

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN FOCUS



International
Labour
Organization

The Sustainable Development Goals are grounded in a vision that aims to transform our world. They aspire to build a world free of poverty, hunger and disease, in which every woman and every girl enjoys full gender equality, where the environment is protected and where all people have access to quality education and decent work. This will be a world that is more inclusive, sustainable, peaceful and prosperous, and free from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, cultural identity or disability. These are just some of the facets of an ambitious and universal vision, adopted with the pledge that “no one will be left behind”.

This vision is of great significance to the over 370 million indigenous peoples worldwide, who have historically suffered grave injustices and many of whom continue to face marginalization, exploitation and exclusion. Even though great strides have been made in the eradication of poverty, indigenous peoples are still among the poorest of the poor. Their traditional ways of life, livelihoods and practices are increasingly under threat owing to a range of factors, including lack of recognition and protection of their rights, exclusionary public policies, and the impacts of climate change. A combination of issues such as loss of access to traditional lands and natural resources, discrimination in the world of work, forced migration, and poor access to opportunities have rendered them still more vulnerable in social and economic terms. Indigenous women, in particular, are exposed to multiple forms of discrimination and exploitation from both within and outside their communities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework provides a historic opportunity to address such issues and ensure that indigenous peoples too are not left behind.



The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been at the forefront of promoting the rights of indigenous peoples through its Decent work Agenda. With its expertise and experience in this area, along with its unique tripartite structure, the ILO has a crucial role to play in supporting concerned stakeholders to ensure that the SDGs are achieved for all. The ILO strives to empower indigenous women and men, for there can be no inclusive and sustainable development without their participation. Indigenous peoples are crucial agents of change, whose livelihood practices, traditional knowledge and ways of life are fundamental for combating climate change and realizing the ambitious vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Indigenous peoples: International instruments and frameworks

- *ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989* (No. 169): the only international treaty on indigenous peoples open to ratification. It has been ratified so far by 22 countries.
- *ILO Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957* (No. 107): the older ILO instrument on the issue. Though no longer open to ratification it remains in force for 17 countries.
- *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007*: the most recent expression of indigenous peoples' aspirations at the international level.
- *World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, 2014*: forum at which States reaffirmed their commitment to respecting, promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.
- *Paris Agreement, 2015*: outcome of the 2015 summit on climate change, in which States highlighted the importance of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge in combating climate change.

Note: In this brief, for practical reasons, the term “indigenous peoples” is preferred. It includes tribal peoples and is now also the most commonly used term.



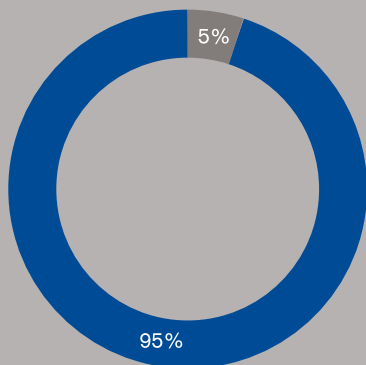
ROLE PLAYED BY THE ILO IN MAKING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS A REALITY FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that decent work is both a means and an end to achieve sustainable development and eradicate poverty. Accordingly, the ILO Decent Work Agenda – an integrated policy framework – has a fundamental role to play in mitigating the specific social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities of indigenous peoples, and tackling their high levels of poverty. Without decent work, indigenous women and men cannot realize their full potential as the crucial agents of change necessary for inclusive and sustainable development and progress in combating climate change. The Decent Work Agenda is thus essential for empowering indigenous women and men, and ensuring that they are not left behind.

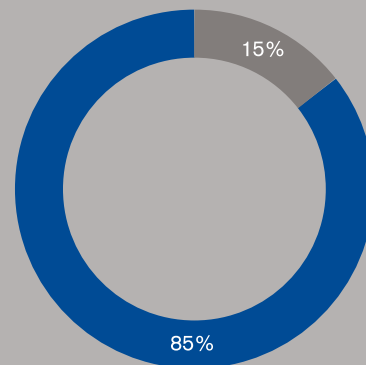
Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth is the strongest articulation of the Decent Work Agenda in the Sustainable Development Goals framework. Decent work is not just a goal, however: it is a driver of sustainable development. Elements of the Decent Work Agenda, which is underpinned by the ILO's Conventions and Recommendations, may be found in a number of the Sustainable Development Goals. With regard to indigenous peoples, ILO Convention No. 169 is particularly significant as it is the only international treaty open for ratification which specifically addresses their rights and well-being. Emphasizing the principles of equality, consultation, participation and cooperation, the Convention is a framework for participatory democracy, social peace and sustainable development. Its provisions cut across numerous goals and serve as an important point of departure for making the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for indigenous peoples.



