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Comprehensive dialogue with six United Nations agencies and funds

Information received from the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Summary

The present submission of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is prepared in the context of the in-depth dialogue between FAO and the members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

* E/C.19/2009/1.



I. Introduction

1. The in-depth dialogue to be held during the eighth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues offers a good opportunity for substantive discussion between international development organizations and representatives of indigenous peoples, as well as other partners in civil society. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has agreed to take part in this dialogue in order to provide a forthright account of its engagement with indigenous peoples' issues, including trends, gaps and constraints on action. It is also a good occasion for FAO managers and officers to become more aware of the problems of indigenous peoples. It is FAO's hope that the report will lead to greater understanding of how it works, under what conditions its work with indigenous peoples takes place and in what capacity it contributes to global efforts to better the lives of indigenous populations. The desire to clarify what can reasonably be expected from FAO, but also what the Organization itself should be aware of, has prompted the preparation of this report and the accompanying dialogue.

2. The engagement of FAO with indigenous issues has been increasing in recent years, motivated by a growing recognition of the precarious conditions in which many indigenous peoples live and in response to strengthened commitment on the part of national authorities. Projects with an indigenous component take place in many countries with which FAO has an ongoing collaboration and where indigenous communities are present. Furthermore, triggered in part by the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, this trend is growing. Nevertheless, there are significant constraints to FAO's engagement with indigenous issues, and these will be explained along with the positive trends.

3. The work of FAO with indigenous peoples is defined by certain institutional and organizational factors that influence the nature of development interventions and determine its capacity to work on this issue. Support to indigenous peoples must respond to the same institutional directive that governs all FAO projects and programmes. All activities undertaken by FAO must be consistent with its overall mandate, defined in the following terms: to "achieve food security for all, raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity, better the lives of rural populations and thus contribute to the growth of the world economy". The implications of this prerequisite will be reviewed in this report, along with an analysis of the work of FAO in this field, the limitations of its engagement and the opportunities for the future.

II. Work on indigenous issues

4. The work of FAO on indigenous issues takes place at three levels: field, research and policy/normative. Each level is an integral component of the organization's mission, and FAO makes an important effort at each level to improve the conditions in which indigenous peoples live and to amend the discriminatory constraints to which they are subject.

A. Work at the field and project level

5. Field projects are one area in which the work of FAO with indigenous peoples is most visible. Their purpose is to provide technical support in areas consistent with its specialization in agriculture and other dimensions of food security. The projects generally follow one of two types of engagement: those that are formulated specifically for indigenous peoples, and those that include indigenous peoples as part of a larger beneficiary population. The latter type is of potential benefit to indigenous peoples in that there is a degree of interaction with the natural or social environment in which indigenous and other communities live, although indigenous peoples are not treated as partners or recipients in this instance.

6. The following section discusses projects and programmes in Latin America that contain an indigenous component. The decision to focus on a single region is motivated by the desire to give a more substantive account of FAO interventions in one of its primary field locations. Therefore, instead of submitting a broad overview of different projects from around the world, a more thorough picture of FAO's programmatic approach to indigenous issues in Latin America will be offered, making it possible to improve understanding of the types of interventions and their key operational characteristics as they apply to a specific context. Other regions are expected to be covered in subsequent sessions of the Forum.

A focus on Latin America

7. FAO involvement with indigenous peoples varies in scope and level of financial support, depending on the nature of the activity, the amount of funding, the type of donor and the type of collaboration. As mentioned above, projects with an indigenous component either work directly with and for indigenous peoples or they include indigenous peoples as beneficiaries along with other rural populations. The two will be discussed separately.

Projects specifically supporting indigenous peoples

8. About a third of FAO projects in Latin America with an indigenous component specifically focus on indigenous peoples. Numerically, this accounts for approximately 50 projects.¹ A more significant effort to address indigenous peoples as special groups occurs in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru. Activities take place to a lesser extent in Argentina, Brazil and Panama. For the rest of the region, projects with an indigenous component either do not take place or benefit indigenous peoples indirectly by including them as constituents in a larger recipient group.

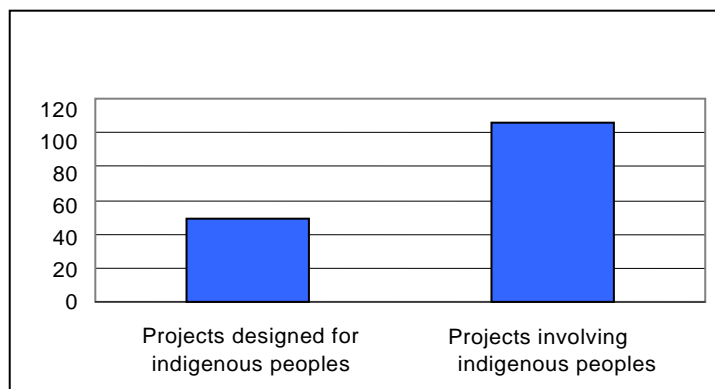
9. Nearly all projects that address indigenous peoples specifically are smaller in scale. For the most part they consist of telefood initiatives, which are small, self-contained agriculture, livestock or fisheries projects that help specific groups of people — mostly small communities or organizations — achieve greater livelihood security through the generation of more food or income. They are generally limited to a time frame of a year, with a budget of less than \$10,000. In general, small-scale initiatives include indigenous peoples throughout the project cycle, especially women, and sometimes indigenous youth. Training and participation are key

¹ Numbers and estimates are approximate figures.

elements of this type of project, where members of indigenous communities gain capacities in food production and productivity in an economically and environmentally sustainable way. Indigenous communities in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru have taken part in activities of this type.

