

POLICY BRIEF

Partnering with indigenous peoples for the SDGs

Advancing solutions by working together



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KEY MESSAGES

_ The involvement of indigenous peoples is key to achieving the ambitions of the SDGs. On the one hand, they hold valuable knowledge and traditions that provide solutions to major challenges, including those related to sustainable natural resource management, climate resilience, and promoting food systems that provide healthy nutrition for all. On the other hand, their exclusion and marginalization threatens the central tenet of the 2030 Agenda – to leave no one behind.

_ Bringing indigenous peoples on board requires building mutually beneficial partnerships with their communities and organizations, underpinned by respect for indigenous peoples' rights and livelihoods, as well as for upholding their intellectual property rights.

_ Engagement with indigenous peoples, their land and resources, must be informed by mechanisms to involve their organizations in decision-making processes and to ensure the principle of free, prior and informed consent is respected, as enshrined in international standards. Internationally negotiated policy tools, such as those of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), provide guidance on how to achieve this in practice.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous peoples play a unique and valuable role in ensuring the sustainable management of a significant share of the world's lands, ecosystems and biodiversity. Indeed, the territories of indigenous peoples are home to 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity.¹ Equally important, the food systems of indigenous peoples are anchored in sustainable livelihoods and the principle of ensuring the food sovereignty and well-being of communities.

It is therefore an especially unfortunate reality that indigenous peoples are among the people most likely to be left behind – poverty rates among the world's estimated 370 million indigenous peoples² are significantly higher than for populations at large³ – as a result of discrimination, historic injustices, and inability (or, in some cases, lack of political willingness) to protect their internationally enshrined rights to their lands and territories.⁴

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE SDGs

The knowledge, sustainable land and resource management systems and practices, cultures and innovations of the world's indigenous people already contribute to sustainable development. They are closely linked to the main elements of the 2030 Agenda and should therefore be recognized as invaluable in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. Indeed, the specific role and challenges of indigenous peoples are at the heart of major issues across the SDGs. For example, consider the following:

- The role that indigenous peoples' food systems are already playing – and can do so to an even larger extent if adequately supported – in contributing to food security and nutrition in the world is significant. The nutrition and diversity of indigenous food varieties, the practices that contribute to resilience in the face of climate change, and, more broadly, the way that indigenous peoples' communities have, for centuries, prioritized ensuring harmony between social, environmental and agricultural capital, should be of particular interest to the world in the context of the challenges faced in achieving zero hunger (SDG 2).
- Ecosystems that are managed by indigenous peoples show better outcomes in terms of sustainability; indigenous peoples depend upon natural resources for their livelihoods and their traditional practices and ways of life are based around principles of environmental and social sustainability. Environmental outcomes are demonstrated to be far better in territories collectively controlled by indigenous peoples: for example, in the Brazilian Amazon the deforestation rate in indigenous peoples' territories is less than 10 per cent of rates in the rest of the Brazilian Amazon.⁵ Indigenous peoples therefore are potentially key protagonists in promoting sustainable development, and in particular in protecting and restoring ecosystems (SDG 15).
- Indigenous peoples are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as a result of their close interaction and reliance upon the climate and natural systems. The paradox (and injustice) is that they have not been responsible for the unsustainable levels of greenhouse gas emissions that have contributed to the climate crises. Indigenous peoples respond to climate change in innovative ways, drawing upon their traditional knowledge, lands and resources; they are important contributors to mitigation efforts through regulating carbon levels and the climate cycle through their abundance of forests, indigenous plants and other sources of biodiversity. Therefore, the relationship between indigenous peoples and climate action (SDG 13) is an intimate and indispensable one.

¹ IFAD. 2016. Spotlight 8: Indigenous Peoples. In: *Rural Development Report 2016*. Rome.

² ECLAC. 2014. Guaranteeing indigenous people's rights in Latin America. Progress in the past decade and remaining challenges.

³ IFAD. 2016. Spotlight 8: Indigenous Peoples. In: *Rural Development Report 2016*. Rome.

⁴ See United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, available at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

⁵ Land Rights Now. 2015. Common Ground: Securing Land Rights and Safeguarding the Earth. Available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/common-ground-securing-land-rights-and-safeguarding-the-earth-600459>. Page 16.



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- In a world where conflicts, injustice, and social inequality and instability continue to impede the promotion of sustainable development, the way that indigenous peoples' traditions and systems contribute to peaceful and inclusive societies merits global attention and support. In particular, the way that governance, participation, and production are organized in indigenous peoples' communities, with the participation of all members and for the shared benefit of all members, is noteworthy. In addition, the lack of recognition and realization of the rights of indigenous peoples' communities is itself a source of tension and strife. Indigenous peoples' communities are tightly bound to key elements of promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16).

