous peoples' institutions and their judicial system
- Fostering apex organizations and building coalitions of indigenous peoples.

Although securing the land rights of indigenous peoples is the central focus of most IFAD funded projects, some projects (PRAIA in the Amazon) provide funding for enhancing the cultural diversity of indigenous peoples while others for establishing legal defence funds for reducing the transaction costs in legal cases (Jharkhand-Chhattisgarh Tribal Development Programme). In an innovative project in Nepal, indigenous men and women are being provided with information and training on their rights and then helped to assert those rights themselves. In the Philippines (Western Mindanao) IFAD has supported the documentation of

indigenous knowledge regarding plants and other genetic resources; it also assisted in the protection of the intellectual property rights of the knowledge holders. In another innovative project in Ecuador (Development of Central Corridor Project), IFAD will be supporting the revitalization and protection of the tangible and intangible heritage of indigenous peoples and the fostering of cultural micro-enterprises.

IFAD has also gained some experience in initiating culturally sensitive approaches in revitalizing traditional knowledge systems and in blending them with modern technology in a broad range of areas, including:

- Soil and water conservation
- Crop and animal husbandry
- Participatory research
- Indigenous medical practices that make full use of plants and roots.

The Fund has also gained useful experience in conflict management and supporting peacemaking by working closely with several indigenous peoples' communities (Verapaces, Guatemala). This experience includes supporting the involvement of women as peace brokers (North East India). Another useful experience relates to channelling resources directly to indigenous communities that demonstrate capacity and willingness to raise and manage their own resources (MARENASS in Peru, NERCRMP in India). This has increased the self-esteem of the concerned groups, their managerial capacity as well as their capabilities to negotiate with outside actors.

IFAD believes that, in spite of the accomplishments made thus far - accomplishments due mostly to the work of indigenous peoples themselves - more strategic interventions and more effective policy advocacy and promotion are required to place indigenous peoples' perspectives and concerns before decision makers at all level. In fact, we need to take advantage of the new growing global interest in poverty reduction to ensure that indigenous peoples' concerns and vision of development are taken into account. In this regard, we fully support their claims for free, prior and informed consent

The Millennium Declaration, adopted by heads of States and Governments in 2002, committed their nations to a partnership for "a peaceful, prosperous and just world". It also generated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that should address the problems of the "people left behind". In addition, by emphasizing the need for: (i) respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, (ii) cherishing diversity within societies as a precious asset for humanity, and (iii) realising the right to development for everyone, the Millennium Declaration suggested that a State cannot achieve the MDGs while disregarding human rights principles, including the principle of non-discrimination.

The MDGs are a set of concrete, quantitative and time-bound targets to be reached by the year 2015 through coherent, coordinated and mutually supportive actions. It is heartening to note that these goals have galvanized unprecedented commitment to meet the needs of the world's poorest, and today they have been embraced embraced by donors, developing countries, civil society and major development institutions alike.

However, the mainstream work of the international community on the MDGs has yet to fully reflect the perspective of the indigenous people on well being, poverty and human security. Indeed, very few PRSPs do include Indigenous Peoples issue. There is therefore a growing concern that this omission may lead to their exclusion from sharing the benefits of the MDGs and may in fact adversely impact their communities by deepening the discrimination faced by indigenous peoples and by accelerating the exploitative use of their lands and resources in the name of progress and economic development. IFAD is working closely with the WB and some bilateral agencies to sharpen the focus of the PRSPs on the rural sector. We will pursue the issues of the IPs in the PRSP discussions

There is also concern that in some countries, indigenous peoples may even be deliberately left out of efforts to achieve the MDGs, as they are comparatively more difficult to reach and their living standards are more difficult to raise to the level of other groups. If the specificities of indigenous peoples are not acknowledged and addressed, the overall efforts to achieve the MDGs by 2015 are likely to fail in many countries. For example, India will meet the overall MDG goals on a countrywide basis but it will not meet them for indigenous peoples. If disaggregated data were more widely available, this would be the case for many other countries.

To take advantage of the current pro-poor environment we have to ensure that the Poverty Reduction Strategies reflect the concrete and specific potentials of indigenous peoples themselves, which is not currently being done. We also need to ensure that poverty reduction processes and strategies take into account the concrete perspectives of indigenous women because they have shown to be powerful agents of change. The Fund supports indigenous women because it recognizes their great untapped potential as 'stewards' of national and global natural resources and biodiversity, as repositories of varied and locally rooted knowledge systems, as guardians of cultural diversity, and as peace brokers and key actors in conflict mitigation.

The Challenges Ahead

To reach the MDGs and eradicate poverty, the Paris declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) has highlighted the importance of country ownership, closer harmonisation and coordination among donors and reliance and alignment on country systems. This is an important initiative. However in our quest for harmonization, we must not destroy the diversity that is around, especially the diversity of different world views and the rights of people develop their own identity.

The challenge for IFAD and other like minded partners is to actively engage in policy advocacy and promotion. The Fund has already started this process by co-financing, together with GTZ and a German NGO (Karl Kubel Stiftung), a workshop on access to lands and related resources in India. The ensuing Mankarai Declaration (2004), currently being translated in other UN languages, has been distributed widely. The IFAD-promoted film on the Garo peoples of North East India, which was screened during the 3rd Session of the Permanent Forum last year, is currently being used by the World Bank as part of an induction training course for its staff. In Asia, the Fund has also partnered with civil society to undertake an audit of the first decade of indigenous peoples and identify gaps.

Last year, IFAD provided a grant to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues so that indigenous experts could scrutinize some of IFAD-funded projects to identify best practices.

The results of these case studies and a general overview will be presented by these experts at a side event that will take place on May 20th to which you are all invited.

The other task of the Permanent Forum will be to draft, in collaboration with the members of the Inter-Agency Support Group, a Platform for Advocacy which could be used by all as a tool for policy promotion.

These initiatives will need to be considerably boosted through dynamic and broad based partnerships (local, national, international, bilateral and multilateral) and effective policy advocacy and dialogue if we want to eradicate the material poverty of indigenous men and women by 2015.

We wish great success to this session and look forward to its deliberations.