

The Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility

Linking grass-roots indigenous peoples' organizations and the international community



Indigenous peoples face complex challenges



@Asif Javed

Indigenous and tribal peoples and ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented among the rural poor. Many of the poorest communities of indigenous peoples are difficult to reach through mainstream development programmes. Several recent studies show that the poverty gap between indigenous peoples and other rural populations is increasing in some parts of the world. In addition, indigenous peoples generally score lower on the Human Development Index – the measure of life expectancy, literacy, education and standard of living for countries worldwide. This is particularly true for indigenous women.

Indigenous peoples are often disempowered by a lack of recognition of their cultural and socio-political systems. This undermines their social capital and their ability to shape their future. Indigenous peoples have ancestral bonds with their land, territories and natural resources, which are also the basis of their livelihoods. But they are frequently threatened by encroachment, dispossession and lack of respect for and protection of their rights.

In many cases, socio-economic changes and official policies have weakened their governance institutions, especially those responsible for natural resources management. Indigenous peoples are often at a disadvantage in capturing market opportunities.

These factors of poverty affect both men and women, but women are often most vulnerable to poverty, disempowerment and exploitation. Building on the strength and values of indigenous peoples is about expanding their opportunities to pursue developmental goals that they themselves value, both collectively and as individuals, and to continue to play their roles as stewards of biodiversity and holders of unique cultural heritages. Listening to indigenous peoples, both women and men, and involving them in making decisions about their future, are key elements of an effective response.

IFAD's support for indigenous peoples and their communities

For almost 40 years, IFAD has supported programmes and projects that benefit indigenous peoples, thanks to its targeted approach to rural development. Since 2003, around 20 per cent of IFAD's funded projects have supported initiatives for indigenous peoples, mainly in Asia and Latin America.

IFAD believes that indigenous peoples should be free from marginalization and be able to lead the kind of life they value. Much of IFAD's support to indigenous peoples has been directed at developing their livelihoods and strengthening their institutions, as well as empowering them to influence the decisions that affect their lives. In September 2009, IFAD's Executive Board approved the Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples.¹ It aims to enhance IFAD's development effectiveness with indigenous peoples' communities in

rural areas, and especially to empower them to overcome poverty by building upon their identity and culture.

This new policy sets out nine principles of engagement that IFAD applies in its work with indigenous peoples, including "free, prior and informed consent". These principles are consistent with international standards, in particular with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Development Group Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues.

Over the years, IFAD has learned that capacity-building and self-determined development can be considerably improved by entrusting indigenous communities with the direct management of resources and funds.

In September 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This historic achievement validates the struggle of indigenous peoples worldwide for human rights and equality. It provides them with an international instrument to better preserve their cultures and heritage, and to strengthen their ability to shape and direct their own destinies, both collectively and as individuals.



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¹ IFAD Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples: <https://www.ifad.org/en/document-detail/asset/39432502>

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In 2006, IFAD's Executive Board approved the transfer to IFAD of a dedicated Facility established in 2003 by the World Bank. This was in recognition of IFAD's experience and knowledge of indigenous peoples' issues. The objective of the Facility is to build a direct partnership with indigenous peoples to enable them and their communities to design, approve and implement grass-roots development projects based on their own perspectives. The Facility is now called the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility (IPAF). IPAF is an innovative funding instrument that indigenous communities can use to find their own solutions to the challenges they face. It supports the aspirations of indigenous peoples by funding small projects that build on their culture, identity, knowledge, natural resources, intellectual property and human rights. Through small grants of up to US\$50,000, IPAF supports projects that:

- include indigenous peoples in development operations
- improve their access to key decision-making processes
- empower them to find solutions to the challenges they face
- promote collaboration in the public and private spheres.

Governance and administration

IPAF is governed by a board made up of:

- four representatives of indigenous peoples' institutions from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.
- one member from the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)
- one member from IFAD.

The board works closely with the Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Issues Team at IFAD, responsible for administrative, technical and financial issues.