Indigenous peoples constitute some
5 per cent of the world's population...



... but they account for nearly
15 per cent of the world's poor.



WHY IS A FOCUS ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES CRUCIAL FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS?



Indigenous peoples are overrepresented among the world's poorest population groups, many of whom are in remote rural areas and engaged in the agricultural sector. Although indigenous peoples constitute about 5 per cent of the world's population, they account for nearly 15 per cent of the world's poor. Poverty among indigenous peoples is a major challenge as they also experience social, economic and climate-related vulnerabilities, and lack adequate access to social protection systems and economic resources.



Indigenous peoples experience disproportionately high levels of malnutrition and often face threats to their traditional activities such as cultivation, hunting and gathering, fishing and pastoralism. The loss of their access to lands and natural resources, climate change-induced vulnerabilities, along with low incomes and productivity from traditional activities are all major causes of food insecurity.



The life expectancy of indigenous peoples is as much as 20 years lower than that of their non-indigenous counterparts. Often lacking adequate access to health-related services and information, indigenous peoples experience disproportionately high levels of diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis, and also of HIV and AIDS. They are also more likely to experience disability. Suicide rates, particularly among indigenous young people, are considerably higher in many countries.



A critical education gap remains between indigenous peoples and dominant populations. Indigenous peoples tend to have poor access to quality education and training, and often lack the skills needed to benefit from emerging opportunities. Their traditional skills, practices, modes of learning and languages are also often not recognized, and this undermines their ways of life and pushes them into the informal economy.

ILO Convention No. 169, Article 7, paragraph 2

"The improvement of the conditions of life and work and levels of health and education of the peoples concerned, with their participation and co-operation, shall be a matter of priority in plans for the overall economic development of areas they inhabit. Special projects for development of the areas in question shall also be so designed as to promote such improvement."

ILO Convention No. 169, Article 24

"Social security schemes shall be extended progressively to cover the peoples concerned, and applied without discrimination against them."

5



GENDER EQUALITY

Indigenous women and girls make significant contributions to livelihoods, unpaid care work and food security but are at the receiving end of multiple forms of discrimination. This includes discrimination both from within and outside their communities, which renders them still more vulnerable to social and economic exclusion. Indigenous women thus tend to face numerous barriers to their meaningful participation in political, social and economic decision-making processes.

Indigenous women and girls also often lack adequate access to quality education, training, social protection and economic resources, while simultaneously bearing the burden of financial, household and traditional activities. This considerably limits their ability to benefit from emerging opportunities and heightens their vulnerability to the slightest social and economic shocks. Facing increasing threats to their indigenous ways of life and livelihoods, many have been migrating away from their traditional areas in search of income-generating activities, such as domestic work. In such situations, they are often exposed to exploitation and gender-based violence.



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ILO Convention No. 169, Article 20, paragraph 3(d)

"The measures taken shall include measures to ensure... that workers belonging to these [indigenous] peoples enjoy equal opportunities and equal treatment in employment for men and women, and protection from sexual harassment."

ILO Convention No. 169, Article 7, paragraph 4

"Governments shall take measures, in cooperation with the peoples concerned, to protect and preserve the environment of the territories they inhabit."

6



CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Indigenous peoples suffer disproportionately from inadequate access to safe drinking water and sanitation services. This is one of the key reasons for the prevalence of certain diseases among them. An important factor contributing to this lack of access to water and sanitation is the contamination of the natural resources on which many indigenous peoples depend. This has particular consequences for indigenous women, who bear the brunt of efforts to find clean water and sanitation.

7



AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

On the one hand, as many indigenous peoples live in remote rural areas, they lack access to affordable and reliable energy. This has implications for the social, political and economic life of such communities, primarily because it limits the use of modern means of communication, learning and agricultural production. On the other hand, indigenous peoples often suffer from both the negative consequences of the dependence on energy from fossil fuels and the impacts of large-scale renewable energy projects. A number of instances of land alienation, contamination of natural resources and forced displacement have been associated with oil and gas extraction, coal mining or construction of dams.