10. Two types of projects formulated explicitly for indigenous peoples are the regional initiatives funded by donor Governments. Regional projects involve two or more countries sharing certain geographical features or thematic concerns. In Latin America there is a group of projects that operate in this way, and most of them have an environmental focus. Animal conservation, for example, is supported in indigenous communities of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru, where food security is linked to the preservation of local species. Another regional project in the high-Andean areas of Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru is focused on the strengthening of the capacity of indigenous organizations to produce food for consumption and sale. To that end, it is promoting the recovery of traditional products and their associated production systems. Regional projects of this type take into account the needs of indigenous peoples while often incorporating local knowledge, livelihood systems and culture into project designs. As for the small-scale projects, they too emphasize participation and interactive exchange.

Figure I
FAO projects in Latin America^a



^a Data refers only to those projects in Latin America with an indigenous component.

11. Country-level projects that specifically address indigenous peoples are taking place in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Peru. FAO has supported approximately 15 projects of this type in recent years. Unlike small-scale or regional projects, their activities are directed at the national or subregional level, with larger funds and over longer periods of time. These types of intervention focus predominantly on institutional, technical and administrative support to national stakeholders (government and civil society) and generally seek improvements in their capacity to tackle the development concerns of indigenous peoples in a coherent and comprehensive way, without isolating them from broader development efforts taking place. Projects related to food security and natural resource management are the most characteristic. They provide technical support in areas such as the establishment of viable agriculture, nutrition

improvement, sustainable management of natural resources and the conservation of globally important agricultural heritage systems, many of which are indigenous systems. At least two projects have supported indigenous peoples following natural disasters. Their aim is to help restore viable agricultural activities after an emergency. Two additional projects, in Chile and Colombia, are focused on human-induced crises. Indigenous peoples that have been victimized by civil violence due to land disputes or discrimination have been the focus of these conflict prevention initiatives.

12. Four multi-agency projects in Latin America are directly targeted to indigenous peoples. In this regard, FAO works in collaboration with other United Nations agencies as a team, where each gives a specific technical contribution related to its individual mandate. Funding for such projects often comes from donors that are particularly sensitive to factors of social exclusion and cultural diversity. Since cross-agency cooperation is also stipulated, they offer a great opportunity for United Nations agencies and programmes to collaborate as a unified system. Generally, this type of intervention shows a strong commitment to inter-disciplinary development and socio-cultural awareness, encouraging direct engagement with indigenous peoples. In Panama and Ecuador, FAO is cooperating in projects that have an environmental dimension: it provides assistance to indigenous communities in preserving their natural surroundings, and therefore their own livelihoods. In Honduras and Ecuador, FAO is supporting projects that aim to integrate cultural diversity into public policy and local development interventions.

Projects that include indigenous peoples

13. In addition to the projects outlined above, in which indigenous peoples are identified as a specific group and a concerted effort is made to address their needs and to include them as effective participants in the planning process and programming cycle, FAO is involved in a number of projects that aim to create positive development outcomes for rural populations, including many indigenous peoples. These projects either take place in areas where indigenous peoples are highly concentrated geographically, such as the Andes, the Amazon, Central America and certain coastal regions, or they include indigenous peoples owing to their focus on vulnerable and marginal communities more generally. In the latter case, the project objective is to work with indigenous peoples by definition rather than by clear intent. For this reason, a concerted effort is not made to identify the specific needs and development concerns of those indigenous peoples present. Nevertheless, substantial benefits may result.

14. Many food security interventions take place in the Andean region because of the difficult living conditions in those areas (for example in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru), but also in other poor countries such as Nicaragua and Honduras. Interventions with this focus seek to increase access to and quality of food through different forms of technical assistance. In countries such as Ecuador, El Salvador and Mexico, FAO works through its special programme for food security to strengthen the capacity of public and private institutions, as well as of farmers and international organizations, to tackle food security concerns and to manage and coordinate responses that include the most vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples. At the regional level, its Right to Food Unit has also undertaken a number of activities in Latin America. In Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay and Nicaragua, projects have supported legislative and policy processes to guarantee the right to

adequate food for vulnerable populations, including indigenous peoples. Closely related to food security are initiatives that address the economic gains and opportunities of disadvantaged stakeholders. Most of these are small-scale initiatives, but some are also national, predominately in Mexico and Paraguay.