In addition to the above-mentioned goals on hunger, the environment and climate, and peaceful societies, in contexts where issues related to the exclusion of indigenous peoples from the benefits of development – and failure to uphold their rights – are not adequately addressed, it will be impossible to end poverty (SDG 1), achieve gender equality (SDG 5) or reduce inequalities (SDG 10). Further, only by ensuring participation, recognition and equitable sharing in the benefits of development for indigenous people can the central pledge of leaving no one behind become a reality. All the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are highly relevant to indigenous peoples; indeed, it is alarming that while many indigenous peoples' territories host projects related to economic and energy development, millions of indigenous peoples in rural areas do not have access to basic social services such as education, health, energy and livelihood support. The overarching principles and dimensions of the SDGs as they pertain to indigenous peoples need to be put into action across the agenda.

DEFINITIONS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

The term indigenous peoples is used in international standards and agreements in an inclusive manner to refer to people who:⁶

- self-identify as indigenous peoples
- have historical association with the land and territories they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used
- have strong links to territories and surrounding natural resources
- maintain distinct social, economic and political systems
- maintain distinct languages, cultures, beliefs and knowledge systems
- maintain their identity and social, economic, cultural and political institutions as distinct peoples and communities
- form non-dominant sectors of society.

It is important to clarify common misconceptions such as the following:⁷

Misconception 1: Protecting the rights of indigenous peoples results in prioritizing the rights of certain ethnic groups over others.

- The reality is that certain groups are marginalized as a consequence of their specific cultures, ways of life and livelihood, and political status within the state. It is legitimate and necessary to call for the protection of the rights of these groups.

Misconception 2: The term “indigenous peoples” is not applicable in some contexts, such as in Africa where all Africans are indigenous.

- It is important to note that the modern use of the term “indigenous peoples” does not focus merely on aboriginality, but is intended to highlight particular features of identity and livelihoods (such as those outlined above) and how they contribute to particular forms of marginalization. Therefore, the term “indigenous peoples” is not intended to deny the legitimate identities of other people, but provides a way of protecting the rights of specific marginalized groups in international human rights frameworks and laws.

Misconception 3: Debating indigenous peoples’ rights has the potential to lead to tribalism and ethnic conflict.

- In fact, in multicultural and multi-ethnic contexts, respecting the rights of all groups and enabling their full and equal participation in democratic societies is key to promoting peace and stability and cultural diversity. The violation of the rights of marginalized groups, in contrast, fuels instability and conflict.

ENTRY POINTS FOR POLICIES AND INVESTMENTS

1. Involve indigenous peoples and their organizations/customary institutions in planning processes, including processes around public and private investments, and especially when the use and access to their traditional land and natural resources is affected.

Indigenous peoples and their organizations are rarely adequately represented in political institutions and processes. Consequently, they often do not have a voice – and may not be asked for consent, or even consulted – in decision-making processes that impact upon their land and territories, communities, livelihoods and access to resources. The principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) has been developed in international human rights to protect indigenous peoples’ rights, noting that the collective and customary ownership regimes of indigenous peoples’ communities is generally in contradiction with global capitalist market systems and therefore requires the development of specific tools if conflicts are to be avoided and rights upheld. The FPIC

⁶ Adapted from: Independent Office of Evaluation. 2015. Box V-2 (p.61). In: *IFAD’s Engagement with Indigenous Peoples: Evaluation Synthesis*. Rome, IFAD.

⁷ For further elaboration, see: Independent Office of Evaluation. 2015. Box V-3 (pp.61-62). In: *IFAD’s Engagement with Indigenous Peoples: Evaluation Synthesis*. Rome, IFAD.

principle is enshrined in international human rights instruments of the United Nations,^{8, 9} as well as in policies and the operational principles of many of its specialized agencies, programmes and funds, including IFAD,¹⁰ and FAO,¹¹ as well as other international organizations, such as the World Bank¹² and the Green Climate Fund.¹³ In addition to FPIC, a variety of participatory, bottom-up approaches are required to ensure the protection, involvement and contribution of indigenous peoples within and towards development processes, especially in the context of SDG implementation (see box 1).

Recommendations:

- Recognize and protect indigenous peoples' rights to land, territories, and natural resources; implement international human rights instruments, including binding treaties and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in development initiatives with indigenous peoples.
- Ensure the inclusion of indigenous peoples' representatives and their organizations in the design, implementation, monitoring and review of strategies to realize the SDGs, including relevant and disaggregated indicators related to indigenous peoples.
- Allocate and generate financial resources – working with relevant public and private actors such as IFAD – to support institutions with a mandate to protect and improve the livelihoods of indigenous peoples in order to promote the implementation of relevant policies and projects.
- Support the participation of indigenous women and youth in development processes, and ensure their specific needs are integrated into relevant national action plans and initiatives.