8



DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

In the world of work, indigenous peoples face numerous threats to their traditional livelihoods, are often discriminated against, and are forced to cope with difficulties in securing decent work. With the increasing pressures placed on natural resources by globalization, along with non-inclusive economic growth and environmental conservation, indigenous peoples have been losing access to the traditional lands and territories on which their livelihoods depend. The impacts of climate change have exacerbated their already insecure livelihoods, in particular in the agricultural sector. At the same time, many traditional activities are unable adequately to meet the needs of indigenous women and men because of their low income-generating capacity, poor training, weak market linkages, and lower levels of productivity. Such factors have also impeded the ability of indigenous peoples, in particular the younger generations, to benefit adequately from emerging opportunities. Figures indicate that in many countries, unemployment rates for indigenous peoples are much higher than those of their non-indigenous counterparts.

Discrimination, low skills and non-recognition of traditional skills have also increased the barriers obstructing the entry of indigenous women and men into the formal economy. They find it more difficult to obtain loans, diversify their economic activities, start a business or secure a permanent contract. Those who do find employment tend to receive lower wages, have less secure contracts and are more likely to lose their jobs. Indigenous persons with disabilities face additional barriers to finding and keeping formal employment. Under the pressure of the increasing insecurity of their livelihoods, inadequate access to social protection, and limited opportunities in the formal economy, many have migrated away from their traditional areas to seek a living in the informal economy. Work in this setting tends to be precarious or hazardous and is often characterized by inadequate contracts or no contracts at all, along with health and safety risks.

Many indigenous women and girls work in the informal economy in a range of activities such as agricultural labour or domestic work, where they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. In a number of countries they have ended up in prostitution and are disproportionately represented among the victims of human trafficking. At the same time, in many countries, the disproportionately high rate of child labour among indigenous communities represents a crucial impediment that must be surmounted in ensuring decent work for all.

While indigenous peoples face a range of challenges in the world of work, their traditional knowledge and practices are crucial for sustainable economic growth that is sensitive to environmental considerations. For instance, sustainable tourism, together with the promotion of local cultures and products, can considerably benefit from ensuring decent work opportunities for indigenous peoples.



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9



INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Often located in remote areas, indigenous peoples tend to lack access to quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure necessary for their economic development and well-being. At the same time, as many indigenous women and men face barriers to decent work opportunities, they are unable to realize their full potential as entrepreneurs and innovators. This limits innovation based on traditional knowledge and the growth among indigenous peoples of small-scale and other enterprises, which can play an important role in employment generation and green growth.



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10



REDUCED INEQUALITIES

As the poorest among the poor, many indigenous women and men face severe constraints in achieving income growth. This is a consequence of unequal opportunities due to discriminatory laws, exclusion in public policies and non-recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples. For many, in particular indigenous women, their exclusion from wage and social protection policies, along with a loss of livelihoods, has led to greater impoverishment, which is a major contributor to inequality.

Indigenous peoples tend to be excluded from social, economic and political processes at the national and subnational levels. This fundamentally stems from a lack of consultation of indigenous peoples and the mechanisms for their participation in decision-making. Such processes include national development strategies and policies that directly affect their ways of life. At the same time, public policies in many countries do not pay directed or targeted attention to the needs of indigenous peoples. As a consequence, they have not been able to share adequately in the benefits of the economic growth which, in many countries, has played a major part in reducing inequalities.

ILO Convention No. 169, Article 2, paragraphs 1 and 2

“Governments shall have the responsibility for developing, with the participation of the peoples concerned, coordinated and systematic action to protect the rights of these peoples”

“Such action shall include measures for: (a) ensuring that members of these peoples benefit on an equal footing from the rights and opportunities which national laws and regulations grant to other members of the population; (b) promoting the full realization of the social, economic and cultural rights of these peoples with respect for their social and cultural identity, their customs and traditions and their institutions; (c) assisting the members of the peoples concerned to eliminate socioeconomic gaps that may exist between indigenous and other members of the national community, in a manner compatible with their aspirations and ways of life.”

11



SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

In search of income-generating activities, indigenous women and men have increasingly been migrating to urban centres. Often they find employment in the informal economy and live in poor conditions with limited access to basic services, for instance in slums. Such areas tend to have unsafe housing, poor hygiene conditions and weak connections to public transportation, and also face a greater risk from the impacts of natural disasters. This situation serves to further the exclusion of indigenous peoples in the urban setting and increases their social and economic vulnerability.

12



RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Unsustainable consumption and production patterns that do not respect the environment have had severe negative consequences for indigenous peoples. Many indigenous communities have been alienated from their traditional lands and territories as a result of both unsustainable resource extraction and contamination of their environment. At the same time, in many countries, indigenous women and men have been excluded from the management of natural resources. This considerably limits their potential to draw on their traditional knowledge in contributing towards the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.



