

# Indigenous women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

## Asia

### Training for Women Leaders in Decision-making: Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, and Sabah, Malaysia

<b>Project title</b>	Training for Women Leaders in Decision-making Bangladesh and Malaysia
<b>Thematic area/ programme</b>	Governance
<b>Project duration</b>	June 2005–February 2006
<b>Location</b>	Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, and Sabah, Malaysia
<b>Beneficiaries</b>	<p><i>Direct beneficiaries:</i> Approximately 60 training participants from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, and Sabah, Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia; and five women trained as trainers to conduct follow-on training</p> <p><i>Indirect beneficiaries:</i> Staff of the local partner organizations who had their capacity to conduct gender training enhanced, which also enabled them to incorporate more easily the gender dimension into decision-making processes and into sustained and broader programmes and activities; other women who will receive future training from the trainers through replication of the modules in each country; and the indigenous communities as a whole, on whom the trainings will also have some impact and influence and who will also benefit in the long term</p>
<b>Executing agency/ agencies</b>	United Nations Development Programme Regional Initiative on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Development-Asia-Pacific (UNDP-RIPP)
<b>Implementing agency/ agencies</b>	Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact Foundation and its partner organizations in Bangladesh and Malaysia
<b>Source of funds</b>	UNDP (RIPP and the Asia-Pacific Gender Mainstreaming Programme (APGMP))

## Overview

Indigenous peoples, communities and organizations face significant barriers to securing full and equal participation in national development, and control over their own development.

Empowerment of communities and peoples to assert and gain greater control over their lives and futures necessitates a holistic and multifaceted approach covering areas in which indigenous peoples remain among the most vulnerable in society. For such empowerment to be sustained, it is necessary that it reach every segment of society, including youth, the poor and women. It is vital that in the struggle of indigenous societies for recognition of rights, women's rights assume equal importance.

Over time, the influence and impact of globalized socio-economic patterns have resulted in the transformation of some cultural norms and traditions to conform to the dictates of modern society. Indigenous women are most affected by the consequences of such transitions, and suffer from the violation of their rights within their own community, from entities such as the armed forces and through their undervalued labour.

International instruments that advocate for the recognition, protection and promotion of women's rights such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women<sup>1</sup> can serve as tools for indigenous women. The need to strengthen the recognition of their rights is linked to including their participation in decision-making processes so that they can play an effective role in their community and among their peoples. Recognizing indigenous women's equal right to decision-making positions and empowering them to take informed and sound decisions pave the way for innovations crafted to address and adapt to the changing relations in indigenous communities and the general society.

Given the generally low status possessed in most societies by women in general and indigenous women in particular—given their triple burden of being indigenous, female and poor—training to enable indigenous women to be better informed on their rights strengthens their capacity to demand and enjoy the same rights as others and provides an excellent building block towards empowerment and capacity development.

As stated in the Project Completion Report (February 2006):

It is a rare experience for women to be given a space to gather and identify issues relevant to their own decision-making. Moreover, discussing resolution to such issues is much more important, as it provides space to facilitate actual decision-making. In general, providing such moments empower women, as well as men, to look deeper into the changing social and cultural relations as indigenous societies develop in the context of a broader sphere. This process allows

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

co-accountability of both women and men in decision-making while considering transformation of structures within the dynamics of an advancing society.

### What was planned

The objectives of the women in the decision-making programme were:

- (a) To provide a venue and an opportunity for indigenous women to share specific and common experiences within their social context;
- (b) To provide women with broader comprehension of their rights with a view to building their capability to protect and demand recognition of such rights, both within their community and in general;
- (c) To provide a space within which to assess the skills and knowledge necessary to make sound decisions or influence leaders in their community within the context of changing relations in indigenous communities or societies;
- (d) To employ indigenous resolution processes in the long term with a view to deciding on conflicts and situations of inequality so as to be able to guarantee the rights of indigenous women within communities and the general society;
- (e) To enhance the capacity of local trainers in Bangladesh and Malaysia by facilitating exchange visits in the actual conduct of the trainings.

### Activities

The project was implemented from 15 July 2005 to February 2006 and covered training conducted with local organizers in Bangladesh and Malaysia.

