INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ FORUM

In conjunction with the Thirty-eighth Session of IFAD’s Governing Council

12-13 February 2015
Indigenous Peoples’ food systems and sustainable livelihoods

The Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum convenes every other year in connection with IFAD’s Governing Council. In preparation for each Global Meeting, regional workshops are convened to ensure that the Forum reflects the diversity of perspectives and recommendations gathered from indigenous peoples in the various regions.

A unique initiative within the United Nations system, the Forum institutionalizes IFAD’s consultation and dialogue with indigenous peoples’ representatives at the national, regional and international levels. This year, it will focus on indigenous peoples’ food systems and sustainable livelihoods, providing a unique opportunity for indigenous peoples and IFAD staff to analyse and learn from previous experiences, and further strengthen their collaboration for rural transformation.

This year’s Forum also builds on the results of the first World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, which took place during the UN General Assembly session in September 2014. The conference called upon the UN Secretary-General to develop a system-wide action plan and a coherent approach to implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and stressed the right to free, prior and informed consent regarding all decisions that affect the lives, culture and identity of the world’s 370 million indigenous people.

Background

In 2009, in order to further consolidate its leading role in advancing indigenous peoples’ rights to sustainable development, IFAD adopted its Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples. The Policy stipulated a series of actions and commitments to further IFAD’s engagement, including the establishment of the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum at IFAD. The Forum provides a vehicle for improved institutional dialogue with indigenous peoples and their organizations.

The First Global Meeting of the Forum took place in February 2013. The Forum recommended that IFAD acknowledge and value indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge, technologies and environmental services in conservation and sustainable use of their ecosystems; document and share good practices with regards to indigenous peoples’ self-determined sustainable development; and ensure effective dialogue on the inclusion of indigenous peoples’ needs and priorities in country strategies and IFAD-funded projects.

Since the First Global Meeting of the Forum, a series of global events and developments have further reaffirmed the relevance and importance of these recommendations and priorities.

At the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, states recognized “the importance of the role that indigenous peoples can play in economic, social and environmental development through traditional sustainable agricultural practices, including traditional seed supply systems, and access to credit and other financial services, markets, secure land tenure, health care, social services, education, training, knowledge and appropriate and affordable technologies, including for irrigation, and water harvesting and storage”. Consequently, states committed “to develop policies, programmes and resources to support indigenous peoples’ occupations, traditional subsistence activities, economies, livelihoods, food security and nutrition”.

It is also worth noting that one of the proposed Sustainable Development Goals of the post-2015 development agenda is to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture”. This goal aims toward doubling the agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers.

All of these recent developments point to the importance and renewed focus on indigenous peoples’ sustainable livelihoods for future development efforts, including for IFAD’s overall goal of bringing 80 million rural poor out of poverty. The Steering Committee of the Forum decided that indigenous peoples’ food systems and sustainable livelihoods should be the overall theme for the Second Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples Forum, as well as for the regional workshops that were organized in 2014 in preparation for the global meeting.

Indigenous peoples’ food systems and sustainable livelihoods are obviously of key importance to IFAD’s work, and are an area where IFAD has important experiences through its country programmes and projects, as well as support to specific initiatives such as the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty and support to the Slow Food Indigenous Terra Madre, whose second global meeting will take place in India in 2015. Similarly, a number of projects financed through IFAD’s loans and grants and the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility (IPAF) have demonstrated how local communities possess valuable knowledge and traditional practices related to agro-biodiversity and food systems.
Regional workshops 2014

In late 2014, regional workshops in preparation for the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum were held in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific. Within the overall focus on indigenous food systems and sustainable development, the specific objectives of the regional workshops were to: 1) exchange knowledge, experiences and good practices on indigenous peoples’ food systems and sustainable livelihoods, traditional production systems and biodiversity conservation; and 2) identify key challenges and opportunities for strengthening these systems as sustainable solutions for the future, and identify key elements for regional strategies to enhance IFAD’s support to these systems.

The regional workshops also provided suggestions regarding indicators of well-being for indigenous peoples related to a series of core themes, including land, territories and resources; free, prior and informed consent; traditional knowledge, seeds and medicine; and resilience, among others. These indicators will be further discussed and consolidated during the Forum.

Finally, the workshops provided an opportunity for participants to review the progress of implementation of the recommendations of the First Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum as well as the regional action plans.

Indigenous peoples’ food systems and sustainable livelihoods

At the regional workshops, participants shared experiences about their traditional food systems and lessons learned from IFAD-funded projects.

