

# The Indigenous Peoples' Forum at IFAD 2024 Regional and subregional consultation meetings Concept Note

## Introduction: The Indigenous Peoples' Forum at IFAD

Indigenous peoples around the world have repeatedly asked for a more systematic dialogue with United Nations agencies. In response, IFAD has taken a series of initiatives to establish such a dialogue.

Approved in 2009 and updated in 2022, the [IFAD Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples](#) aims to enhance IFAD's development effectiveness in its engagement with Indigenous Peoples' communities in rural areas. It sets out the principles of engagement that IFAD will adhere to in its work with Indigenous Peoples, and the instruments, procedures and resources that IFAD will deploy to implement these principles.

As a key instrument to implement the Policy, the [Indigenous Peoples' Forum at IFAD \(IPFI\)](#) was established in 2011. The Forum is a permanent process of consultation and dialogue between representatives from Indigenous Peoples' institutions and organizations, IFAD and governments. The Forum enables participants to jointly assess IFAD's engagement with Indigenous Peoples, consult on rural development and poverty reduction challenges and opportunities, and promote the participation of Indigenous Peoples' organizations in IFAD's activities at the country, regional and international levels. Overall, these activities help IFAD to implement its Policy and translate its principles into action on the ground.

The global meeting of the IPFI convenes every other year in conjunction with IFAD's Governing Council, IFAD's main decision-making body. In preparation for each global meeting, [regional and subregional consultation meetings](#) are held to ensure that the Forum reflects the diversity of perspectives and recommendations gathered from Indigenous Peoples in the various regions where IFAD operates. The regional consultations also track the progress made on past agreements.

The overall process is guided by a steering committee composed of representatives of Indigenous Peoples' organizations from the different regions,<sup>1</sup> indigenous youth, the Board of the [Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility \(IPAF\)](#), [the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues \(UNPFII\)](#) and IFAD.

A unique process within the United Nations system, the Forum institutionalizes IFAD's consultation and dialogue with Indigenous Peoples' representatives at all levels and provides an opportunity for Indigenous Peoples and IFAD to further strengthen their collaboration for rural transformation.

## The theme of the seventh global meeting of the IPFI

The seventh global meeting of the IPFI will take in February 2025 in conjunction with the Forty-eighth session of the Governing Council, under the theme: "**Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination: a pathway for food security and sovereignty**". The regional and subregional consultation meetings leading to the global meeting will be conducted between August and October 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> The steering committee is composed of 14 members as follows: seven representatives from Indigenous Peoples' organization (two from Africa, two from Asia, two from Latin America and the Caribbean, one from the Pacific); one youth representative from each region; one IPAF Board member; one representative from UNPFII; and one representative from IFAD.

## Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination: A pathway for food security and sovereignty

Indigenous Peoples hold internationally recognized rights for the preservation of their food systems through the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#), and particularly through the inherent right to self-determination.

The UNDRIP, which represents a milestone for the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, is the first international instrument to acknowledge Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination.

Self-determination embodies the right for Indigenous Peoples to freely determine their political status and pursue their own knowledge systems, and economic, social and cultural development, making decisions about policies and programmes that directly affect their lives, including through their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

When it comes to food security and sovereignty, the exercise of the right to self-determination entails the possibility for Indigenous Peoples to strengthen their food systems by choosing, cultivating and preserving their food practices and biocultural values. Also, in line with Indigenous' Peoples holistic concept of development, this right encompasses various economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions which are crucial to Indigenous Peoples well-being.

### Indigenous peoples' food systems as game changer solutions

Over 80 per cent of the planet's biodiversity is found on the territories of Indigenous Peoples, who farm while caring for forests, deserts, grasslands and oceans. Anchored in sustainable practices which are unique to their native ecosystems, **Indigenous Peoples' food systems** have traditionally provided healthy diets in diverse environments around the world. They comprise hundreds of different food sources, such as local crops, wild plants, and domestic and wild animals. Indigenous Peoples' food systems are increasingly seen as regenerative and possible game-changing solutions.

The [2021 UN Food Systems Summit](#) provided an historic opportunity for the sustainable transformation of food systems. As a result of the Summit, the first-ever [Coalition on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems](#) was established. The Coalition aims to enable Indigenous Peoples to work with a wide range of stakeholders to build healthy, equitable and sustainable food systems in a way that recognizes and respects their rights to self-determination and collective ownership of lands, territories, resources and knowledge.

