World’s Indigenous Leaders Firm Up Partnership with IFAD

BAGUIO CITY, Philippines, 6 March (Tebtebba Indigenous Information Service) - Indigenous peoples’ leaders and representatives from various parts worldwide have sought to strengthen and improve their partnership with a UN financial institution, which specializes in supporting agricultural programs that seek to help address hunger and poverty.
They thus called on the International Fund for Agricultural Development or IFAD, governments and fellow indigenous peoples to “firmly link the Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum with follow-up mechanisms at regional, national and project levels, for effective tripartite dialogue on the inclusion of indigenous peoples’ needs and priorities in country strategies and IFAD-funded projects.”

Under the auspices of IFAD, some 30 indigenous leaders and representatives from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and Latin America gathered in Rome 11-12 February for the first global meeting of the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum to discuss how to improve further indigenous peoples’ partnership with IFAD.

“We sincerely appreciate the serious efforts of IFAD to establish a strategic partnership with indigenous peoples, which has reached a higher ground with the establishment of the Indigenous Peoples Forum,” said the indigenous leaders in a synthesized report of the deliberations.

“We see this as a good practice of intergovernmental institutions and a key step in implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which establishes a universal minimum standard for survival, dignity and well-being of our peoples,” the report added.

The indigenous participants to the Forum officially presented the synthesized report at the opening plenary of the 36th session of the IFAD Governing Council in Rome last 13 February. The report was read by Tebtebba executive director Victoria Tauli-Corpuz before some 138 IFAD member-state heads and representatives.

The indigenous participants have acknowledged the Forum’s role in “institutionalizing” their relationship with IFAD and establishing a “shared learning environment, based on the principles of consultation, participation and dialogue.”

They also expect the Forum to also help facilitate the implementation of the IFAD’s Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples.

“The dedicated funds of the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility (IPAF) have increased IFAD’s engagement with indigenous peoples as a specific target group,” said the report.

The IPAF was set up to strengthen indigenous peoples’ communities and their organizations by financing small projects, which foster their self-driven development in the framework of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to generate lessons learned and approaches for replication and upscaling.

The Facility invites applications from indigenous peoples’ organizations and communities, as well as organizations that work with them, for grants to fund projects, innovative approaches and partnerships that promote the development of indigenous peoples and help them fulfill their aspirations.

The Facility provides small grants of US$20,000 to $50,000 to small projects designed and implemented by indigenous peoples’ communities and their
organizations. In response to IFAD’s three calls for grant proposals, in 2007, 2008 and 2011, indigenous communities and organizations submitted around 3,000 applications from about 90 countries around the world, according to the IFAD website.

The IPAF is governed by a board composed of mostly indigenous members.

**Collaboration**

Reflecting on their collaboration with IFAD so far, the indigenous participants to the global meeting in Rome noted some valuable experiences, lessons learned and good practices, but challenges as well.

“Some states still do not adequately recognize indigenous peoples in national legislation and policies,” they said in their report. “The contents of IFAD’s Policy on Engagement and provisions on free, prior and informed consent have not been systematically applied. These are identified as major obstacles for having our issues adequately reflected in IFAD country strategies and programs.”

They also noted “an encouraging number” of projects involving indigenous peoples involved in the design phase. But they equally noted “a significantly weaker participation in implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases.”

The indigenous participants thus forwarded some recommendations “to consolidate our partnership and strengthen the systematic implementation of IFAD’s Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples.”

Besides calling on governments, IFAD and indigenous peoples themselves to link the global meeting of the Forum with “follow-up mechanisms” at regional, national and project levels, they encouraged that all stakeholders document, exchange, share, replicate, and scale out good practices about indigenous peoples’ “self-determined, sustainable development.”
Other calls

They particularly called upon governments to recognize indigenous peoples’ rights to land, territories and resources, including rangelands and corridors. They likewise stressed the need for governments to recognize the contributions of traditional knowledge systems and technologies and traditional livelihoods for ecosystem resilience and sustainable development.

They also called on governments to “build the capacity of government institutions to address indigenous peoples’ needs and priorities, by providing training to staff and employ indigenous experts within their institutions.”

“(We also call on governments) to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of indigenous peoples as contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and acknowledge the role of indigenous traditional institutions, authorities and organizations,” they said.

The indigenous participants also called upon the IFAD to:

• Increase its capacity on indigenous peoples’ issues by providing training to staff, further the employment of indigenous experts and, as much as possible, appoint focal points at the country level;
• Ensure full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in formulating country strategies throughout the project cycle;
• Implement effectively its Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples and, in working with projects targeting or affecting indigenous peoples, systematically encourage borrowing governments to consult with indigenous peoples to obtain their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). IFAD should consider this consultation and consent as a criterion for project approval, as stated in its policy of engagement with indigenous peoples.
• Increase the direct funding to indigenous peoples’ organizations and institutions, including increasing contributions to the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility (IPAF);
• Acknowledge and value indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge and technologies and environmental services in conservation and sustainable use of their ecosystems, as in-kind contributions to projects;
• Inform and involve indigenous peoples in supervision missions and evaluation;
• Identify and operationalize, in collaboration with indigenous peoples, specific indicators on the well-being of indigenous peoples;
• Devise measures for affirmative action targeting indigenous peoples and, in particular, indigenous women and youth;
• Use the Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples as a platform for policy dialogue at country level with governments and other development partners;
• Ensure that during project formulation in country—and within the
design of projects—communication and information provisions for indigenous peoples are appropriately provided;

• Continue the support to the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples; and

• Support and undertake joint advocacy with indigenous peoples on their issues and concerns in the post-2015 Development Agenda.

The IFAD Board responded positively to the calls of indigenous leaders and representatives. As a result of its commitment to educate its national country program managers and government heads about IFAD’s Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples, the IFAD Asia-Pacific Division has slated in April a retreat in Hanoi, Vietnam for this purpose, Tauli-Corpuz told the Tebtebba Indigenous Information Service.

For their part, the participants listed some commitments, which they, as part of indigenous peoples’ organizations, have pledged to do.

They have vowed to “continue to defend and sustain our land, territories and resources as the basis for our sustainable livelihoods and development; and as our contribution towards global environmental sustainability.”

Their other commitments:

• Report back to our communities and organizations on the outcomes of this first Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum and continue the dialogue and our partnership at all levels;

• Work jointly with IFAD and governments in the design and elaboration of economically viable, culturally appropriate and ecologically sound sustainable development models for our peoples; and

• Advice and influence governments to adopt and implement public policies oriented towards the promotion of indigenous peoples’ self-determined, sustainable development.

The IFAD, a specialized agency of the United Nations, was established as an international financial institution in 1977 as one of the major outcomes of the 1974 World Food Conference.

The conference was organized in response to the food crises of the early 1970s that primarily affected the Sahelian countries of Africa. It resolved that “an International Fund for Agricultural Development should be established immediately to finance agricultural development projects primarily for food production in the developing countries.”

One of the most important insights emerging from the conference was that the causes of food insecurity and famine were not so much failures in food production but structural problems relating to poverty, and to the fact that the majority of the developing world’s poor populations were concentrated in rural areas, according to the IFAD website.

“The IFAD is the most unique UN intergovernmental agency with which indigenous peoples’ leaders and representatives can directly engage,” said Tauli-Corpuz. 🌍