

2008/24/04 /092 /RANKOV/ITEM 4 a/AM



UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Seventh Session, New York, 21 April - 2 May 2008

Agenda Item 4:

Implementation of recommendations on socioeconomic development

Statement of the International Labour Organization

Thursday 24 April 2008

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Madame Chairperson,

In 2005 and 2006, at the UNPFII, we discussed the relevance and the challenges for indigenous peoples in relation to the MDGs. In this context, the ILO undertook comprehensive research to explore the inclusion – or rather the lack of inclusion – of indigenous peoples' rights in the national poverty reduction strategies, the so-called PRSPs. In 2006, the Forum issued a recommendation for the World Bank, governments, indigenous organizations, UN organizations and bilateral donors to further explore inter-agency mechanisms to support the inclusion of indigenous peoples in national poverty reduction strategies in a number of pilot countries - and to report back to the Permanent Forum on the progress made and the opportunities and limitations encountered, with a view to replicating the initiative in other countries.

In 2007, in response to the call by the UNPFII, the ILO initiated a one-year process to support the inclusion of indigenous peoples' issues in the PRSPs of three countries; Cambodia, Cameroon and Nepal. The process counted with financial support from the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN in Geneva.

In these three countries, the ILO has worked with governments, indigenous peoples, donors, UN agencies and NGOs to try to influence the PRSP processes, particularly focusing on the implementation. And in order to share the experiences thus generated, the ILO has published a Practice Guide for Including Indigenous Peoples in Poverty Reduction Strategies that we will make available to all interested parties.

The Guide does not provide a blueprint model on how to reconcile indigenous peoples with poverty reduction strategies, rather it speaks about the importance of contextualising approaches to the specific country situations; it speaks about communication gaps and capacity-building needs of all involved actors; it speaks about the importance of applying international standards to national processes; and, beyond technical arguments, it speaks about the difficulties of achieving the commitments of national and international institutions, including donors and financial institutions, to actually make development more inclusive.

Time will not allow me to present the more detailed conclusions and practical recommendations here, but overall, the recommendations are pointing towards two fundamental challenges: the omission of indigenous peoples' rights and issues in the overall policies that guide development, and the lack of coordinated and sustained implementation processes at the country level.

With regards to the first challenge, it was somewhat surprising to realize that in spite of the numerous institutional policies that donors, UN agencies and financial institutions have developed, there have so far been no attempts to consider indigenous peoples in the context of the highest – level policies that are determining the current aid architecture, namely the Paris and Rome Declarations as well as the PRSPs themselves. This means that while institutional policies may be applied to specific projects – that have limited or specific impacts – there is no policy commitment or consideration of indigenous peoples in the broader context of national sector policies and programmes, direct budget support etc. This is serious, as the current focus on national ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results, and mutual accountability implies not only entry points and opportunities but also inherent risks for further excluding indigenous peoples.

With regards to the other challenge, the main conclusion is that it is only through sustained dialogue and practical collaboration at the country level that we start understanding the implications of diversity and can start addressing the enormous implementation gap between international policies and national realities. In these country processes, there is a number of factors that will influence implementation; including the institutional capacity of indigenous peoples and government agencies; the existence of national legislative and policy frameworks; disaggregated data collection and development of relevant indicators; and the inclusion of indigenous peoples' priorities not only in the planning frameworks but also in budgets and monitoring mechanisms. The complexity of these processes thus requires long-term, coordinated and concerted efforts of all development partners at the national level, to eventually reach a point, where indigenous peoples will actually experience positive impact of the formal recognition of their rights.

The ILO remains committed to supporting such long-term processes in the pilot countries and particularly welcomes the decision of the government of Nepal to ratify Convention No. 169 and establish an inter-governmental Task Force for its implementation. Furthermore, the ILO will continue to work with the UNPFII and other interested parties to further explore the inclusion of indigenous peoples' rights in high-level development policies, for example by raising the issue of indigenous peoples with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and its related Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

Thank you Madame Chairperson