Box 1. The Indigenous Peoples Forum

To generate a more systematic dialogue with indigenous peoples and their organizations, IFAD has established an Indigenous Peoples Forum, which held its fourth global meeting in February 2019. The Forum institutionalizes IFAD's consultation and dialogue with indigenous peoples, enabling them to provide input on IFAD-financed agricultural and rural development investments to ensure that these initiatives will address their realities, concerns and aspirations.

A series of regional workshops lead up to each global meeting, ensuring that the Forum reflects the diversity of perspectives and recommendations gathered from indigenous peoples around the world.

Through these consultations with indigenous peoples' representatives at the national, regional and international levels, the Forum aims to improve IFAD's accountability, enhance its development effectiveness and exercise leadership among development organizations. It is a unique initiative within the United Nations system.

For more information, go to: <https://www.ifad.org/en/indigenous-peoples-forum>

⁸ Including in article 10 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states: "Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return."

⁹ International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 also establishes a legal obligation for ratifying governments to obtain free and informed consent from indigenous peoples in the context of development projects (article 16, available at: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169).

¹⁰ In the IFAD Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples, FPIC is one of nine fundamental principles outlined to guide IFAD in its engagement with indigenous peoples. The policy is available at: <https://www.ifad.org/en/document-detail/asset/39432502>

¹¹ FAO has developed a manual for project practitioners to ensure and facilitate compliance with the principle of FPIC, available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6190e.pdf>

¹² The World Bank's Environmental and Social Standards includes Environmental and Social Standards 7 (ESS7) on "Indigenous Peoples/Sub-Saharan African Historically Underserved Traditional Local Communities", which requires FPIC in projects that have an impact on indigenous peoples. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/383011492423734099/pdf/114278-WP-REVISED-PUBLIC-Environmental-and-Social-Framework.pdf#page=89>

¹³ The importance of engaging with indigenous peoples in climate change policies and actions has been recognized by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including in the Cancun Agreement. The Green Climate Fund Indigenous Peoples Policy recognizes that indigenous peoples often have identities and aspirations that are distinct from mainstream groups in national societies and are disadvantaged by traditional models of mitigation, adaptation and development. In many instances, they are among the most economically marginalized and vulnerable segments of the population.

2. Work with indigenous peoples and their organizations to facilitate documentation and legal recognition of their traditional lands and territories, and ensure mechanisms are in place for these claims to be formally recognized.

Indigenous peoples' legitimate claims over their ancestral lands and territories are often not well documented or understood. Further, as these claims tend to be based upon traditional and customary land tenure arrangements, there are often conflicts with modern statutory property rights regimes. Addressing these gaps, contradictions, and sources of misunderstanding and conflict requires bottom-up, participatory exchanges in a spirit of mutual respect to promote enhanced understanding and solutions that benefit communities, governments and broader society.

Recommendations:

- Work with indigenous peoples and relevant organizations to develop their capacities to map and document their legitimate claims on land, territories and natural resources; develop capacity development programmes among relevant public and private stakeholders to increase sensitivity and understanding of issues related to indigenous peoples' land tenure systems.
- Establish up-to-date inventories on land tenure systems that reflect the inputs and systems of indigenous peoples' communities, and record their legitimate rights.
- Ensure that processes around the delegation of tenure governance are developed in participatory ways and are clear and transparent, and ensure that information on procedures and regulations is available in applicable indigenous peoples' languages.
- Where appropriate, adapt legal frameworks to recognize the tenure systems of indigenous peoples, working together with relevant stakeholders – including indigenous peoples – to promote understanding, acceptance, and in order to avoid conflicts.

3. Work with indigenous peoples, learn from and adapt their unique knowledge, respect their intellectual property rights, and recognize their communities as key partners in implementing the SDGs.

Indigenous peoples have significant capacity to contribute to finding solutions to solving the most pressing agricultural, environmental, climatic and economic problems that the world is facing in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Realizing this – largely untapped – potential requires building mutually beneficial partnerships based around the exchange of specialized information – that is, traditional knowledge from indigenous peoples' communities, and technical assistance from public and private development actors – and respect for indigenous peoples rights and livelihoods. This means first recognizing their knowledge as a strength to build upon, and secondly enhancing the participation of indigenous peoples in development planning and implementation, enabling them to invest in their own communities (see box 2), and recognizing that they can contribute uniquely and sustainably to the success of projects, programmes and policies.

Recommendations:

- Consult with indigenous peoples, and integrate their knowledge, skills, needs and aspirations into the development of national action plans for the SDGs and in the determination of Nationally Determined Contributions in the context of the Paris Climate Agreement; involve indigenous communities in the implementation of such plans.
- Recognize and raise awareness of the value of indigenous peoples' food systems as key contributors to providing diverse and nutritious food, building social cohesion and inclusion, managing the environment, and providing solutions to climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Initiate and support investments to promote indigenous peoples' products (including traditional crops, fruits and vegetables, seeds, non-food products, medicinal plants and artifacts); and support their innovations and initiatives in strengthening resilience to climate change.