In order to implement the training, efforts involved creating and clarifying the responsibilities of the team of local trainers, preparing the participants and the venue, training conduct and report-writing. These were packaged into the preparatory process, the actual conduct and the post-training activities:

#### *Activity one: creating the local trainers' team*

In preparation for the training, each country formed a local trainers' team composed of from three to four local trainers directed to serve as resource persons. A visiting local trainer from Malaysia joined the team of Bangladesh and a trainer from Bangladesh joined the Malaysia team. The local members of the team were chosen from indigenous communities/groups with previous experience in gender-related discussions.

#### *Activity two: conducting the training*

Subsequent to the training of the pool of local trainers, a five-day training session was conducted using the commonly understood local language.

(a) *Training for Indigenous Women Leaders on Decision-making, Bangladesh:* The activity was co-organized by Trinnamul Unnayan Sangstha, the Hill Tracts NGO Forum (HTNF) and Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact Foundation (AIPP) and held from 5 to 9 August 2005 in Rangamati, Bangladesh. The participants were some 33 women leaders from different communities including Chakma, Marma, Pankua, Khiang, Tangchangya, Tripura, Bawm, Chak, Mro, Khumi, Garo, Khashi and Orao, covering the three districts of Rangamati, Kagrachari and Bandarban in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, as well as from the plains areas of Bangladesh. The training was conducted by four local trainers and the members of the Gender Committee of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact Foundation (AIPP). There were also UNDP resource persons available during the training.

(b) *Training for Indigenous Women Leaders on Decision-making, Malaysia:* Subsequent to the training in Bangladesh, the Partners of Community Organizations (PACOS) Trust co-organized a counterpart training held from 8 to 15 December 2005 in Sabah, Malaysia. Thirty-two participants from Malaysia (including five men) attended from the regions of Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah. This series included six women representatives from Bangladesh participating as part of their training as local trainers and as members of an exchange/sharing-of-experiences component. PACOS staff served as secretariat, while AIPP and UNDP resource persons also participated.

#### *Activity three: evaluation*

At the end of the training, an evaluation was conducted with a view to improving future trainings and gaining an overview of the training's successes and challenges.

#### *Activity four: documentation*

This activity encompassed documentation of the process and methodology of the training, and of the experiences and situations of women participating in the training; and dissemination of the documentation, both in formal reports and in accessible booklet form, to ensure awareness-raising on the issues facing indigenous women.

The programme of activities was adapted to the local condition with a view to providing a better response thereto. Evaluation of the topics contained in the programme included other stakeholders. This led to the recommendation of adding one more day to the module, to be devoted to an exchange of views on issues significant with respect to national and international processes and policies specifically affecting indigenous women.

The learning method used in raising the capability of the local trainers took some innovative forms. In particular, the training in Malaysia accommodated six local trainers from Bangladesh, instead of one. This



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allowed for a collective approach to gaining knowledge for the purpose of building the capacity of the local trainers.

The modifications mentioned above resulted in changes being made to the budget allocation so that it would include additional activities such as field visits, as well as related documentation and miscellaneous expenses within the whole learning process.

### What the strategy was

The strategy was to incorporate local organizations into every stage of the training so as to ensure that indigenous women at every level, ranging from those in community organizations, civil society and development organizations to those in regional and national indigenous organizations, would become more aware of their rights and of the constraints that they faced. The training aimed at enabling all women involved in the process to realize their full potential to play a decisive role in their society and communities. This was achieved through training and capacity development workshops and sharing and learning sessions.

### Who was involved

UNDP, through its Regional Initiative on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Development-Asia-Pacific (RIPP) and the Asia-Pacific Gender Mainstreaming Programme (APGMP), in partnership with the Asia Indigenous

Peoples Pact Foundation (AIPP), the Hill Tracts NGO Forum and Partners of Community Organisations (PACOS).

The training was jointly organized by AIPP, Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha, Hill Tracts NGO Forum, PACOS Trust and other women's groups and organizations in close consultation and cooperation with UNDP-RIPP.

The collaboration fostered the complementarity of the roles of the various organizations and groups and created the means to empower and strengthen indigenous women's leadership and representation.

