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Tapping into the knowledge of indigenous peoples

MAIN SOURCE:

Initiative for Mainstreaming Innovation Concept Note (2007). Completion Report. *Learning and building upon the knowledge base of the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility (IPAF).*

PROGRAMME NAME:

Learning and building upon the knowledge base of the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility

PROGRAMME DATE:

2007

IMI FUNDING:

US\$80,400

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The Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility (IPAF)¹ finances small projects designed and implemented directly by indigenous peoples' communities and their organizations. The projects are selected through global calls for proposals, based on a competitive process. In managing the IPAF when it was established in 2007, IFAD realized that the Facility was not only a grant-making mechanism, but it also contained a wealth of knowledge derived from the project proposals themselves.

With its limited funding, the IPAF can support only a small number of these proposals. Thus, a knowledge-harvesting mechanism was set up with funding from the Initiative for Mainstreaming Innovation (IMI). The information embedded in the solutions proposed by local communities is now readily available and is

systematically used to inform IFAD-funded projects during technical reviews at the design stage. By capturing knowledge from this wider pool, the IPAF has become a resource that is used to advise IFAD country programme managers (CPMs) on indigenous peoples' issues when they are designing projects. It also helps to identify organizations with which to partner in their country programmes.

Besides the knowledge-harvesting mechanism, the US\$80,400 IMI grant² was also instrumental in promoting a networking function among indigenous peoples' organizations through two regional conferences organized in Asia and Latin America in 2007. By linking indigenous peoples' grass-roots organizations and communities to their national, regional and international organizations, through the IPAF, it was possible to engage

1 Since 2007, IFAD, the World Bank and the Governments of Canada, Finland, Italy and Norway have financed IPAF and its related activities for a total of just over US\$3.57 million.

2 "Learning and Building upon the Knowledge Base of the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility."



Saudata Walet Aboubacrine, Touareg from Burkina Faso speaking at the Opening Session of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum in 2013

with a wider population of indigenous peoples' organizations and strengthen their networking capacities.

Knowledge harvesting

The knowledge-harvesting activities focused on sharing knowledge that indigenous peoples themselves had generated. A study titled *Custodians of culture and biodiversity*,³ funded by the IMI and the Government of Finland, was commissioned to review the more than 1,000 project proposals submitted to the IPAF 2007 cycle, and provide an analysis of the needs that indigenous peoples' communities and organizations had articulated, as well as their solutions to tackle rural poverty. The study provided new insights for IFAD into the complexity of indigenous peoples' poverty and the solutions to address it.

The more than 3,000 project proposals that IPAF received in its three cycles (2007, 2008 and 2011) were inserted into a database called the IPAF tracking system.⁴ These proposals contain first-hand, free-of-charge knowledge derived from the indigenous peoples' communities and organizations, which the IPAF uses to enrich IFAD country programmes. For example, such information is used at the project design phase to realistically consider the needs and solutions that indigenous peoples have put forward.

Networking

Using IMI funds, two regional conferences were organized in Thailand and Peru to foster strategic partnerships among indigenous peoples, national organizations and civil society. The conferences helped strengthen the voices of the indigenous peoples and highlighted the common issues they were facing, such as land ownership and access, territorial rights, the concepts of food sovereignty and food security, and the effects of climate change. Participants who were representatives of indigenous peoples in Latin America and Asia found the personal interactions and exchanges of experiences and information particularly beneficial. The networking capability among indigenous peoples' communities and organizations has since evolved with them also participating in international meetings. Partnerships among the IPAF grantees are now being built and consolidated through communities of practice and knowledge fairs,⁵ and the IPAF grantees are now using social media tools such as Facebook.

India - Andhra Pradesh Participatory Tribal Development Project



³ See *Custodians of culture and biodiversity: Indigenous peoples take charge of challenges and opportunities*, 2008. <http://www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/pub/documents/biodiversity.pdf>

⁴ The IPAF tracking system contains 3,000 project proposals and data on 2,800 indigenous peoples' organizations.

⁵ In 2011, a knowledge fair was organized in Malaysia by one of the IPAF grantees. Another knowledge fair was organized the same year by IFAD in Rome.

