

Information received from the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations
United Nations Development Fund for Women UNIFEM
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2009

Summary

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has a dual mandate: to provide innovative and catalytic programming and financial support to countries to achieve gender equality in line with their national priorities; and to strengthen action on gender equality across the United Nations system of development cooperation (General Assembly resolution 39/125).

Integrating indigenous women's rights is fundamental to UNIFEM, and develops projects and programmes that respond to indigenous women's issues as a priority in its agenda. UNIFEM's programmes focus on advocacy for indigenous women's rights and the elimination of discrimination, working in issues such as combating violence against women among indigenous communities and including indigenous women in decision making position, while strengthening indigenous women's groups.

1. UNIFEM's follow up on the Recommendations on Indigenous Women.

(No recommendations to UNIFEM in the seventh forum)

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has been working to advance indigenous women's rights by means of existing internal processes and innovative initiatives among indigenous communities. UNIFEM's approach includes not exclusively, working to combat violence against women in indigenous communities, supporting indigenous women's participation in decision making, ensuring indigenous women's access to justice, and strengthen indigenous women's organization to work for a common agenda and influence decision making and public policies.

As part of UNIFEM's work to support indigenous women participation and influence decision making, during the constituent assembly process in Ecuador, UNIFEM supported an indigenous women's alliance formed by organized women from Chimborazo, Imbabura and Sucumbíos to present a proposal on how to improve indigenous women's access to justice. Several points of the proposal, e.g. guaranteeing women's participation in decisions taken by ancestral justice, were included in the final Text of the Constitution.

In Bolivia UNIFEM supported the Excluded Women's organizations from Trópico, Cochabamba promoting indigenous women political participation, gender responsive budgeting and productive projects in 6 Municipalities in participatory forums with local government, insisting upon the protection of the rights guaranteed in the new Constitution. The participation of women's organizations in a dialog with local government is partnership with the organization Centro de Servicios y Acompañamiento Técnico (CESAT) an indigenous non-governmental

organization in Bolivia. In this dialog, indigenous women formulated a number of recommendations to the new Constitution that resulted in the inclusion of several of these demands in the Constitutional Text.

UNIFEM is working to ensure the protection of indigenous women rights and their access to justice through working with indigenous communities and indigenous women strengthening their capacity to protect women's human rights in formal and ancestral justice systems. In the framework of the preliminary phase of the UNIFEM's regional program "Working against Ethnic and Gender based Discrimination - For the Effective Exercise of Latin American Indigenous Women's Rights," UNIFEM has supported 3 pilot initiatives to improve indigenous women's access to justice. The strategy is based on strengthening traditional indigenous justice systems by promoting women's rights with their authorities from a culturally appropriate perspective, and accompanying them with "promoters of good treatment", both men and women, who follow the victims through the process and give advice to the authorities.

These promising practices have also been disseminated during the International Meeting Indigenous Women and Ancestral Justice held in Quito in October 2008 organized by UNIFEM in cooperation with the Simon Bolivar Andean University (UASB). 23 indigenous women and men from Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panamá, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and México and representatives of the Ministries of Justice of Ecuador and Bolivia participated. Currently, a documentary showing promising practices of organized indigenous women working for their rights in indigenous justice systems is being produced and delegations that participated in the conference are preparing proposals on how to improve access to justice for indigenous women to be presented to their governments

As part of its endeavour to strengthen indigenous women's organizations, UNIFEM supported the participation of indigenous women to the Internal Forum of Indigenous Women, held in Lima in April 2008. More than 250 indigenous women from 20 countries in the Americas participated in the Forum. The objective was to create a space where indigenous women shared experiences with representatives of international organizations and social movements. As a result, a coordination committee was formed to advance the participation of indigenous women in international processes.

UNFEM has also given long-term support to the Alliance of Central American and Mexican Indigenous Women, and particularly to indigenous women politicians. The Alliance participated and gained influence in the Meetings on Gender Statistics and the Census Rounds in 2010 in Aguascalientes, Chile and the Philippines.

UNIFEM is committed to support the strengthening of the indigenous women networks, for example in Guatemala, UNIFEM supports the Foro Nacional de la Mujer in their processes of monitoring the political participation of women at national level and their dialogue with the government; Coordinadora de Mujeres Mayas, Garifunas y Xincas in their activities to promote indigenous women's participation and end discrimination; the Interinstitutional Committee to Strengthen Municipal Offices for Women that consists of representatives of the Municipal Offices for Women, the Presidential Secretariat for Women, the Office for the Defence of Indigenous Women, Foro de la Mujer and several national and international cooperation

agencies, in their advocacy to promote the institutionalization of the offices as an mandatory in all municipalities.

UNIFEM supported the The Mexican National Indigenous Women's Forum was held in the Mexican Parliament 12 of September 2008 in commemoration of the first anniversary of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. The event was co-organized by the Alliance, the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous People (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de Pueblos Indígenas, CDI), and the Parliamentarian Commission for Gender Equality. This event was an opportunity to highlight the indigenous women's proposals and leaderships, and resulted in the commitment from the co-organizers and other institutions to support the monitoring of the final agreements taken in the meeting.