ILO Convention No. 169, Article 4, paragraph 1

“Special measures shall be adopted as appropriate for safeguarding the persons, institutions, property, labour, cultures and environment of the peoples concerned.”

13



CLIMATE ACTION

For many indigenous peoples, climate change is already a reality that threatens their livelihoods and ways of life. They are among the first to face the direct consequences of climate change as they are heavily dependent on natural resources and the environment. Even though indigenous peoples contribute little to greenhouse gas emissions, in many countries, climate change poses a threat to their very existence. At the same time, climate policies and action that overlook the specific needs of indigenous peoples risk increasing their existing social and economic vulnerability.

Incorporating the traditional knowledge and ways of life of indigenous peoples into climate mitigation and adaptation measures is essential if climate action is to succeed, for instance in the management of natural resources. However, exclusionary public policies, a lack of targeted focus and the weak human and institutional capacities of indigenous peoples pose severe challenges to efforts to integrate their knowledge and practices in climate action.

14



LIFE BELOW WATER

Many indigenous communities are dependent on the oceans, seas and marine resources for their livelihoods and food security. However, the rapid growth in fisheries has led to overfishing in many areas, while environmental degradation has also contributed to the depletion of certain marine resources. The over-exploitation of marine resources has resulted in threats to the livelihoods of indigenous peoples, who have traditionally been disciplined in harvesting and developing their fisheries. Many indigenous communities also face restrictions on their fishing rights that further undermine the security of their livelihoods. At the same time, indigenous peoples have an important role to play in developing alternative approaches and sustainably managing marine resources, an aspect which is yet to receive adequate attention in public policies.



ILO Convention No. 169, Preamble

“Calling attention to the distinctive contributions of indigenous and tribal peoples to the cultural diversity and social and ecological harmony of humankind”

ILO Convention No. 169, Article 15, paragraph 1

“The rights of the peoples concerned to the natural resources pertaining to their lands shall be specially safeguarded. These rights include the right of these peoples to participate in the use, management and conservation of these resources.”

15



LIFE
ON LAND

Lands, forests and biodiversity are at the heart of the cultures and ways of life of indigenous peoples. Nearly 70 million indigenous women and men worldwide depend on forests for their livelihoods, while numerous other indigenous women and men depend on activities such as cultivation, hunting-gathering or pastoralism. Such forms of livelihood are increasingly under threat from deforestation, desertification, land degradation and biodiversity loss. In a number of countries, indigenous peoples also face restrictions on access to their traditional lands and territories arising from the exclusionary policies adopted for forests and biodiversity conservation. This often results in poor conservation outcomes while further exacerbating their livelihoods and food insecurity.

Indigenous peoples possess a wealth of traditional knowledge and practices relating to the sustainable management of natural resources on land. For instance, forests managed by indigenous peoples tend to have lower carbon dioxide emissions and deforestation rates. In many countries, however, the exclusion of indigenous peoples from the management of forests and other natural resources on land remains a major challenge that must be surmounted.



ILO Convention No. 169, Article 6, paragraphs 1 and 2

"In applying the provisions of this Convention, governments shall: (a) consult the peoples concerned, through appropriate procedures and in particular through their representative institutions, whenever consideration is being given to legislative or administrative measures which may affect them directly; (b) establish means by which these peoples can freely participate, to at least the same extent as other sectors of the population, at all levels of decision-making in elective institutions and administrative and other bodies responsible for policies and programmes which concern them; (c) establish means for the full development of these peoples' own institutions and initiatives, and in appropriate cases provide the resources necessary for this purpose."

"The consultations carried out in application of this Convention shall be undertaken, in good faith and in a form appropriate to the circumstances, with the objective of achieving agreement or consent to the proposed measures."

16



PEACE, JUSTICE AND
STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Indigenous peoples have historically suffered grave injustices and, in many settings, continue to face violence and serious violations of their human rights. Discriminatory laws and policies, along with a disregard for the rights of indigenous peoples, often lead to fragility and conflict. In recent years, ILO Convention No. 169 has served as a framework for the peace-building process in Nepal and Guatemala. In numerous other contexts, however, a lack of mechanisms that ensure inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels by indigenous peoples is contributing to the perpetuation of injustices and instability.

