

Delivering results for not leaving indigenous peoples behind: COVID-19 responses and beyond

Background

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its pledge to leave no one behind, offers a unique opportunity to strengthen global efforts in tackling the socio-economic vulnerabilities confronting indigenous peoples today.

There are 476 million indigenous people around the world,¹ spread across more than 90 countries they represent about 6% of the world's population. While indigenous Peoples occupy or use a quarter of the world's surface area, they are the custodians of 80 percent of the world's remaining biodiversity.

Historic marginalization and discrimination as well as lack of recognition of their rights including their inherent rights to land, territories and resources are the main reasons why indigenous peoples make up 19% of the world's extreme poor. Globally, they also suffer higher rates of violence, malnutrition, and internal displacement than other groups.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Development Agenda, international institutions have been reporting that the situation of indigenous communities remains alarming. Indigenous peoples had experienced little, if any, socio-economic progress, their land and resource rights continue to be precarious at best while land grabbing and encroachments continue unabated. Their human rights continue to be violated or disregarded in many countries and reports of violence against indigenous peoples' leaders, communities and indigenous women has increased as land conflicts escalate. In many countries indigenous peoples continue to be arrested, threatened, or even murdered by repressive military and paramilitary forces.

The UN Mechanisms pertinent to indigenous peoples' issues such as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues have made several recommendations and observations relating to gaps and

¹ See ILO's Report IMPLEMENTING THE ILO INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL PEOPLES CONVENTION No. 169 TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE, SUSTAINABLE AND JUST FUTURE at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_735607.pdf

challenges for indigenous peoples in relation to the 2030 Agenda. Recommendations are based on key issues emerging from discussions and dialogues focusing on the rights of indigenous peoples. In its reports, the Forum has emphasized that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals can only be possible when achieving the rights of indigenous peoples.

The global inequalities that the 2030 Agenda is committed to ending are witnessed at their worst in indigenous communities; they are the living examples of the world's most disadvantaged, most marginalized and the people left furthest behind. What is often overlooked and needs to be taken into account is that indigenous peoples have much to contribute to achieve truly inclusive and just sustainable development as custodians of a wealth of traditional knowledge and practices, languages and cultures, including responses to crises proven over time.

The current COVID-19 pandemic and States' responses are exacerbating the marginalization of indigenous communities in most of the countries affected- and in the most extreme situations, militarization of their territories is taking place. Many indigenous peoples are being denied their right to their lands, territories and resources, while business interests are being granted access to and in effect, destroying their lands and fragile eco systems. This has resulted in protests and other demonstrations and movements to demand that the rights of indigenous peoples be addressed by concrete action and resources.

In this context, the contribution of indigenous peoples to the topic of the 2020 HLPF "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development" is particularly relevant. Indigenous peoples play a fundamental role in the conservation and transmission of knowledge and culture, as well as traditional indigenous practices that can contribute to increased food security, health, well-being and recovery from COVID-19 of their own communities and wider communities.

Justification

The UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) provides a crucial mechanism to assess and monitor measures taken by States to ensure that no one is left behind and to promote and protect Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Several voluntary national reports issued since the last session of the HLPF indicate that aside from the fact that no country is on track to achieve all the SDGs, some key SDGs are regressing. Inequality is on the rise, and loss of forest and biodiversity is increasing, which are at the core of indigenous peoples' survival, wellbeing, and development.

The alarming trend of regression illustrates that actions of States are pushing behind more than 476 million indigenous peoples in the world who are dependent on their traditional lands and resources. States are giving priority to economic growth driven by profit and exacerbated by corruption leading to wider inequality, massive environment destruction and widespread violations of the rights of indigenous peoples.

In some countries, consultations with indigenous peoples as well as environmental impact assessments - are being abruptly suspended to force through megaprojects relating to agribusiness, mining, dams and infrastructure.

Indigenous peoples who lose their lands and livelihoods are pushed further into extreme poverty, higher rates of malnutrition, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, as well as exclusion from medical services, which in turn renders them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

Indigenous communities that have managed to best resist the COVID-19 pandemic are those that have achieved autonomy and self-government, which allows them to manage their lands, territories and resources, and ensure food security through their traditional crops and traditional medicine.

Ten years remain for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, at the heart of which is the principle of leaving no one behind. The current global crisis due to the COVID pandemic has made the urgency of addressing the concerns of indigenous peoples, particularly indigenous women more evident than ever before.

In the implementation of the SDGs, Governments worldwide should support indigenous peoples to implement their own plans to protect their communities and participate in the elaboration of nationwide initiatives to ensure these do not discriminate against them.

Ensuring that indigenous peoples are not left behind from responses will require good governance, coherent policies, clear measures, and decisive actions by States to address systemic issues causing the regression of key SDGs. These actions must include the legal recognition of indigenous peoples as rights-holders and stewards of the environment. Establishment of effective measures to ensure their access to justice are urgently needed.

The SDGs will not be achieved if States continue to push indigenous peoples behind by denying their rights and making them invisible. Indigenous peoples exist as distinct rights holders bearing invaluable contributions to sustainable development. Therefore, every year during the sessions of the HLPF, the Indigenous Peoples Major Group (IPMG) has been voicing the urgent need of data disaggregation by ethnicity in order to monitor and report on the SDGs - to monitor progress on indigenous peoples, make them visible and to identify and address areas of regression. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has also reiterated the need for data disaggregation by ethnicity as a key factor in achieving sustainable development that is culturally appropriate to the rights of indigenous peoples.

Further, urgent transformative actions by States and other development actors need to include genuine partnerships with indigenous peoples in good faith; based on the protection of their rights and their meaningful participation in decision-making and processes related to SDGs at all levels. These must take into account indigenous peoples' self-determined development and their roles in, and contributions to, environmental protection, food security and sustainable resource management, among others.

The COVID-19 pandemic is teaching the world that progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals will only be achieved by valuing the collective over the individual and that acceleration to deliver truly sustainable development for all, including indigenous peoples, will only be achieved if effective actions are put in place to ensure that they are not left behind. This will only be possible by building inclusive, peaceful and equal societies that respect human rights, indigenous peoples' rights and protect everyone without discrimination.

We only have 10 years left to achieve the SDGs. If States and other key development actors continue to ignore indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups the international community will not only fail in achieving the SDGs, but they will also fail in addressing the needs and interests of future generations. Transformative actions are needed to break the barriers and achieve sustainable and equitable development and social justice.

Objectives of the side event

On the occasion of 2020 HLPF, this side event will provide a virtual space to voice indigenous peoples' views on how to augment their inclusion in the immediate COVID-19 crisis response and in the long-term recovery strategies in order to ensure that they do not continue being pushed behind. The side event also intends to explore the potential of the recommendations made by international and regional mechanisms dealing with indigenous peoples' rights.

The virtual side event aims to:

1. Provide and share information about indigenous peoples' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Examine findings and recommendations from the recent reports prepared by indigenous peoples and international/regional mechanisms.
3. Identify ways to ensure that indigenous peoples are not discriminated nor left behind, and that their rights are fully incorporated in the elaboration of nationwide responses in the economic recovery from COVID-19.

Co-sponsors:

- IWGIA
- Indigenous Peoples Major Group;
- DESA/DISD/ Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch (IPDB);
- Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (others to be confirmed)

When and where:

Wednesday 7 of July – 12:00 – 1:30 pm (New York Time)

Zoom platform - https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_GSoJ_5-STOGc4eKkNgaiTA