

## **Leaflet No. 11: UNDP and Indigenous Peoples**

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is a UN organization that promotes and supports programmes for sustainable human development. It is the UN's principal provider of development advice, advocacy and grant support to developing countries. With 132 country offices worldwide, UNDP's commitment to a universal presence has proven especially useful in post-conflict situations and with states that had been otherwise isolated from the international community.

In September 2000, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, world leaders pledged to reduce the proportion of people living in poverty by half by the year 2015. UNDP plays a leading role in making this happen by providing developing countries with consulting services and by building national, regional and global coalitions for change. UNDP works in partnership with governments, UN specialized agencies, civil society organizations and private-sector institutions to implement economic and social development programmes. UNDP has specialized expertise in democratic governance, pro-poor policies, energy and the environment, peace building and disaster mitigation, HIV/AIDS, and information and communications technology. UNDP also engages in extensive advocacy work on poverty issues. Its widely cited Human Development Report stimulates international and national debate on key development issues including poverty, globalization and human rights.

Improving partnerships is another key element of UNDP's mandate for the future. As stated by UNDP's Administrator, partnership among development actors is a precondition for development effectiveness. The primary challenge for UNDP is to move the institution into a highly networked organization that creates new development opportunities through strategic partnerships. UNDP seeks to build stronger partnerships with civil society and Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs) as a basis for promoting alternative perspectives to conventional development thinking. Social change can occur only when coherent and satisfying alternatives are devised, and UNDP, in partnership with indigenous peoples, can help create those alternatives.

UNDP also administers a number of special-purpose funds, including the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the Office to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNSO). UNDP is a sponsor of a global programme on HIV/AIDS, and is also a partner, along with The World Bank and UNEP, of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which provides funds to address global environmental problems.

UNDP is governed by a 36-member Executive Board, representing governments of both developing and developed countries, which meets once a year at UNDP headquarters in New York. The world's largest multilateral grant development assistance organization, UNDP has a network of 132 country offices managed by Resident Representatives/Coordinators, and works with people and governments in 175 countries and territories in all regions of the world.

### **UNDP and Indigenous Peoples**

UNDP's engagement with indigenous peoples at the country level is extensive. Since the inauguration of the UN International Year of Indigenous People in 1993, many of UNDP's small grants programmes, and its regional and national programmes, have involved indigenous peoples' communities. These initiatives have focused on poverty eradication, environmental conservation, conflict prevention and resolution, and cultural revitalization. In addition, UNDP has supported projects under the Indigenous Knowledge Programme whose main objective has been to promote indigenous knowledge through targeted capacity-building and direct support for projects formulated and implemented by Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs).

Since early 1999, UNDP has been engaged in reactivating its Indigenous Peoples' Portfolio. The overall objective of UNDP's engagement with indigenous peoples is to integrate indigenous perspectives and concepts of development in future programmes, and to make indigenous peoples' concerns a cross-

cutting issue within UNDP' priority areas of work. Recent initiatives include an exploration of the role of indigenous peoples in conflict prevention and peace building. UNDP has commissioned case studies examining the role of indigenous peoples' movements in conflict prevention and peace building across the globe to serve as instructive practices. In partnership with other UN agencies, UNDP is reviewing how best to address the information, networking and capacity-building concerns of IPOs in preparation for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (authorized by ECOSOC in July 2000.)

### **Global Programmes**

Many projects supported by UNDP that incorporate indigenous peoples fall under the category of small grants programmes. Several of these programmes are global in scope and the grants tend to be of smaller amounts. These programmes are designed to promote consensus-building and participatory decision-making processes. They are formulated and implemented in a decentralized manner; and participatory management structures are an integral component of these kinds of initiatives. The small grants programmes commonly involve direct assistance to local communities through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs). IPOs, among others, can seek funding through the **Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme**, which supports small-scale activities conducted by NGOs and community groups that address environmental problems. In Africa, the **Africa 2000 Network** provides funding for projects that support community groups, NGOs, including IPOs, and technical institutions. Project activities include direct assistance, such as training and communication exchange designed to protect Africa's environment and promote ecologically sustainable development at the grassroots level.

Since **Agenda 21** (the agenda for sustainable development adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development UNCED, or the Earth Summit) there has been an implicit obligation to reach out to indigenous peoples. In support of the ideals outlined in Agenda 21, the **Capacity 21** fund was established to build the capacity of developing countries to better integrate environmental conservation and sustainable development. Capacity 21 provides support for designing sustainable development policies and programmes, many of which involve indigenous peoples' communities.