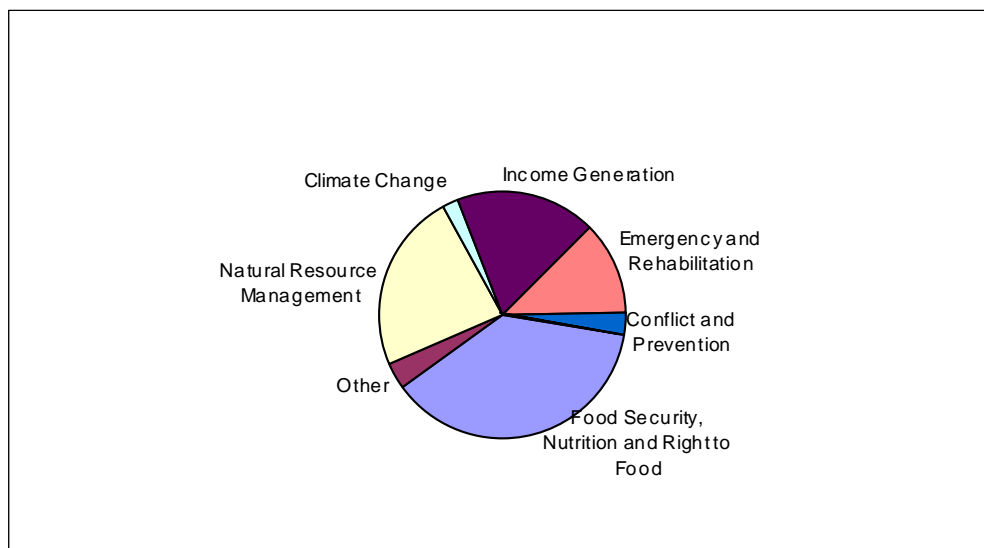
15. There are also two interventions for adaptation and mitigation of climate change impacts on rural communities. For instance, FAO, in collaboration with other United Nations agencies, is developing pilot adaptation measures in the Colombian massif aimed at strengthening the sustainable practices of indigenous communities and other rural inhabitants. It is also working to integrate environmental issues within the national development agenda, with an emphasis on reducing vulnerabilities in the most affected groups. Similar efforts are under way in Guatemala and Peru.

16. In Honduras, Guatemala, Ecuador, Belize, Colombia, Nicaragua and Bolivia, where natural disasters have had a devastating impact on marginal communities, including some indigenous ones, emergency relief and rehabilitation projects are being implemented. In projects of this type, FAO works to re-establish the first cycle of agricultural activity following a period of crisis. The aim is to give affected communities the chance to regenerate production when they have been hard-hit by natural phenomena. Additionally, FAO had helped to build capacity for disaster risk management in the agricultural sector in a number of countries. These efforts focus on strengthening national and local institutions to carry out disaster mitigation, preparedness and response. The point is to ensure that even the most vulnerable have some degree of protection in emergency situations.

17. For the most part, only limited work on indigenous issues occurs in the small island Caribbean States, as well as in other countries like Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Argentina and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

18. In sum, FAO's work on indigenous issues follows two types of engagement. A specific focus on indigenous peoples is clearly more desirable, but given that FAO's mandate is technical in nature, its work is generally dominated by efforts to support indigenous peoples as members of rural populations. Nevertheless, efforts of the latter kind are also important.

Figure II
Distribution of projects according to thematic focus^a



^a Data refers to all FAO projects in Latin America with an indigenous component.

B. Research

19. FAO's role in generating credible, high quality technical knowledge and research in the field of food and agriculture reinforces its work at the field level. FAO has undertaken a number of research projects that focus on indigenous peoples and various aspects of their environment. Their purpose is to deepen global and governmental understanding of certain topics or certain contexts.

20. One example is a collaborative initiative between FAO and the Centre for Indigenous Peoples Nutrition and Environment (CINE) at McGill University in Canada, which has explored the concepts of food security and food sovereignty as they relate to indigenous peoples. In 12 case studies from different indigenous communities around the world, FAO and CINE professionals have documented the nutritional composition of their food systems and their correlation to the health levels of consumers. These case studies have demonstrated that products derived from indigenous peoples' local ecosystems generally provide much greater nutritional value and energy content than those derived purely from the market. Traditional food practices are being threatened by environmental degradation, migration to urban areas and lack of resources due to poverty. As a result, indigenous peoples increasingly resort to market products. The inadequate nutrient quality of purchased "globalized foods" is manifested in poor health consequences such as decayed and missing teeth, obesity, heart disease and other conditions. These conditions have traditionally been linked to "rich" societies, and the fact that they are now also surfacing in the lowest socio-economic strata — of which many indigenous communities are part — has opened a new dimension in health-related development work. Indeed, the poor health status of indigenous children and adults is a growing concern.