Indigenous peoples’ traditional livelihood practices include small-scale farming, pastoralism, shifting cultivation, fishing, hunting, gathering and other forms of wild harvesting, or a combination of such practices. Such traditional livelihoods provide for sustainable management of resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, and are based on traditional knowledge, reciprocal labour and traditional agricultural calendars. Hence, indigenous peoples’ foods systems are closely interlinked with spirituality, culture and governance, ideally securing indigenous peoples’ not only food security but also food sovereignty.

In spite of these positive characteristics, indigenous peoples’ livelihood practices are often not well understood, and their rights to lands, territories and resources are often not adequately recognized. Further, indigenous foods are often undervalued and regarded as foods “of the poor” and “of the past”. In particular, the crucial role of indigenous women in food production and preservation is often overlooked.

In all regions, traditional food systems are under pressure due to factors such as non-recognition of indigenous land tenure systems, population growth, climate change, water scarcity or rising sea levels, migration, conflict and transition towards market-oriented production and monocropping. This transition often contributes to biodiversity loss, erodes cultural values and traditional knowledge, and increases dependence on external technology and support, including chemical pesticides and fertilizers. All regions face disruption of the transmission of traditional knowledge to the younger generation, including the loss of indigenous languages. This is also mirrored by dietary changes; from traditional foods that are generally rich in phytochemicals, antioxidants and fiber to processed foods that are low in fiber and high in fat. Such dietary changes have severe health implications, including an increase of non-communicable diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and obesity.

While the erosion of traditional knowledge and livelihoods constitutes a challenge in all regions, the relative persistence of indigenous cultures, the dedication of indigenous communities to maintain and transmit their identity, culture and knowledge to their children, and the increased acknowledgement of indigenous peoples’ contribution to sustainable development also provide opportunities.

In general, indigenous peoples’ livelihood practices are often very flexible and adaptive to changing climatic, environmental and economic conditions. Indigenous peoples further strengthen their resilience by, for example, exchanging information and experiences; providing training on the nutritional value, preparation and preservation of traditional foods; avoiding intermediaries; and promoting access to credits, technical assistance and fair trade. The growing appreciation of the socio-cultural and spiritual values related to indigenous peoples’ traditional production constitutes a window of opportunity.
Highlights and preliminary recommendations

From their different perspectives, the regional workshop participants identified a series of issues and recommendations, which will be further discussed at the Forum. The participants highlighted the need for IFAD to take a holistic approach to supporting and strengthening indigenous peoples’ food systems, including the recognition of traditional tenure, conservation of biodiversity, and respect and revitalization of cultural and spiritual values, such as the reciprocity and interdependence, which characterize social and economic relation within and among communities. An important element is to ensure that projects are designed with the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples. Further, IFAD should strengthen the participation of indigenous peoples throughout the programme and project cycles, for example by including indigenous representatives in country programme management teams, project steering committees, technical coordinating units, and monitoring and evaluation activities. Some of the other central issues that emerged during the regional discussions include:

- Appreciation of the leadership role of IFAD as one of the key institutions that channel resources for sustainable development and resource management by indigenous peoples, including direct support to indigenous peoples’ communities and organizations to pursue self-determined development through the IPAf. The regional workshops called upon governments to continue their support to enable IFAD to further strengthen its work with indigenous peoples.

- The need for increased support to research and documentation of indigenous knowledge and food systems, as well as scaling up of successful practices, including through exchange of experiences among indigenous peoples and promotion of traditional foods among consumers.

- Counter the erosion of traditional knowledge and food systems by focusing on initiatives to support indigenous youth. Such revitalization initiatives could include youth training and skills development for traditional occupations, inter-generational dialogues, youth participation in decision-making and increased access to adequate technology.

- Inclusion of indicators specifically relevant to the situation of indigenous peoples in IFAD’s Performance-based Allocation System, Results and Impact Management Systems, as well as other monitoring systems and tools for IFAD-supported projects at the country level.

- Recognize, appreciate and strengthen the role of indigenous women with regards to traditional food systems and ensure their full and effective participation in all projects, through a range of targeted initiatives.

- Facilitate dialogue between indigenous peoples and governments on the importance of traditional agricultural systems in policies, strategies and frameworks for food security, climate change resilience, nutrition and local culture.

Expected outputs of Second Global Meeting

- Regional action plans, emerging from the regional working group sessions
- Synthesis of deliberations, to be presented to the Governing Council
- IFAD management response to the synthesis of deliberations