Main challenges addressed

CHALLENGES	SOLUTIONS	BENEFITS
1) Initially, there was doubt about IFAD's capacity to manage the IPAF. IFAD lacked the technical expertise and the links with grass-roots organizations.	Through the IPAF, IFAD built its expertise thanks to consultations with the World Bank and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The IMI funding served to strengthen the IPAF's knowledge-harvesting and networking functions.	Today, the IPAF is tailored to effectively engage in issues relating to indigenous peoples and in line with IFAD's mandate and way of working. The IPAF has brought to IFAD the knowledge generated about the local situation of indigenous peoples and the proposed solutions and methodologies for working with these communities, based on issues they themselves identify – which often differ from mainstream development approaches.
2) The capacity of indigenous peoples' organizations to respond to progress reporting requirements was limited.	Through coaching from the IPAF implementing organizations and regular dialogue with other indigenous peoples' organizations, they learned how to effectively communicate progress of activities, harvest knowledge and record changes occurring in their lives.	The knowledge communicated by indigenous peoples' organizations has helped them gain visibility and credibility within IFAD operations and with other donors financing similar proposals.
3) A one-year project implementation period was deemed too short to produce results on the ground; the budget available was deemed insufficient.	As a direct recommendation from the regional conferences, the IPAF grant ceiling was increased to US\$50,000 in 2011 and the grant implementation period was extended to two years.	Indigenous peoples' organizations can fully implement their projects as seasonality issues can be better planned. The number of grant extensions has been reduced and more sustainable results can be expected.

Results

Significant results emanated from the IPAF knowledge-harvesting and networking functions that the IMI funded:

- The initiatives have strengthened the way the IPAF operates today. For example, indigenous peoples' organizations have learned how to better communicate the progress of their activities thanks to coaching from the IPAF implementing organizations and regular dialogue with them. This enhanced skill has helped them gain visibility and credibility within IFAD operations and with other donors financing similar proposals.
- The *Custodians of culture and biodiversity* study was an eye-opener to the wealth of information that can be derived from the proposals submitted to the IPAF. The methodology for the study was replicated

in later calls for proposals and has potential to stimulate other donors to cofinance proposals submitted to the IPAF.

- Partnerships between indigenous peoples' communities/organizations and their governments have been strengthened. A case in point is the *Kawaip Kayabiof* indigenous peoples' organization in Brazil. Stronger networking capabilities of this organization helped it to establish a partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment and increase support for its activities.
- Through its ongoing networking activities, the IPAF has built trust between IFAD and indigenous peoples' organizations at local, national and international levels. These partnerships paved the way for the creation of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum⁶ at

6 <http://www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/forum/>

USEFUL LINKS

<http://www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/pub/documents/biodiversity.pdf>

<http://www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/grants/index.htm>

<http://www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/index.htm>



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Juana Segura – Continental Network of Indigenous Women speaking at the Opening Session of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum in 2013

IFAD and to new partnerships with indigenous peoples' organizations in Africa, where IFAD previously did not have links.

- IFAD's country operations are benefiting from the knowledge derived from the projects. For example, through the IPAF tracking system, the most reputable grass-roots and indigenous peoples' organizations and NGOs working with indigenous peoples' communities can be identified and suggested as partners in IFAD-funded projects.

Conclusions

The support from the IMI proved to be invaluable in exploiting the wealth of information available through the calls for proposals. It was key to building strategic partnerships among indigenous peoples, national organizations and civil society. These partnerships are fundamental for supporting indigenous movements. Through the IPAF and its tracking system, IFAD's CPMs are advised on the pressing issues affecting indigenous peoples in project areas and on suitable organizations with which to partner in their country programmes.

The project helped promote partnerships with the main actors – grass-roots, national and global – who deal directly with many of the most critical indigenous peoples' issues. It also helped capitalize on indigenous peoples' knowledge and expertise in matters such as natural resources management, biodiversity and climate change. The vision and talents of indigenous peoples can build IFAD's own capacity to understand, assess and mainstream, in programme and project design, all relevant issues in rural poverty in general and those that touch upon the lives of indigenous peoples in particular.



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The Innovation Mainstreaming Initiative was approved by IFAD's Executive Board in December 2004 with complementary contributions from the United Kingdom amounting to GBP 6.6 million (US\$12 million). The initiative was conceived to enhance IFAD's capacity to promote innovations, which ultimately would have a positive impact on rural poverty. The three main expected outcomes were to: (i) mainstream the innovations into IFAD operations; (ii) strengthen learning and sharing of innovations and apply such learning; and (iii) achieve a change in organizational culture and practices in support of such innovations.