



RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND THE WORK OF THE DIVISION FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

New York, 26 May 2009

1. Introduction

The Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM), through the Socio-Economic Governance and Management Branch, promotes participatory governance and knowledge management to foster the engagement of stakeholders in the development agenda as an essential element in the sustainable implementation of the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs), including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

2. Importance of Citizen Engagement in Public Administration and Participatory Governance

Social participation in public affairs is of increasing importance for development policies for several reasons:

- It fosters social inclusion, by bringing into the process of policy making and implementation all groups of society, including those that have often been left out as unfortunately is the case of many indigenous peoples.
- It creates skills and promotes the cooperation of these groups in public affairs and development management.
- It enriches public policy design by bringing in better information - stemming from diverse perspectives of the distinct groups of society - about needs, priorities, delivery modes, equitable share among diverse beneficiaries, and so on.
- It also positively improves policy outcomes by facilitating consensus in the application of policies, contributing with initiatives and energies from diverse social groups; enhancing monitoring, evaluation and accountability on the use of public resources.

In this context, explicit consideration of indigenous peoples within social participation strategies around development management is an important avenue to foster the overall development of these peoples, socially, economically, and in many other ways.

3. Impact of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People on the Work of DPADM

Listed below are some major actions undertaken by DPADM in the area of participatory governance particularly as it relates to indigenous peoples:

UNDESA's World Public Sector Report (WPSR) 2008 "People Matter: Civic Engagement in Public Governance" featured emerging issues, concerns and innovations in civic engagement in public governance, particularly those that contribute to the realization of the United Nations Development Agenda including the MDGs. The Report highlighted some innovative local government practices, featuring the experience of the cities of Cotacachi and Otavallo in Ecuador, which are managed by indigenous Mayors through a cross-cultural participatory approach.

DPADM also organized a panel discussion on "Managing Indigenous Local Governments: Balancing Traditions with Emerging Challenges" in partnership with the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), on 23 April 2008. The Panel was held in the context of the Seventh Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. It was chaired by Mr. Bernie Yates, Deputy Secretary, Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, introduced by Ms. Elissavet Stamatopoulou, Director, UNPFII Secretariat and has had as panelists: Mr. Mario Conejo, Ecuador, Hon. Mayor of Otavallo; Mr. Hassan Id Balkassm, Morocco, UNPFII; Mr. Tom Calma, Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner and Mr. Jonas Rabinovitch, UNDESA, Senior Inter-Regional Governance Adviser. More than 70 participants representing Member States, government, academia and civil society organizations attended the panel, which received a very positive evaluation with more than 90% of approval by participants.

UNDESA was also invited to attend the First Meeting of Indigenous Mayors in Latin America, organized by CODENPE (Consejo de Desarrollo de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades del Ecuador) in Quito, Ecuador, in 2008. On that occasion, DPADNM has contributed views concerning the importance of local governance and civic engagement approaches in managing local public administration challenges, in line with the approaches being adopted by indigenous mayors within that region.

DPADM also supported the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in Ecuador. DPADM provided inputs to the Cross-Cultural Task Force seeking to promote indigenous issues in the country. These inputs were designed as an operational contribution into the current National Development Plan being concluded with support from the United Nations.

Furthermore, DPADM has decided to adopt a permanent focus on citizen engagement and participatory governance in public administration institutions. Within this framework, these are additional activities being considered in the work plan of the Division for the immediate future with a focus on indigenous people:

- Global Governance Inventory (GGI) to collect, among other things, information on initiatives aimed at reducing distance between discourse and action in the exercise of the rights of indigenous groups, particularly women, and their empowerment through knowledge of laws on human rights, protection from domestic violence, etc.
- Online training for local governments on participation and rights of indigenous women and men.
- Construction of indicators on civic participation and participatory governance institutions as it comes to indigenous people.
- Civic participation knowledge base to document efforts promoting participation of indigenous women's groups in decision making.
- United Nations Public Service Awards to give awards to initiatives documenting government's innovative approaches promoting consultations with/participation of indigenous men and women.
- Promoting leadership building for the emergence of capable indigenous women leaders within local governments for promoting gender-sensitive local policies, protection of economic and social rights of indigenous women and action to counteract violence against women.
- Supporting, through advisory services, institution building for the creation of platforms for effective interaction, consultation and training on the rights of indigenous groups, (including lessons learned from the establishment of Ombudsman's offices such as the one established in Guatemala with the support of the International Labour Organization - ILO and the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP)
- Standard of excellence in public administration education to include criteria on respect of diversity, the rights of indigenous women and men and participatory approaches.

4. Assessment of the Impact of Having Indigenous Women as a Target Group

It is difficult to make an assessment of the overall impact of targeting indigenous women. However, it is clear that it is very important to include more actively this group in the work of DPADM. As mentioned in the United Nations publication on “Indigenous Women and the United Nations System (2007)” this group faces barriers on securing full and equal participation in national development and control over its own development. Indigenous women also face several challenges in claiming their collective rights as indigenous peoples (ownership, land, territory and intellectual property rights) and their individual rights as women. Depending on the context and cultural background, the right to gender equality may also infringe upon indigenous cultural traditions and customs. In sum, this group has the triple burden of “being indigenous, women and poor”.

As one of the most vulnerable groups, indigenous women, continue to be marginalized and discriminated against. Therefore, the UNPFII Secretariat recommends the promotion of true participatory mechanisms for the involvement of indigenous people, especially women, in decision-making processes. DPADM could promote/document the involvement of indigenous women, through partnerships with governments or as part of leadership capacity development actions, particularly at the local level. This could greatly enhance opportunities to improve the recognition of their rights and the enactment of more responsive development policies. Moreover, to achieve a greater impact from the knowledge on these matters, actions will be undertaken to create a knowledge base to be made available through the Internet.