21. A methodology for understanding local traditional food systems of indigenous peoples was developed with FAO support. It outlines procedures for documenting traditional food practices and nutritional contents. Among other things, it covers field sampling, laboratory methods, dietary analysis, assessment of environmental constraints and planning food-based interventions. It also suggests ways to develop adequate cooperation with indigenous partners, based on extensive experience in the field with different indigenous communities. These procedures offer development professionals a practical methodology for formulating food-based interventions to improve nutrition and physical well-being. They can also be applied by indigenous peoples themselves.² Currently, FAO and the Centre have joined forces in promoting the recovery of traditional indigenous food systems in order to reverse negative health trends and recover some of the environmental and cultural richness in indigenous lands.³

22. FAO, through research and practice, uses its projects and programmes to help raise awareness about gender dynamics and local knowledge. The new strategic framework 2010-2013, approved by the FAO special session held in November 2008, identifies the 11 fundamental strategic objectives of its work. One of these is gender, meaning that gender and social equality are a fundamental area of FAO's work. Equally relevant is the strategic objective dealing with more equitable access to and secure tenure of natural resources, in which indigenous peoples and women are specifically mentioned. The new framework also refers to traditional and local knowledge. For instance, the strategic objective on improved food security and nutrition emphasizes the benefit that can accrue from greater utilization of locally specific knowledge tools and resources. These areas of work can certainly gain from the specialized knowledge of indigenous peoples.

23. Recently, FAO has commissioned a study on the linkages between indigenous peoples, gender and indigenous knowledge systems for food security. This comprehensive review has made clear that, in spite of discrimination and dispossession, many indigenous women and men sustain unique biological and cultural systems that help foster the sustainable use and conservation of biological diversity, including thousands of traditional animal breeds, traditional domesticated crops, landraces and plant varieties, as well as micro-organisms used for food and drinks. Gender-based knowledge systems are particularly important because men and women know different things and therefore offer different contributions to food security and conservation processes. This is evident in projects such as the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems initiative (GIAHS), where FAO is supporting indigenous and other rural peoples in efforts to maintain their ingenious agricultural heritage systems for their own benefit and that of humanity and demonstrates the relevance of linking indigenous knowledge of natural resource management to development efforts in organizations such as FAO.⁴

24. Currently, FAO is developing basic guidelines for development projects on how to build on traditional knowledge. The objective is to improve the capacity of

² See http://www.mcgill.ca/files/cine/ProcedureManual_Introduction.pdf.

³ H. Kuhnlein, "Indigenous peoples food systems: the many dimensions of culture, diversity and environment for nutrition and health" (to be published).

⁴ E. Reichel, "Indigenous knowledge, gender-based knowledge systems, and the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity of food and agriculture: an overview for FAO" (to be published).

FAO staff and other interested parties to integrate useful local knowledge into the development process. Indigenous peoples will benefit from such an approach as well.

C. Normative work: policy instruments and their operational dimensions

25. Besides its role in field projects and research, FAO also engages in important policy and normative work in order to make development at the local, national and international level more effective.

26. As part of its core functions, FAO is involved in the negotiation of international instruments, the establishment of international norms, standards and voluntary guidelines, and support to the development and implementation of national legal instruments.

27. Most normative instruments that FAO has helped to develop are of relevance to indigenous peoples. A number of normative instruments refer explicitly to indigenous peoples or indigenous communities.⁵ Others are of implicit benefit to indigenous and other rural populations, as they work to influence the social or natural environments of which they are part. Although many of the instruments form part of the so-called non-binding soft law, they provide Governments with moral obligations and policy guidance which do indeed hold weight. For indigenous peoples, they can serve as advocacy tools to promote good practices and sensitive policy.

28. Interviews with FAO staff and an analysis of existing documentation revealed a general lack of awareness of indigenous issues in FAO's normative instruments. Clarifying how indigenous peoples and other stakeholders can make greater use of these normative instruments for their own practical benefit would help to render them more accessible and operational. Indeed, all stakeholders involved in the implementation of these instruments must be aware of the specific provisions on indigenous peoples included in some of these instruments. It is hoped that general and specific awareness-raising efforts on indigenous issues related to these normative instruments will reduce the awareness gap among FAO staff, development workers, Governments and indigenous peoples themselves and lead to an improved understanding of these instruments from an indigenous peoples' perspective.

29. FAO recently analysed two normative FAO instruments: the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries⁶ and the Right to Food Guidelines.⁷ The objective is to provide guidance on the impact and benefits of these instruments from an indigenous peoples' perspective. The main points of the analysis are summarized below.

⁵ See International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, Right to Food Guidelines, Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Voluntary Guidelines on Fire Management, and Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Management of Planted Forests.

⁶ See www.fao.org/fishery/ccrf/en.

⁷ FAO, *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security*, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/y5906m/Y5906M08.htm>.

FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries

30. The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries was unanimously adopted in 1995 by the twenty-eighth session of the FAO Conference and provides a framework for national and international efforts to ensure the sustainable exploitation of aquatic living resources in harmony with the environment. While voluntary in nature, parts of it are based on relevant rules of international law. It is the most comprehensive document that exists so far on fishery-related activities. It is therefore of great significance to indigenous peoples whose livelihoods are based on fishing practices.