How grants are awarded

To be considered for funding, local organizations must design their own projects and submit them to IPAF. All project proposals are reviewed through a rigorous and competitive process. Funds are awarded based on the criteria of project relevance, sustainability and feasibility, and institutions' capacity and credibility. Following approval of IFAD's Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples, a new criterion has been introduced to assess to what extent proposed projects adhere to the principles of development with culture and identity for indigenous peoples. The IPAF board ensures that the grant portfolio is balanced in terms of geography, gender and sector.

In response to IFAD's five calls for proposals, in 2007, 2008, 2011, 2015 and 2018, indigenous communities and organizations in 90 countries submitted more than 4,200 applications. In all, in the first four cycles, 127 projects were financed in 45 countries worldwide for a total amount of about US\$3.6 million.

The projects aimed to:

- enrich livelihoods by improving sustainable agricultural practices, developing new off-farm enterprises and enhancing market access
- manage natural resources, including community-based forestry, and protect biodiversity
- build capacity to revitalize cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and indigenous peoples' rights
- map indigenous and tribal peoples' territories and cultures
- empower women
- protect and patent intellectual property rights
- develop culturally appropriate initiatives and ethno-tourism models
- collect data on indigenous and tribal populations

- improve health services by integrating traditional knowledge systems
- boost disaster and climate change risk management based on traditional knowledge and practices
- strengthen the participation of indigenous and tribal peoples in policy formulation.

For example, the 2015 project “Amazon women grow native fish for food security and market access” (Ecuador) aimed to improve food security through the recovery of a native Amazonian fish. Also, women were able to sell the surpluses in the local market, increasing their access to capital, and boosting their power of decision-making within their communities. The project “Strengthening indigenous Dayak Jawatn communities’ capacity (especially indigenous women) in three villages to manage their indigenous forest/territory sustainably” approved in 2015 in Indonesia, enabled the communities to formulate the Jawatn Model of Land and Forest Management System, which proposed innovative actions to uphold the implementation of their land and forest management system. The project “Economic integration of Amazigh women in Morocco – support for commercialization of local terroir products” approved in 2015, sustained the training of Amazigh women and equipped them with skills for producing and marketing indigenous products.

A unique partnership and its potential

Although the Facility and the grants it provides are small, they have a great potential to bridge grass-roots indigenous peoples’ organizations with the international indigenous peoples’ movement and with the UNPFII.

In this regard, a new strategy for the Facility was developed in 2010. Its aim is to empower indigenous peoples’ organizations to manage IPAF at the regional level and to strengthen networking among indigenous peoples’ communities and organizations at the local, regional and global level. In 2011, the management of the Facility was decentralized at the regional level, with the support of three indigenous peoples’ organizations. The regional partners for the fifth IPAF cycle are: Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas (FIMI) in Latin America and the Caribbean; Samburu Women Trust in Africa; and Tebtebba Foundation in Asia and the Pacific.



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Experiences of IPAF projects have been shared during the global meetings of the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum at IFAD, held in Rome in 2013, 2015 and 2017. The Indigenous Peoples’ Forum at IFAD is a concrete attempt to institutionalize a process of consultation and dialogue with indigenous peoples’ representatives. The Forum was established during a workshop in Rome (17-18 February 2011), which gathered together 28 representatives of indigenous peoples’ organizations and members from the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII).

As co-managers of IPAF, these partner organizations are responsible for:

- supporting the technical review process of IPAF applications and advising the IPAF board
- channelling resources to organizations awarded by the IPAF board
- monitoring and supervising IPAF-funded projects
- strengthening the link between IPAF small projects and IFAD-funded country programmes
- documenting and disseminating knowledge generated by IPAF
- supporting IPAF resource mobilization.

These links create a unique and promising partnership that has the potential to further strengthen indigenous peoples' roles and advancement in their communities and countries, as well as on the world stage.

In 2014 and 2017, a survey to measure the success of the decentralization was sent to the

grass-roots organizations that had implemented the small IPAF projects. The performance of the three IPAF partners resulted satisfactory in 85 per cent of the cases.