The Coalition includes 14 Member States of the [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#) and is chaired by the UNPFII. UN agencies such FAO, IFAD, the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#), the [United Nations Environment Programme](#), the [World Food Programme](#) and the [World Health Organization](#) and have joined the Coalition to support the collective work in designing policies and programmes that respect, preserve and promote Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems.

- Indigenous Peoples are deeply connected to their **land, territories and resources**. These not only constitute the basis of their livelihoods and food systems but hold profound cultural, spiritual and existential significance. Indigenous Peoples rely on their ancestral lands to grow crops, hunt, fish, and gather wild foods through sustainable practices, which have evolved and adapted to specific ecosystems while preserving biodiversity. Secure land tenure and the ability to manage resources autonomously enable Indigenous Peoples to preserve their identity and make crucial choices about food production, thereby ensuring a stable and diversified food supply in harmony with nature.
- The self-determination right of Indigenous Peoples is closely tied to the **preservation, promotion and transmission of their traditional knowledge**. This knowledge, accumulated over centuries, encompasses a vast array of practices and experiences that are based on a profound understanding of nature, local environments and ecosystems. Traditional knowledge guides Indigenous Peoples and communities in employing sustainable agriculture and food production practices which support biodiversity, promote healthy ecosystems, enhance resilience to climate change, and minimize environmental impact. The promotion and revitalization of Indigenous traditional knowledge and its transfer among generations is thus essential to ensure the

long-term sustainability of Indigenous Peoples' food systems and their ability to achieve food security on their own terms.

- One of the key areas where self-determination plays a vital role is in **nutrition**. Traditional Indigenous diets have been refined over generations to be nutritionally balanced and sustainable. These diets typically include a variety of plants, animals and other natural resources that are nutrient-rich, locally sourced and seasonally available. Indigenous traditional culinary and storage techniques enhance the flavour and nutritional value of foods as well as their preservation. By exercising their right to self-determination, Indigenous communities can prioritize the protection of their traditional food systems, ensuring access to these nutritious and culturally significant foods. This not only supports physical health and nutrition but also strengthens cultural ties and community resilience.
- In this regard, the role of **Indigenous women** is of particular importance, as they hold a decisive function in the preservation and transmission of traditional ancestral knowledge within their communities. **Youth** also play a pivotal role, serving as the bridge between elders and future generations and acting as agents of change and catalysts for integrating traditional knowledge with modern technologies, thereby contributing to the resilience and continuity of their communities.
- Self-determination entails the possibility for Indigenous Peoples to determine and pursue their **economic development** in a way that is consistent with their cultural values, ecological practices and perception of well-being. Indigenous Peoples around the world have a remarkable diversity of traditional small-scale, family-based economic activities. Hunting, fishing, gathering, pastoralism and small-scale farming form the cornerstone of many Indigenous economies, together with traditional arts, crafts and ecotourism ventures. These activities are not merely economic endeavours but are expressions of cultural identity. They also embed key principles which reflect Indigenous Peoples' perceptions of economic development, such as balance with nature, solidarity, distribution and reciprocity, as opposed to the individualism and accumulation principles that govern the market economy.
- Self-determination is exercised as a collective right and is intrinsically linked to **Indigenous Peoples' governance systems and decision making**, as both are essential for the preservation of Indigenous autonomy. Indigenous governance systems, which are often rooted in traditional laws, customs and institutions, provide the framework through which self-determination is exercised and enable Indigenous Peoples to make decisions related to their internal and local affairs and to participate collectively in external decision-making processes. When it comes to food systems, by exercising authority through their governance structures, Indigenous communities can make collective and informed decisions about land use, resource management, and food production in ways that are sustainable and culturally appropriate. This inclusive and culturally rooted approach to governance is essential for maintaining resilient and sustainable food systems that can adapt to changing environmental, climatic and economic conditions.

#### **Indigenous Peoples' economies**

Indigenous Peoples' economies prioritize harmony with the environment and a deep respect for nature, ensuring a sustainable use of resources and their preservation for future generations. They often emphasize community-based decision making and equitable distribution of resources, ensuring that production benefits all members of their communities rather than individuals only. Sharing resources, knowledge, and labour is a key element of Indigenous Peoples' economies, thereby fostering social bonds and a sense of shared responsibility in the communities. While an increasing number of Indigenous Peoples are moving away from subsistence to commercial production, trade and exchange are not driven solely by monetary value. Cultural significance and reciprocal relationships play a vital role in determining the value of goods and services.