### Specific changes resulting from the project (outputs and impact)

It is rare for women to be given a space within which to gather and identify issues relevant to their own decision-making. Discussing the resolution of such issues is much more important, as it provides a space within which to facilitate actual decision-making. In general, providing such moments empower women as well as men to take a deeper look at changing social and cultural relations as indigenous societies develop within a broader context. This process allows for the co-accountability of women and men in decision-making while the transformation of structures within the dynamics of an advancing society is considered.

The impact of the training on women local trainers has been reflected in a broadening of skills in imparting knowledge to their colleagues. The training in Malaysia, especially, has fostered a country-to-country exchange of skills among the trainers, thereby contributing to the acquisition of broader knowledge.

The participants and local organizers were provided with a greater opportunity to enhance their familiarity with coordinating and networking among various groups such as non-governmental organizations and support agencies at the regional (Asia) level. In the case of Bangladesh, the event provided the local hosts with an additional opportunity to consolidate their efforts in organizing indigenous women members and partners.

Integral to the capacity-raising of the participants was the formulation of a follow-up action plan. Identification of efforts to further the resolution and discussion of gender-related issues among both women and men in indigenous societies was generally held to be significant.

In addition, the learning/sharing experiences of the indigenous women in the two target communities helped build stronger linkages and cooperation.

### Sustainability

The gender training included a component on training of trainers. It is expected that this group of indigenous women will be available to contribute





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to and support the work of their sisters in their communities and in other countries in the region.

It is envisioned that follow-up activities shall consider medium- and long-term activities and plans directed towards the concrete realization of the training as a tool for empowerment of women in respect of their participation in decision-making.

Further development of the training module shall be made integral. The series of training sessions will continue and will be held in the years that follow, possibly in two countries per year. Projects shall be identified, if necessary, depending on the outcomes of the training sessions.

At the regional level, the results of the training sessions have predictably included better linkages and networking between the two countries specifically, and in the region at large, given the learning/sharing nature of the training series. In addition, documentation and materials through which to disseminate the stories, experiences and lessons learned are being produced, and these will in turn support further training, dissemination of information and advocacy on gender issues.

### Replication/spin-off effects

This model will be replicated and expanded to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region in the next steps of the programme. The two country sharing/learning exchanges have proved to be extremely rewarding and will be followed up to ensure that the process is manageable and that the exchange between indigenous women maintains its momentum and gen-

erates greater awareness of the challenges they face both within and outside their communities.

The training modules used will also be freely available to any indigenous organization that is interested in providing members with the same technical skills and knowledge.

In addition to funded replication of the training modules used in this training process, sustained impact from the “training of trainers”, which is an integral part of the training process, is expected.

As a result of the training of trainers, groups of technically skilled local women have been able to replicate the training with or without external funding.

### What was learned

Lessons learned during the first training session held in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, in August 2005 were examined and built into the second training session (Malaysia, 11-14 December 2005). The primary lessons identified in the implementation of the project thus far revealed that, inter alia:

- The inclusion of women in positions of decision-making authority has direct and positive effects on the level of social inclusion experienced by women
- Forms of exclusion stemming from economic and social marginalization may not always be recognized as stemming from such causes, but can be addressed more easily once their root causes are articulated
- Cultural norms of gender subordination are better able to be challenged and changed if they are understood
- The inclusion of men in training events aimed at examining the roles of women in decision-making can broaden the impact of the training provided

Full analytical treatment was applied to the lessons learned in both training sessions, and these lessons will be directly applied to the design of possible future training sessions.

### Factors contributing to success

- Providing comfortable space for the sharing of experiences, visions and problems
- Working directly with community workers
- Having trainers from the same communities or peoples as the trainees





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- Having committed and skilled trainers with experience in development and empowerment work
- Working in partnership with local organizations, with government and with regional organizations
- Focus on identifying practical steps forward
- Imparting knowledge and experience

#### Obstacles or problems identified during the project

- Language (different languages)
- Differing socio-economic conditions
- Training-of-trainers component of the training was insufficient in respect of enabling independent replication without support; however, this outcome had been partially predicted, and a follow-up and support process with training graduates is planned

#### Documentation/bibliography

AIPP Gender Training Module

UNDP, Policy of Engagement with Indigenous Peoples (2001)

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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