Box 2. IFAD's Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility

The Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility is a funding instrument administered by IFAD that enables indigenous communities to invest in solutions to the challenges they face.

The Facility is co-managed at the regional level by indigenous peoples' organizations and is governed by a six-person board made up of four indigenous peoples' representatives from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia; one representative from the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and one representative from IFAD. With their leading role in the governance and management of the Facility, indigenous peoples assume a decision-making role in its operations.

The objective of the Facility is to strengthen indigenous peoples' communities and their organizations. It finances small projects that foster self-driven development within the framework of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Facility generates lessons learned and approaches for replication and scaling up.

The Facility supports projects designed and implemented by indigenous peoples' communities and their organizations through small grants of up to US\$50,000. Supported projects build on indigenous peoples' culture, identity, knowledge and natural resources.

For more information, go to: <https://www.ifad.org/en/ipaf>

- Recognize indigenous peoples, particularly women, as guardians of their traditional knowledge, with the rights to control dissemination of that knowledge, and acknowledge that existing protection mechanisms are generally insufficient to protect these intellectual rights. In cooperation with indigenous peoples, develop adequate intellectual property rights regimes to improve livelihoods, fair and transparent market access and remuneration for indigenous peoples.

4. Use – and adapt to national contexts – internationally negotiated policy products on sustainable investment with relevance to indigenous peoples.

In addition to declarations and conventions, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Labour Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (Convention 169), relevant internationally negotiated policy guidance products are available to inform governments in their engagement with issues affecting indigenous peoples. Policy products of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), considering the inclusive nature of the associated negotiation processes that include United Nations Member States and specialized agencies as well as stakeholders from civil society and the private sector, are of direct relevance in this respect. In particular, products such as the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI)¹⁴ and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT),¹⁵ may be of use.

Recommendations:

- Consult the CFS RAI and partner with relevant stakeholders, including indigenous peoples' organizations, to adapt and implement in national contexts. In particular, principles 7¹⁶ and 9¹⁷ therein contain important guidance on, respectively, cultural heritage, and inclusive governance systems, that contain specific advice on engaging with indigenous peoples.

¹⁴ Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-au866e.pdf>

¹⁵ Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/i/2801e/i2801e.pdf>

¹⁶ RAI principle 7 is: "Respect cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, and support diversity and innovation"; paragraph 27iii contains specific advice related to indigenous peoples.

¹⁷ RAI principle 9 is: "Incorporate inclusive and transparent governance structures, processes, and grievance mechanisms"; paragraphs 29iv speaks explicitly to engaging with indigenous peoples.



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- Consult the CFS VGGT and partner with relevant stakeholders, including indigenous peoples' organizations, to inform local approaches to land tenure governance and contribute to the realization of indigenous peoples' rights. Extensive references and advice related to indigenous peoples is included in this document, with part 3 on "Legal recognition and allocation of tenure rights and duties"¹⁸ being especially pertinent.

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

Indigenous peoples have struggled to defend their rights throughout history. The legitimacy of their claims has been increasingly and widely recognized at the international level: The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and the ILO Convention No.169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989) provide global frameworks for recognizing these rights, while other milestones such as the appointment of the United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2001) and the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2000) and most recently the Paris Agreement,¹⁹ represent global recognition of the need for wider participation of indigenous peoples to ensure rights are realized. And other organizations have developed their own policies and platforms to engage with indigenous peoples. In this context, the 2030 Agenda, under an overarching framework that promises to leave no-one behind provides scope to go further by bringing indigenous peoples on board as partners in national plans to, first, ensure they are not left behind, and, second, to enable societies, and indigenous peoples themselves, to benefit from the unique contribution indigenous communities can make to the realization of the entire agenda. Realizing this potential depends on the way and extent governments and other private and public stakeholders work together with indigenous peoples, prioritize the protection of their rights, and bring them on board as valued partners in building the future we are all working towards.

¹⁸ Includes a dedicated section on "Indigenous peoples and other communities with customary tenure systems".

¹⁹ The COP decision adopting the Paris Agreement recognized the need to strengthen practices and efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples related to addressing and responding to climate change and operationalized the local communities and indigenous peoples' platform to help do this.



International Fund for
Agricultural Development
Via Paolo di Dono, 44
00142 Rome, Italy
Tel: +39 06 54591
Fax: +39 06 5043463
Email: ifad@ifad.org
www.ifad.org

 facebook.com/ifad
 instagram.com/ifadnews
 linkedin.com/company/ifad
 twitter.com/ifad
 youtube.com/user/ifadTV

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