17



PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS

Indigenous peoples and their organizations and networks are fundamental partners in the endeavour to surmount the challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Where strong and effective national mechanisms for dialogue, consultation and participation are in place, there is enormous potential for indigenous peoples and their representative organizations to play a crucial role as agents and partners in development. At the same time, as the absence of data disaggregation often renders indigenous peoples invisible in official statistics, partnerships with indigenous peoples' organizations are instrumental for data collection, monitoring and accountability.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

While indigenous peoples face a host of challenges in their lives, their proactive participation as agents of change is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. With their wealth of traditional knowledge and practices, their role is particularly important in the following contexts that cut across several Goals:

- Ensuring the sustainable management and use of natural resources such as forests or marine resources
- Enhancing sustainable agricultural practices and food security
- Achieving effective climate change mitigation and adaptation to build resilient communities
- Enhancing sustainable forms of livelihood, creating green jobs and spurring climate-sensitive innovation, entrepreneurship and businesses
- Achieving gender equality and the greater participation of women, including in decision-making and natural resource management
- Raising productivity and economic growth while taking into account environmental considerations
- Securing the peaceful and stable societies necessary for inclusive social and economic development
- Establishing strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms so as to ensure that no one is left behind
- Enhancing knowledge-sharing and collaboration to implement and achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



ILO APPROACH TO THE EMPOWERMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The ILO carries institutional responsibility for Conventions Nos. 169 and 107, the only legally binding treaties specifically dedicated to indigenous peoples. It is therefore in a unique position within the United Nations system and has historically been at the forefront of promoting indigenous peoples' rights and well-being. Its interventions, in collaboration with UN partners, have covered several countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe.

By supporting governments and also workers', employers' and indigenous peoples' organizations, the ILO has been addressing the issues faced by indigenous peoples from multiple perspectives, with gender equality and non-discrimination as underlying principles. This includes interventions focusing on governance, including the establishment of consultation frameworks, capacity-building for legal and policy reforms, on addressing and preventing violations of fundamental rights at work, the promotion of sustainable livelihoods and entrepreneurship development, strengthened access to traditional lands and natural resource, and the creation of inclusive social protection floors. Greater attention is also being directed towards indigenous persons with disabilities. The ILO's Decent Work Agenda has played an important role in empowering indigenous women and men in a wide range of countries, and this empowerment has enabled their meaningful participation in economic, social and political processes.

The ILO is also collaborating with the United Nations Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises and with the United Nations Global Compact. This includes efforts to develop guidance for enterprises as part of their due diligence processes, and responding to the need for the sharing of knowledge and experiences regarding company policies and practices designed to ensure respect for the human rights of indigenous peoples.

With its experience and expertise in indigenous peoples' issues, the ILO is in a strong position to support stakeholders in ensuring that the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals do not leave indigenous peoples behind. As a UN specialized agency devoted to promoting social justice, the ILO has a unique tripartite structure that brings together governments, trade unions and employers' organizations. This gives the ILO the additional capacity to reach across local, national, regional and international boundaries in promoting ownership and harnessing partnerships that are crucial to the realization of the visionary 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The ILO's 2015 strategy for action regarding indigenous peoples was designed through a consensus-driven process and has been endorsed by its tripartite constituents. Its key elements are:

- Promoting Convention No. 169 for rights-based, inclusive and sustainable development
- Strengthening institutionalized dialogue, consultation and participation
- Improving livelihoods and working conditions
- Extending social protection
- Addressing specific challenges faced by indigenous women
- Closing the knowledge gap
- Enhancing and strengthening partnerships



Further reading and resources:

- ILO topical web-portal on indigenous peoples (www.ilo.org/indigenous)
- Indigenous peoples' rights for inclusive and sustainable development – ILO strategy for action
- Understanding the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) – Handbook for ILO Tripartite Constituents
- United Nations Indigenous Peoples Partnership Success Stories – Cooperating to promote and protect indigenous peoples' rights
- 2030 Development Agenda – ILO focus targets



Guy Ryder- ILO Director General

“Indigenous women and men and their communities risk remaining trapped in a cycle of poverty, discrimination and exploitation.

However, this does not have to be the case. There is an unrealized potential here: indigenous peoples' occupations, skills and knowledge are assets that can provide a basis for the creation of enterprises and cooperatives of indigenous women and men. Indigenous communities are increasingly combining traditional livelihood strategies with new economic activities. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to improve their economic and social conditions, including through vocational training and access to decent work and social protection.

The ILO's tripartite constituents play an important role in the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples' rights, including their right to consultation and participation.”



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SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

International Labour Organization (ILO)

4, route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

Gender, Equality and Diversity Branch (GED) Conditions of Work and Equality Department

Tel : +41 22 799 6730
Email: ged@ilo.org
Website: www.ilo.org/ged

Department of Communication and Public Information

Tel: +41 22 799 7912
Fax: +41 22 799 8577
Email: communication@ilo.org
Website: www.ilo.org

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