31. A careful look at the content of the code shows that concepts of equity, fairness and right to livelihood, which are important to indigenous fishing communities, are included. Particular attention is drawn to the rights of all categories of fishers and to the importance of consultation and participation of fishing communities within decision-making processes. More technical issues such as sustainable fishing practices, coastal zone management and trade are also addressed. There is no doubt that indigenous communities would benefit greatly if relevant articles of the code were incorporated into national legislation and implemented as national policies in accordance with ILO Convention No. 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

32. The code itself is not tailored to indigenous peoples specifically, but it does regulate issues of relevance to indigenous fishing communities. For example, the code — as well as other related international initiatives and instruments — encourages countries to encompass sustainable utilization of fisheries resources. A central element of the code is the increased participation of resource users, which reverses the approach from a top-down process to a participatory and interactive one. This is also in line with the principle and right to free, prior and informed consent.

33. In its efforts to support the implementation of the code, FAO should ensure that the different stakeholders involved in the fisheries sector are aware of the interests and needs of indigenous fishing communities. At the same time, indigenous fishing communities should also use the code to lobby their national Governments to implement and apply its stipulations in a manner that respects their rights and interests.

34. It is necessary to translate gaps and concerns into action and to implement fundamental fisheries reform through effective legislation, policies and public participation for the benefit of indigenous peoples. FAO staff and fisheries lawyers and administrators at national and local levels are strongly encouraged to address the concerns and the positions of indigenous peoples in the fisheries sector.

Right to Food Guidelines

35. The Right to Food Guidelines were adopted unanimously by the FAO Council in 2004. They reflect a consensus among FAO members on what needs to be done in all of the most relevant policy areas to promote food security using a human rights-based approach. The guidelines are voluntary in nature but build on international law and provide practical guidance for the implementation of the right to adequate food at the national level. They refer to “indigenous peoples” or “indigenous

communities” explicitly in the context of access to resources and assets. Indigenous peoples are also referred to implicitly as members of vulnerable groups in several other guidelines. The guidelines assert that States should pay particular attention to the needs of vulnerable groups, which include indigenous peoples. The guidelines are valuable because they move away from the theoretical to the practical, and assist governments in realizing everyone’s right to food, in particular the most needy and hungry. They translate human rights principles, such as non-discrimination, into concrete recommendations for action. For example, the guidelines invite States to collect disaggregated data on the food insecurity, the vulnerability and the nutritional status of different groups in society, which is also fundamental for highlighting the discrimination suffered by indigenous peoples. Thus, the guidelines provide a basis for advocating more equitable policies and programmes, paving the way for indigenous peoples to promote their right to food in all areas that intersect with this right.

36. The guidelines can help Governments design appropriate policies, strategies and legislation that focuses on the most vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples. Although voluntary, because they arise from a consensus among FAO member States, the Guidelines can have a significant influence on State policies and on the realization of the right to food of vulnerable populations, including indigenous peoples.

III. An analytical assessment of the work of FAO with indigenous peoples

37. This section contains an analytical assessment of FAO’s work with indigenous peoples, highlighting important achievements, lessons and discrepancies in FAO’s approach to indigenous issues. At the same time, it outlines positive trends and opportunities for better engagement in the future.

Identified strengths and lessons learned

38. The greatest contribution of FAO to global development work is its high-quality technical capacities and its engagement at the international and national policy levels. These strengths enable FAO to influence the policies, planning strategies and development projects undertaken by national Governments. FAO has made an increasing effort to engage indigenous peoples in work related to food security and nutrition, sustainable natural resource management, income generation, and emergency support. Several research and policy instruments have helped to raise awareness about indigenous issues and to integrate those issues into national development planning.

39. However, the analysis of projects and programmes from Latin America has demonstrated a number of limitations in the work of FAO with indigenous peoples at the field level. These limitations must not be ignored.

40. It is evident in the analysis regarding Latin America that the work of FAO with indigenous peoples per se is quite limited, and that only a small proportion of projects actually take into account their specific needs and development concerns. In reality, most FAO projects simply take place in regions where the majority of

peoples happen to be indigenous; therefore, project objectives require working with indigenous peoples by definition, rather than by true intent. This is the most fundamental limitation that characterizes the work of FAO in this field. The need to work with indigenous peoples as a special group is therefore evident, even though the organization has no specific mandate to do so. After all, the mandate of FAO is directed at the rural poor, and it cannot be denied that indigenous peoples constitute an important minority of the most vulnerable and most marginalized rural communities.

41. Projects specifically formulated for indigenous communities imply a concrete effort to involve indigenous peoples throughout the project cycle and to consider their livelihood systems more carefully. Although some projects meet the criteria of the United Nations Declaration, the primary clients of FAO are Governments and therefore its engagement in indigenous peoples' issues is often limited. There are very few projects that are specifically designed to meet the needs of indigenous peoples, and even fewer that seek their prior and informed consent. FAO needs to make a greater effort to mainstream the concerns and perspectives of indigenous peoples throughout the organization, at both headquarters and decentralized levels, including member Governments. Only in this way will it be possible to address indigenous issues more systematically and in compliance with the Declaration and the principles of indigenous peoples themselves.