### **The challenges Indigenous Peoples face in exercising the right to self-determination for food sovereignty and security**

### **Self-determination and resilience to the pandemic**

While the path to Indigenous Peoples' self-determination is often challenging, its realization has demonstrable links to improved outcomes for Indigenous Peoples. In assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous Peoples, the [Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) observed a correlation between how well Indigenous Peoples were faring during the pandemic and their ability to exercise their right to self-determination: the closer a State was to achieving the ends of the UNDRIP, the better Indigenous Peoples would fare.

Source: United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council, Forty-eighth session, [Efforts to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Indigenous Peoples and the right to self-determination](#), Report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2021.

For many Indigenous Peoples, their right to self-determination has advanced little since the adoption of the UNDRIP, and it is often undermined by historical injustices and contemporary challenges that affect their social and cultural identity, livelihoods and economic resources as well as their ability to ensure food security and sovereignty.

Indigenous Peoples everywhere continue to fight discrimination and a lack of recognition of their collective rights. They face mass evictions and land dispossession due to infrastructure development initiatives, extractive industries and land privatization for investments. Lack of recognition and protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights to land, territories and resources is the single most important factor negatively affecting their food and nutrition security and the realization of their right to food and food sovereignty.

Socioeconomic disparities and inadequate access to education and health care further marginalize Indigenous Peoples, particularly women and youth. The erosion of traditional knowledge and languages, also due to rural– urban migration, poses significant barriers to self-governance and the preservation of identity. It also leads to a serious loss of perspectives, solutions and innovations that proved effective to address pressing global challenges such as food insecurity, climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development.

The lack of recognition of the nutritional value inherent in Indigenous food systems has led to significant dietary changes for many Indigenous communities, often with detrimental health consequences. Traditional diets have been increasingly replaced by processed and imported foods that are high in sugars, fats and artificial additives. This shift has been driven by factors such as economic pressures, loss of land, and cultural assimilation policies that undermine traditional ways of life.

Moreover, Indigenous Peoples frequently face violence, displacement and human rights violations when asserting their self-determination rights.

All of these challenges are exacerbated by the effects of climate change, which is further threatening Indigenous Peoples' traditional livelihoods, cultures and ways of life.

The promotion of self-determined development and the meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples and their organizations as horizontal partners in development processes are considered essential elements for ensuring food security and sovereignty, reducing poverty, addressing climate change, promoting sustainable environmental management, and enhancing governance and human rights.

### **IFAD and the promotion of self-determined development**

In line with the UNDRIP and the [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), and particularly its commitment to "leave no one behind", IFAD supports Indigenous Peoples' self-determined development through its strategies and programmes.

- Approved in 2009, the [IFAD Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples](#) aims to empower Indigenous Peoples through a development approach that builds on their culture, knowledge and identity. The 2022 updated Policy calls for a paradigm shift whereby IFAD now works with Indigenous Peoples as equal partners who co-create strategies and design and monitor investments to improve their livelihoods based on their own perspectives.

- IFAD is the first international financial institution to adopt the **FPIC** as an operational principle in its Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples and as a criterion for project approval. IFAD-funded projects and programmes are people-centered and rarely finance large-scale infrastructures. For IFAD, therefore, FPIC is not simply a safeguard principle; rather it is a proactive approach to identify development pathways with local communities, empower Indigenous Peoples' communities, and ensure their full and effective participation in decision making on proposed investments that may affect their rights, access to lands, territories and resources, and livelihoods.

### **The updated IFAD Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples**

The updated Policy:

- Recognizes Indigenous Peoples as **equal partners** in co-creating strategies, as stewards of natural resources and biodiversity, and as bearers of rich knowledge systems;
- Recognizes that global aid is evolving, with funding coming from a growing range of sources, and commits to ensuring that Indigenous Peoples have **access to these resources**;
- Introduces a new principle of **Indigenous food sovereignty, food security and nutrition** to ensure the protection and preservation of Indigenous Peoples' food systems; and
- Mandates that representatives of Indigenous Peoples are **observers** at IFAD's Governing Council when items concerning them are on the agenda.

