

# **International Fund for Agricultural Development**

## **61st UN Commission on the Status of Women**

### **Interactive dialogue on the empowerment of indigenous women**

**Thursday, 16 March, 10:00–1:00**

**Khalida Bouzar, Director of the Near East, North Africa and  
Europe Division**

Madam Chairperson,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm honoured to be here.

IFAD invests in rural transformation – sustainable inclusive change that is both social and economic. Over the last 10 years we have taken important steps to strengthen the impact of our work with indigenous peoples.

IFAD manages the Indigenous Peoples' Assistance Facility – a financial instrument co-managed at regional level by indigenous organizations. In 2009 we adopted a Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples. We established the Indigenous Peoples' Forum at IFAD – a permanent platform of dialogue between indigenous peoples, IFAD and governments.

In 2015 and 2016, 10 country strategies and 49 projects with a specific focus on indigenous and tribal peoples, and ethnic minorities were approved, for a total IFAD investment of 260 million US Dollars.

Loss of lands, waters and forests is increasing poverty among indigenous peoples. Economic empowerment must therefore be combined with strengthening access to ancestral lands and natural resources.

In Nepal, for example, women have increased their income from livestock and vegetable production, and by marketing forest products. They spend less time collecting fodder and firewood, and more children are in school.

How have indigenous women secured and protected their rights to ancestral lands, territories and resources?

In any intervention, we must first understand the governance and land tenure system, including the context-specific challenges faced by

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indigenous peoples. Youth, women and indigenous peoples are often grouped together as "vulnerable", but their situations need to be analysed separately. Differences between indigenous and non-indigenous women's roles and status must be addressed in a culturally sensitive manner. Indigenous women have specific priorities and needs.

Many IFAD projects have established important partnerships with state and local governments.

In the Philippines, support included legal assistance on tenure, use, protection and management of ancestral lands, and assistance with securing certificates for ancestral domain claims. Indigenous peoples' representation on local councils also increased.

What are the opportunities for indigenous women to participate effectively in economic life and decision-making? Women's economic empowerment is one of three objectives in IFAD's gender policy. Indigenous women need better access to markets and we need to build innovative forms of collaboration with the private sector. Geographical indications, labelling and certification have been used successfully, and achievements made through partnerships with organizations such as Slow Food.

In Madhya Pradesh in India, tribal and rural women organized in 20,000 self-help groups and in village committees. Women gained confidence. Over 4,400 stood for local elections and 50 per cent of them were elected.

At the core of our partnership with indigenous women and men, is the shared principle of "free, prior and informed consent" in all decisions that affect their lives and their future. For development to be effective, inclusive and sustainable, it must be self-driven, not imposed from outside. Above all, indigenous peoples have to be the co-creators of their own development.

Thank you for your attention.