42. New opportunities are nonetheless evolving, and it is the intention of FAO to offer its technical assistance where it is possible and important to do so. The United Nations Collaborative Partnership for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation is one example where efforts are being made to consult and include indigenous peoples, in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Response to Permanent Forum recommendations over the years

43. Implementation of the recommendations of the Permanent Forum is taken very seriously at FAO. Most of the recommendations have been followed, or are being carried out through projects that are still operationally active. In fact, many activities being undertaken in fulfilment of the recommendations are viewed as ongoing processes. This section contains a comprehensive review of the recommendations that have been directed at FAO and the organization's response to them. They have been clustered according to subject matter and type of recommendation (the identification of these clusters is based in part on the categories used by the Permanent Forum itself).

A. Technical work on issues related to the mandate of FAO

44. These recommendations relate to projects and training at the field or community level, that are linked to the particular expertise FAO has to offer. They cover food security, nutrition, agriculture and associated issues such as health effects, biodiversity and environmental conservation. In considering the relationship between food, indigenous diet, health and subsistence lifestyles, FAO has been active in its partnership with the Centre for Indigenous Peoples Nutrition and Environment. Important information about the inherent quality of traditional

indigenous food systems has been ascertained and projects relating to the nutrition and health of indigenous peoples are under way.

45. A technical workshop to promote models for environmental and sustainable development governance among Forum members, State representatives and indigenous peoples has not taken place, as recommended to FAO and other organizations (among others, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and UNDP). Nevertheless, FAO has undertaken a great deal of project work on issues related to this recommendation. Cultural and biological diversity, for example, are the focus of the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) project, which seeks to keep ingenious agricultural systems intact around the world, many of them in indigenous communities. Another issue referred to in conjunction with the suggested workshop is traditional knowledge and its potential linkage to scientific knowledge. Traditional knowledge was a core component of FAO LinKS project (Local Indigenous Knowledge Systems) in southern Africa, which highlighted the proficiency of local knowledge systems in managing natural resources for food security. These characterize the effort of FAO to support indigenous agricultural systems and their associated biodiversity, foods, knowledge systems and cultures.

46. In partnership with indigenous peoples' organizations, FAO, through its Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Initiative, has also developed cultural indicators of indigenous peoples' food and agro-ecological systems. The cultural indicators are increasingly being used by indigenous peoples to assess their conditions of food security and sustainable development. For example, indigenous communities in Rio Yaqui, Sonora, Mexico, and in other regions are using them to determine the impacts of decreasing rainfall on traditional farming activities in their areas, as well as their own traditional knowledge about using seeds (corn, squash and beans) and drought-resistant methods.

47. Following the Forum recommendation, a symposium on the protection of sacred sites took place in Tokyo in June 2005. It was organized by UNESCO, together with the secretariat of FAO, as well as of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the Permanent Forum, under the title "The Role of Sacred Natural Sites in Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity". Land issues are in fact a core focus at FAO. In response to another recommendation by the Forum, FAO is fostering an open discussion to develop a participatory methodology to deal with participatory land delimitation targeting the specific needs of indigenous peoples. The methodology is partially based on field experiences over the last few years, which have yielded some initial positive results, particularly in a San community in Angola, where an official land title has been issued in the name of that community. Other methodologies are also being tested and should support the adaptation of the methodological approach. As a result, FAO would be able to contribute expertise and new knowledge on those topics when the opportunity arises.

B. Policy and institutional issues

48. Some recommendations refer to processes internal to FAO: they encourage a shift in institutional commitment towards indigenous peoples' issues and seek to mainstream these issues into the organization's operations. The process of developing an FAO policy on indigenous peoples began in 2002, when this recommendation was first articulated. A comprehensive draft strategic framework was completed within two years, but, due to a reorganization within FAO, it was not possible to complete the process at that time. Although an explicit FAO policy on indigenous peoples is not yet in place, a new draft is ready and it will soon be sent out for comments to the Inter-Agency Support Group (IASG) and some indigenous peoples' organizations, before it is submitted to senior management for clearance. In the meantime, renewed efforts are being made to raise greater awareness about indigenous issues within FAO. An organizational focal point was established in 2002, along with a working group composed of officers from different technical departments and regional offices. FAO is also actively involved in various networks such as the Inter-Agency Support Group.

49. Other recommendations revolve around the need to integrate indigenous peoples' concerns, perspectives and practices into development processes in order to expand paradigms on how development ought to work. In response to this more holistic vision of development, many normative instruments developed by FAO now reflect considerations of indigenous and other vulnerable peoples. The Right to Food Guidelines, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources are among the instruments available to FAO with specific provisions and stipulations for addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including indigenous peoples.

50. At the 2008 FAO Conference, the important role of smallholders in the use, development and conservation of livestock resources was officially recognized. In response, the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Animal Genetic Resources are preparing an analytical assessment of this issue, and progress in the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources was welcomed by the Forum in its latest session. Importantly, the assessment acknowledges the need for capacity-building and institutional support to address the particular needs of small-scale livestock production systems, while ensuring respect for the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities. FAO is also exploring other opportunities to implement relevant national legislation and international agreements.