The improved performance of the grass-roots organizations, compared to previous IPAF cycles, was a reflection of the positive involvement of the IPAF co-management partners. More detailed project designs and adjustments during the implementation phase improved project relevance due to the support provided by the three regional partners and a decentralized and more accurate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system set up at the regional level. The improvement in operational capacity was also due to decentralization, which allowed for a more tailored technical assistance by the three regional organizations during both the design and implementation phases. The challenges and development solutions presented by indigenous peoples and their organizations in their grant proposals provide a wealth of information.

By drawing on this information, IFAD will be



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The UNPFII is an advisory body to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.

able to improve the programmes and projects it supports. IPAF previous cycles and related activities have been funded by IFAD, the World Bank and the Governments of Canada, Finland, Italy and Norway. The ongoing IPAF cycle is being financed by IFAD (US\$2 million) and cofinanced by Tamalpais Trust, Christensen Fund, the International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America (FILAC) and Packard Foundation. In the future, more resources will be needed to meet the demands of indigenous peoples' communities and organizations to support the solutions they develop to meet the challenges they face.

IPAF-funded projects: key findings

The experience of the four IPAF cycles has been captured in reports that analyse the performance of the small projects: "Learning by Working Together, Microprojects financed through the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility" (2008); IPAF small project desk review (2011 and 2015) and Assessment of the performance of the fourth IPAF cycle (2018). The assessments, based on qualitative and quantitative analysis, confirms that the beneficiary communities are extremely poor and difficult to reach. Most of the people reached by the small projects are young people and women. The reports also confirm that extending funding directly to indigenous peoples' communities and their organizations is effective in supporting self-driven development. Small amounts for small communities can make a big difference, particularly in building capacities and strengthening institutions and organizations.

Another finding is the high degree of "ownership" beneficiary communities and implementing organizations feel towards the projects.

IPAF's activities and outputs at a glance

Four reviews conducted by independent consultants on the performance of IPAF-funded projects provided an overview of the performance of 109 small projects, implemented between 2007 and 2017, in delivering results and improving the lives of their communities. Findings of the review showed that:

- About 97,000 people directly benefited from 127 small projects financed through IPAF, of which approximately 50 per cent were women.
- Training and individual capacity-building were the primary activities, followed by building and strengthening local institutions and creating and raising the value of physical assets, infrastructure and equipment.
- More than 50,000 people (almost 50 per cent women) benefited from trainings and capacity-building on priorities they set: natural resources management and climate change coping strategies, traditional agricultural technologies and income-generating activities, protecting, restoring and applying traditional knowledge and systems (including traditional medicine), indigenous peoples' rights and land tenure, and community programming and literacy.

Through activities aimed at building and strengthening local institutions, more than 700 community groups were strengthened and created. These included self-help groups, microenterprises, marketing groups and collective resources groups. Overall, about 50 per cent of them were headed by women. These groups focused on:

- improving livelihoods and economic development
- gaining access to land and improving security of tenure
- setting up rural microfinance services
- documenting, protecting, restoring and applying traditional knowledge and systems, traditional language and ancestral cults.

The IPAF activities improved the livelihoods of indigenous communities by increasing food security and income generation, enhancing access to and management of land and other natural resources, preserving traditional knowledge, and empowering communities by raising awareness on indigenous peoples' rights and needs.

Improvement of livelihoods and economic development. Small projects focused mainly on increasing agricultural production and access to markets, improving management of natural resources and increasing off-farm activities.

About 15,000 individuals, half of them women, were trained in natural resources management and traditional agricultural technologies, crop production practices, livestock production techniques and technologies, infrastructure management, post-production processing and marketing, traditional medicines and other traditional ways of protecting, restoring and applying traditional knowledge and systems, financial management and traditional income-generating activities. Ten microenterprises were established. Thirty natural resources management groups were formed or strengthened, along with 170 saving and credit groups, 25 marketing and processing groups and 12 crop and livestock production groups.

Collective empowerment. Efforts have been made to increase indigenous peoples' awareness of their rights at the national and international level, and to strengthen traditional governance structures. In particular, more than 13,000 individuals were trained in policymaking and community management, one third of them women. These two aspects go hand in hand to empower indigenous communities. They are fundamental in ascertaining rights and fighting against encroachment and dispossession of land and territories. IPAF projects contributed to support the capacity of indigenous communities to manage their relations with the government and state institutions, influence policies that are relevant to them, be aware of their rights and conduct effective advocacy actions.