### **Indigenous Knowledge Programme**

The Indigenous Knowledge Programme (IKP) is an initiative of the Indigenous Peoples' Biodiversity Network, which aims to conserve and promote indigenous knowledge worldwide. The Steering Committee is composed of a General Coordinator and eight Regional Coordinators, each of whom represents local Indigenous Peoples' Organizations. This Programme is supported by UNDP, the International Development Research Centre and the Swiss Development Cooperation.

The Indigenous Knowledge Programme is based on three main objectives:

to promote the participation of IPOs in international processes and conferences of concern to indigenous peoples, such as the annual Conference of the Parties of the Biodiversity Convention;

to promote and conserve indigenous knowledge through, for example, research projects

designed and implemented by IPOs in areas such as customary laws and traditional resource rights; and

to allocate funding for indigenous peoples' self-help initiatives that address poverty reduction, human resource development and organization-building at the community level.

Of the three UNDP-funded IKP projects, two were in Asia and one in South America. The Programme was recently evaluated positively, with special mention given to the project in the Amazon forest of Yana Yacu Sacha in Ecuador. That project was formulated to recover and develop indigenous knowledge for the conservation of the ecosystems and biodiversity of the forest. It aimed to create a sustainable development model based on traditional indigenous knowledge in the Amazon. Whether the Programme will move into a second phase is to be decided by the Steering Committee.

## **UNDP Regional and National Programmes involving Indigenous Peoples**

UNDP also supports indigenous peoples in its regional and national development programme activities. Many of these programmes have tended to focus on one or more of the following areas: improvement of living standards; economic and technological development; preservation of natural resources and environmental conservation; and cultural revitalization.

A good example of a UNDP regional programme is the Southeast Asian Regional Programme: Highland Peoples Programme (HPP). The programme, which recently completed its first phase, covered four different countries in the Mekong Sub Region: Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, home to some 11 million indigenous people. With the close involvement of indigenous organizations, the programme focused on poverty reduction by applying a participatory, decentralized, and localized bottom-up approach. It established exchange mechanisms and procedures to encourage dialogue and information-sharing between multi-stakeholders, i.e. governments and IPOs, regarding highland peoples' development at regional, national, and local levels. In Cambodia, HPP has focused on providing support to the Inter-Ministerial Committee and the developing Policy Guidelines for Highland Peoples Development. The Guidelines were formulated with broad participation from the grassroots and central levels, as well as with regional participation.

## **Strengthening UNDP's engagement with Indigenous Peoples**

In 1999, UNDP held two consultations with leaders of Indigenous Peoples' Organizations to discuss, among other topics, indigenous peoples' priority issues and how best to partner with UNDP. The consultation, entitled "Indigenous Peoples and UNDP: Strengthening our Partnership", held in Geneva in July 1999 propelled UNDP's work with indigenous peoples. In accordance with the commitments made during this consultation, UNDP has prioritized the design of a policy, including operational guidelines, to be used by Country Offices as well as Headquarters. In addition, UNDP has focused on enhancing the capacity of indigenous peoples and increasing their participation in the UN system and at key global events.

## **The CSO Advisory Committee to the Administrator and Senior Management**

In May 2000, UNDP established its first formal Civil Society Organization (CSO) Advisory Committee to the Administrator, which provides strategic guidance on a range of policy issues from globalization, trade and poverty reduction, to conflict prevention and human rights. The Committee is composed of 14 CSO policy leaders, including the Director of an IPO. Members provide critical perspectives on issues of concern to civil society and indigenous peoples. At the inaugural meeting of the CSO Committee, UNDP Administrator, Mark Malloch Brown, expressed his personal commitment to indigenous peoples' issues and stressed the importance of developing and implementing a policy on indigenous peoples, including preparing operational guidelines for such a policy.

## **Participating in UNDP activities**

UNDP's Executive Board meetings are public events at which indigenous and other non-governmental organizations and individuals can participate as observers. Prior to the meeting, a representative of an NGO can request approval from the Board to take the floor and make a statement. It is important to note that UNDP does not hold regular meetings on indigenous issues and any ad hoc or special meetings or consultations on indigenous issues are generally organized at the request of indigenous groups or representatives.

UNDP also seeks to include indigenous participation in policy processes. UNDP regional and country staff consult with indigenous representatives and communities on programme activities that may affect their communities; and the organization promotes the participation of indigenous peoples in the design, planning and implementation of development projects supporting indigenous communities.

If you would like more information on any of UNDP's activities relating to indigenous peoples, please contact either the UNDP Country Office in your country or the Civil Society Team in the Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships at UNDP's headquarters in New York.

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