C. Capacity-building and awareness-raising for indigenous peoples, development professionals, United Nations agencies, Governments and other stakeholders

51. These recommendations urge Governments and the United Nations system to build capacities to respond to the needs of indigenous peoples, protect their rights and include them in decision-making processes. They also encourage awareness-raising about indigenous peoples' conditions so that greater sensitivity and

understanding can be institutionalized. Any FAO activity on indigenous issues naturally seeks to support Government efforts to enable indigenous peoples to sustain their own livelihoods. The FAO policy of support to Governments is centred on making national development planning more responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable. For example, FAO has recently begun a project in Ecuador to develop and implement a national policy on rural women entitled “Política Nacional Prioritaria para Mujeres Rurales” (PNPMR). The objective is to increase national and local level capacity to respond to the individual and collective needs of rural women from different ethnic and cultural groups, through consciousness-raising, creation of participatory mechanisms, and improved institutional mechanisms for the protection of rural women’s rights and their multicultural expressions and needs.

52. Concerns about indigenous women are receiving increasing attention, partly in response to the recommendations issued by the Forum at its third session, and, generally, also in conjunction with greater gender mainstreaming efforts in FAO. FAO holds regular gender training sessions in different countries. A component relating to the United Nations Declaration and the United Nations Development Group Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples’ Issues has been recently included in these sessions to raise awareness simultaneously about gender and indigenous issues.

D. Information and knowledge generation and communication initiatives

53. These recommendations relate to the generation of information and knowledge on issues related to indigenous peoples, and include research on the living conditions of indigenous peoples, the challenges they face and other relevant subjects. FAO has invested considerable effort to specify indigenous peoples’ issues in studies on land, biofuel production, protected areas and traditional knowledge. A publication focusing specifically on FAO and indigenous peoples will soon be released.

54. FAO has also tried to respond to the recommendation to address the limited access to communication and information services that indigenous peoples often face. FAO has long been involved in using communication tools to advance sustainable rural development, including specific activities in recent years on communication for and by indigenous peoples. FAO welcomes the positive response of the Forum to the development of indigenous peoples’ communication platforms in Latin America and Canada. At the moment, however, the platform in Latin America is facing some difficulties and, although the possibility of extending this initiative to Asia and Africa is being sought, no significant progress has yet been made. It is important that some follow-up regarding these platforms takes place with other United Nations partners to determine if and how to proceed with this particular recommendation.

55. A response to the recommendation to establish an information network and integrated database on indigenous issues is currently in process. Technical consultations are under way to set up a database and a website page on indigenous issues within FAO.

E. Support to the Permanent Forum: reporting and other issues

56. Some recommendations simply relate to participation in Permanent Forum meetings. FAO has been an active participant in every session or expert meeting of the Forum, consistently providing regular reports and information.

F. Mobilization of resources and financial assistance

57. Recommendations in which FAO is asked to mobilize resources for projects by indigenous peoples or to provide financial support to the Forum or other bodies are not in tune with the nature and functions of FAO. By decree, all projects must be channelled through national authorities. FAO is not a financing institution — unlike institutions such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank — and, therefore, FAO does not accept proposals for project funding directly. This is a common misconception which must be cleared.

58. Furthermore, it is not within the mandate of FAO to cover financial training, although some training of indigenous peoples in the construction and management of savings and loans clubs and cooperatives at a community level does occur. These respond to the recommendation related to building indigenous peoples' capacities for financial management in order to support positive health choices.

G. Other issues

59. A few recommendations have not been fulfilled because they do not fall within the explicit mandate of FAO. For instance, addressing the needs of indigenous children has not been realized. FAO does not have a separate working unit specialized in children and youth. However, FAO remains available to provide technical support, if requested, by more relevant specialized agencies, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Gaps and limitations in the work and approach of FAO: an overview

60. FAO has made substantial progress in considering indigenous peoples in its work over the last two decades. At the same time, the organization faces a number of institutional and organizational challenges that make the full mainstreaming of indigenous issues a complex and difficult process. This section discusses some of these issues in order to clarify how FAO works and the limits to its engagement. By extension, the section clarifies what can reasonably be expected from FAO and what simply lies outside its constitutional parameters.

61. Firstly, FAO has no specific mandate to work with indigenous peoples. There has not yet been an express directive by member States to focus on indigenous peoples, and FAO cannot, therefore, pursue the matter freely. This is a serious gap, but one which is expected to be tackled through the development and potential approval of an FAO policy on indigenous peoples.

62. The nature of FAO and the explicit regulations governing its work are the main reasons for its limitations in this field. As a specialized intergovernmental organization of the United Nations, its membership — 191 States as of 2008 — and governing bodies consist of government representatives. All projects, activities or

collaborative engagement must therefore be endorsed a priori by the national authority of the recipient country. FAO cannot engage in any action without the explicit endorsement of its member States. Indeed, all FAO projects with an indigenous component have been individually approved by the Government concerned. However, there is still no overall framework for action because member Governments have not requested an explicit focus on indigenous issues. For that reason, the degree to which FAO can commit its human and financial resources is presently restricted.