Traditional knowledge, culture and identity.

About 15 per cent of the activities in the small projects attained results in documenting, protecting and restoring traditional knowledge, culture and identity. Several projects revitalized traditional agricultural systems and handicraft techniques to help people improve their livelihoods, food security and nutrition. The relevance of the activities in meeting peoples' needs was judged highly satisfactory, inasmuch as livelihood improvement activities produce important outputs and preserve traditional knowledge.

Land and natural resources management.

The focus of small projects on land and natural resources management has increased since the first IPAF call for proposals in 2007. In the fourth IPAF round, almost 12 per cent of projects addressed issues linked to land tenure with activities involving the establishment of mechanisms to monitor land and address legal issues associated with it, land titling and land mapping using modern technologies such as GPS.



Highlights from the Assessment of the fourth IPAF cycle

In 2017 IFAD commissioned an independent assessment of the fourth IPAF cycle with the aim to review and analyse the performance of partners in implementing the Facility and the results achieved in the execution of the small IPAF-funded projects between 2015 and 2018.

Overall, the fourth IPAF cycle supported the implementation of 25 projects in 23 countries for a total financing of US\$1.05 million. The projects globally reached over 21,850 direct and 458,100 indirect beneficiaries. Projects improved livelihoods of indigenous communities by increasing food and nutrition security and income generation, enhancing access to and management of natural resources, preserving and recovering traditional knowledge, assets and techniques, and empowering communities by raising awareness on indigenous peoples' rights and needs. The involvement and active

participation of women further contributed to the reduction in gender inequality in the communities and reflected the recognition of the role women play for the life and well-being of their communities. Overall, effectiveness was considered satisfactory given the significant results obtained with a relatively limited budget and implementation period.

IPAF also provided the three regional partners with a unique experience in programme management, contributing to their growth as institutions. Although with different degrees of effectiveness, they ensured oversight and technical assistance to IPAF sub-grantees, contributing to the improvement of their operational capacities. As IPAF co-managers, they are also playing a key role in strengthening indigenous peoples' intercultural dialogue on national, regional and global policies that



directly and indirectly affect them. Overall, taking into account the limited time and resources available, results achieved by the three organizations were impressive and their institutional growth remarkable.

Nonetheless, some challenges were faced in the implementation of the Facility, and areas of improvement were identified. In particular, the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function of the Facility should be improved and more effort should be made to support capacity-building and institutional strengthening of grass-roots organizations through the three regional partners, particularly in terms of projects design, M&E, resource mobilization and financial management.

More opportunities for peer knowledge-sharing and exchanges should be promoted and knowledge management should become a key strategic axis within the IPAF and with the regional partners playing a key role. This approach is considered key for grass-roots organizations' institutional development and should become a central mechanism to accelerate the learning process by peers.

Certainly, the continuity of the IPAF should be granted. Acknowledging that there is an untapped potential for sustainable development, IFAD and IPAF partners should strengthen their efforts to mobilize additional resources to reach a larger number of communities and beneficiaries.



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2018 fifth IPAF Call for proposals

The fifth IPAF call for proposals was launched in April 2018 with the aim to foster indigenous peoples' self-driven development, within the framework of the UNDRIP, by strengthening their communities and organizations. Out of the 700 proposals received from Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, the IPAF board will approve up to 35 small projects ranging from US\$20,000 to US\$50,000 lasting up to two years. This new IPAF cycle focuses on indigenous youth and prioritizes projects which build their capacities in four areas: food security and nutrition; access and rights to land, territories and resources; access to markets; and climate change mitigation and adaptation. IFAD's resources dedicated to the direct financing of the selected IPAF proposals for this cycle amount to US\$1.47 million.

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Links






Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility
<https://www.ifad.org/en/ipaf>

IFAD's Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples
https://www.ifad.org/documents/38711624/39417924/ip_policy_e.pdf/a7cd3bc3-8622-4302-afdf-6db216ad5feb

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/index.html>



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February 2019