- The **IPFI** promotes dialogue and consultation among Indigenous Peoples' organizations and institutions, IFAD staff, and Member States. The Forum helps set the strategic direction for IFAD's engagement with Indigenous Peoples, especially Indigenous women and youth. Through the creation of the Forum, strong partnerships have been established between IFAD and Indigenous Peoples' organizations, and other like-minded organizations. Although the IPFI is a well-established process at the global level, additional efforts are needed to enhance it at the regional and national levels.
- Since its creation in 1978, IFAD has supported rural development programmes with **Indigenous Peoples as major stakeholders**, targeting 45 million Indigenous people in 57 countries through projects that build upon their culture, identity, knowledge, natural resources, intellectual property, and human rights.
- IFAD supports the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in determining their priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. Through **consultations**, it aims to engage with Indigenous Peoples for the formulation of IFAD country strategies and the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of IFAD investment projects.
- Launched in 2007, the **IPAF** is an innovative instrument which supports self-determined development by financing projects designed and implemented by Indigenous Peoples' communities and their organizations through small grants. Since 2007, as a result of five calls for proposals, the IPAF has supported 159 projects in more than 45 countries for a total of about US\$5.1 million.<sup>2</sup> IPAF governance and implementation set an example of best practice in self-determined development by providing Indigenous Peoples' organizations a leading role and contributing to their growth as institutions.
- In partnership with the [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency](#), IFAD is conducting a series of pilots whereby it supports the incorporation of Indigenous Peoples' priorities, perspectives and solutions by hiring **Indigenous experts** to lead the design of projects integrating climate finance and implementing the FPIC process.
- In partnership with the [International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs](#), the UNPFII Secretariat, and the [Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues](#), IFAD supported **policy engagement** between Indigenous Peoples, governments and UN

<sup>2</sup> The IPAF was financed by IFAD, the Christensen Fund, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Tamalpais Trust, the World Bank and the Governments of Canada, Finland, Italy and Norway. The ongoing sixth IPAF cycle is being supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Packard Foundation.

Country Teams in 10 countries for developing national action plans to implement the [outcome document](#) of the [World Conference on Indigenous Peoples](#) and the UNDRIP. All policy engagement processes identified and focused on regulatory, policy or planning issues of common interest to States and Indigenous Peoples and sought to establish, or advance in creating, permanent mechanisms of consultation between Indigenous Peoples and relevant state institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

IFAD recognizes that Indigenous Peoples hold valuable knowledge, traditions and practices that provide solutions to major challenges including those related to sustainable natural resource management, climate resilience, and food systems that provide healthy diets not only to their communities but to humanity at large. IFAD's experience demonstrates that when development projects value and build upon the distinctiveness of Indigenous Peoples' communities, development effectiveness is likely to be achieved. In line with the updated 2022 Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples, further efforts are needed to foster Indigenous Peoples' self-determined development in IFAD operations from the country to the regional and global levels.

### The IPFI regional and subregional consultation meetings

In preparation for the seventh global meeting of the IPFI, regional and subregional consultation meetings will be held in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Pacific. Within the overall theme of the Forum, the objectives of the regional and subregional consultation meetings are to:

- Exchange experiences and good practices on the main theme of the Forum;
- Share knowledge and evidence on Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination, and the exercise of this right, to enhance food security and sovereignty;
- Identify opportunities for strengthening good practices and finding sustainable solutions to the challenges that Indigenous Peoples face in the recognition and exercise of their right to self-determination, and the corresponding elements for regional strategies to enhance IFAD's support;
- A Enable the communication and dissemination of information, lessons and experiences on Indigenous Peoples right to self-determination.
- Formulate action-oriented recommendations on the theme of the Forum; and
- Draft regional action plans that will guide the engagement between Indigenous Peoples, IFAD, development partners and donors during the Forum.

#### Regional and subregional consultation meetings

- Africa: [Mainyito Pastoralist Development Organization \(MPIDO\)](#)
- Latin America and the Caribbean: [Fondo para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas de América Latina y el Caribe \(Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America\)](#) in partnership with the Red de Jóvenes Indígenas (Indigenous Youth Network) and the [Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia \(Caribbean and National Indigenous Organization of Colombia\)](#)
- Asia: [Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact](#)
- Pacific: [Partners in Community Development Fiji](#)

The regional and subregional consultation meetings will also contribute to: (i) Assess progress in the implementation of the updated IFAD Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples; (ii) Review the recommendations made at the sixth global meeting of the IPFI and assess progress in the implementation of the recommendations and regional action plans adopted in 2023; and (iii) Prepare the regional participation in the seventh global meeting of the IPFI, including the selection of delegates.

Regional and subregional consultation meetings will be organized by Indigenous organizations in cooperation with IFAD country offices and IFAD staff. All meetings will take place between July and October 2024. Virtual meetings might also be held to provide an opportunity to broaden participation and engagement of Indigenous Peoples. Geographical balance will be

ensured in the selection of participants, as well as the different ecosystems and livelihood systems (pastoralists, fishers, hunters and gatherers). Gender balance and the participation of youth will be also ensured.

### **Main sources**

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