63. This absence of direct authorization translates into a certain degree of institutional resistance, as FAO officers are discouraged from engaging extensively in issues deemed supplementary, particularly under conditions of limited resources. By extension, there is little institutional commitment within FAO to issues which member States have not designated as priorities. Unfortunately, indigenous issues are not a priority for member Governments and therefore not a priority for the organization as a whole.

64. On these grounds, bilateral cooperation with indigenous organizations also lies outside the FAO mandate. Partnerships can exist only if country representatives have consented. Indeed, any programme or collaborative arrangement must be channelled through the relevant national authority.

65. FAO does not give grants or any other form of financial assistance. The support of FAO to indigenous peoples is necessarily channelled through technical assistance to Governments, rather than through direct financial assistance. The misconception of FAO as a financial source is widespread and must be corrected.

66. Despite the lack of an explicit directive to work with indigenous peoples, FAO does include indigenous peoples in some of its work. As seen in many field activities in Latin America, indigenous communities are at times the primary partners in FAO projects. In others, they benefit from larger interventions to improve the social or environmental conditions of life. Given the lack of an explicit mandate, however, engagement with indigenous peoples occurs primarily on an ad hoc basis, and is often dependent on the personal commitment and knowledge of the officers involved in a particular project. The absence of a strategic approach for FAO staff working with indigenous stakeholders is also a serious problem.

67. Discussions and consultations with FAO professionals have revealed that knowledge about indigenous peoples is quite limited, a factor which contributes to the uneven treatment of indigenous issues in the work of the organization. There is a need to promote better awareness about indigenous peoples among FAO staff, especially as the strong aptitude of staff would stand to benefit from capacity-building in sociological areas. The many projects which do not specify whether beneficiary populations are indigenous or not, even in locations with a high proportion of indigenous inhabitants, demonstrate the need for better sociological skills. Increasing basic understanding about who indigenous peoples are, what they want from the development process and how they wish to be involved would also help address this weakness. A general lack of disaggregate data by ethnicity or linguistic affiliation compounds the identification dilemma and also hinders better understanding. In addition, alternative views worldwide about how to integrate indigenous perspectives into development projects and programmes contribute to the confusion.

68. Awareness-building efforts need to concentrate on normative instruments as well. For example, indigenous and other peoples are often cited in documents such as the aforementioned Right to Food Guidelines or the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, but there is little understanding among FAO staff on how this can be made operational or how to articulate the tangible benefits to stakeholders. Indigenous peoples would also benefit from greater understanding of such instruments. Although they are extremely knowledgeable about their own development concerns, they are often less aware of the existence, meaning, and/or practical applicability of treaties, conventions and other legal or technical documents.

69. International treaties and declarations require a parallel effort. In that regard, the principles and rights set forth in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should be mainstreamed into the different sectors of the FAO mandate, in particular when providing legal advisory services to Governments and supporting the development of policies, national strategies or programmes. This implies the engagement of indigenous peoples in the implementation of FAO policy mechanisms, as appropriate, and FAO compliance with the preambular paragraph of the Declaration, which emphasizes that the United Nations has an important role in promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.

70. If access to FAO is not possible through the relevant national authority because of political differences of any kind, some alternative options exist which support the participation and contribution of non-governmental stakeholders. The Civil Society Liaison Office of the Organization provides one viable entry point. With this support, indigenous peoples' networks are increasingly participating in FAO policy dialogue processes at both global and regional levels. For example, FAO has been consistently including Latin American indigenous peoples organizations in panel discussions at the World Summit on Food Security, FAO regional conferences, the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, the Committee on World Food Security, and others. This has been partly done through the international mechanism of the International NGO/CSO Planning Committee.⁸

71. A new FAO strategy for working more effectively with civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations is currently being developed. The forthcoming strategy for the private sector may also offer possible channels of participation. Indigenous peoples may find it useful to approach either of these two forms of cooperation in order to increase their visibility within FAO and to keep informed about how the Organization maintains relationships with its stakeholders and partners in development. Information on how to participate in these processes is available upon request.

⁸ The International NGO/CSO Planning Committee (IPC) is a global network of non-governmental and civil society organizations concerned with food sovereignty issues and programmes. It was established in 2000 in anticipation of the World Food Summit: Five years later, but its origins can be traced to processes which took place in the 1990s.

IV. Opportunities for the future

72. The engagement of FAO with indigenous peoples is in continuous evolution. Various institutional and organizational factors have hindered the development of a systematic approach, and yet, work with indigenous peoples does occur and is increasingly evident. In fact, despite these institutional challenges, many officers within FAO are committed to indigenous issues and work to create greater awareness and progress.

73. The Declaration signed in 2007 offers a unique opportunity to advocate for greater action, and it will be used within FAO to pursue positive change. The formulation of an FAO policy on indigenous peoples is in part a direct response to the Declaration and promises improved FAO engagement. The draft policy will soon be disseminated to members of the Inter-Agency Support Group and to some indigenous peoples' organizations for their important input and review before it is sent to senior management at FAO for approval. In essence, FAO policy is expected to provide a critical impetus in implementing the 2007 Declaration and strengthening the relevance and benefits of its work for indigenous populations.