UNIFEM supported four studies on the rights of indigenous women in the Caribbean undertaken over a five-month period in Guyana, Suriname, Belize and Dominica. The studies reviewed existing literature, examined the economic, social, cultural and legal status of indigenous women and recent trends in the indigenous women's movement. Foremost among the critical areas of need identified by the studies were the challenge of access to culturally relevant and responsive educational opportunities; the need for clarity on land rights given the centrality of land to the culture, identity and economy of indigenous peoples; and the need to challenge traditional and harmful gender stereotypes that impede women's full enjoyment of human rights. They also pointed to the absence of data for research and for policy making and all requested that more research on Indigenous women be carried out. The consultants undertaking the studies were either Indigenous women (Belize, Suriname) or women closely associated with Indigenous communities (Guyana, Dominica).

To present the studies, UNIFEM, in collaboration with the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs convened the Meeting on "Caribbean Indigenous Women: Voice, Participation and Influence for Sustainable Development", the first of its kind in the Caribbean, 08-09 October 2008 in Georgetown, Guyana. The main objectives of the meeting were to promote dialogue on the experiences of indigenous women; analyze global themes that affect the lives and well-being of Indigenous and Maroon women; encourage strategic alliances between indigenous women cross-regionally; and identify action priorities for development programming. The participants shared Caribbean experiences which revealed country specificities as well as commonalities, both in progress made and the challenges that remain. The meeting culminated in the Georgetown Consensus by which the participants agreed to advocate and take action to foster and support community, national and regional networks of indigenous women that will seek to promote advocacy, capacity building and political participation to ensure a full realization of the enjoyment of individual and collective rights; ensure that indigenous women's expertise and perspective is reflected in all national and international development strategies and that indigenous women, in consultation with their communities and organizations, are part of the formulation and decision-making processes of sustainable development initiatives; end cultural practices and gender stereotypes that violate the rights of indigenous women and negatively affect the wellbeing of indigenous communities; ensure universal access to culturally appropriate and inclusive education, health and other social services; affirm and promote the use of indigenous languages; encourage open dialogue and action for the recognition of land rights; promote processes of economic empowerment of indigenous women including access to credit

and other productive resources; urge the commitment of donor and development partners, including the UN system for increased resources for indigenous women's programming; end all forms of violence against indigenous women; and endorse the recommendations of the Country Case Studies.

Apart from indigenous women who participated in the study from Belize, Dominica, Guyana and Suriname, participants in the meeting included ministers, representatives of governments and UN agencies, indigenous leaders, and representatives of indigenous and tribal peoples organizations. Other participants included the Coordinator of the International Indigenous Women's Forum from Nicaragua.

In Latin America, UNIFEM supported indigenous women's participation during the preconference in preparation for the Conference of the Americas Preparation for the World Revision Conference of Durban, Brasilia, June of 2008. Indigenous women's participation was highly significant. During the preconference this prior meeting, the demands of civil society were drafted, emphasizing the need for the institutionalization and necessary budgetary allocation to implement commitments agreed upon in the meeting.

In the framework of UNIFEM's work to ensure indigenous women's economic security and rights, in Suriname, 24 women from the indigenous women's group, Whe Khalwabetjie, now have skills in business management and are involved in running a viable awarra (a local fruit) production and marketing venture, following training in economic development and gender awareness by local NGO Foundation for Socio-Economic & Sustainable Human Development (SESHD) with support from UNIFEM. The project's continuation has been supported by private-sector company and IDB has also approved work in continuation. The purpose of the project facilitated by SESHD was to contribute to the eradication of poverty in the village of Powakka through empowerment of the women's group. Group members received training in organization and management, gender and community development, fruit preservation and business administration. The project gained the support of the all male village board which now invites representatives of the women's group to participate in planning and other village activities. The Inter-American Development Bank has also approved support for a project on the preservation of the Amerindian culture of Powakka. This is a result of the close relationship fostered by the UNIFEM-supported project between the youth organization, the women's group and the chief of the village. The eldest woman of the group will be a trainer in this project.

UNIFEM has been working with indigenous women to introduce a gender and multi-ethnic perspective to public policies and poverty reduction plans, as result, the National Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men 2008-2017 in Paraguay has included the perspectives of gender, race and ethnic group in its contents and has developed action plans for its implementation.

UNIFEM has been introducing the perspective of indigenous women into its work on violence against women by means of existing internal processes and innovative initiatives addressing the issue in indigenous communities. For example, in Ecuador UNIFEM supported the reform of the ancestral indigenous justice system in 43 kichwa communities of Cotacachi in the Province of

Imbabura, strengthening women's rights especially on violence against women and women's economic discrimination. A set of "Rules for a Good Coexistence" were created in a participatory process led by indigenous women, and is currently being formally introduced and implemented in the 43 communities with the technical and financial support from UNIFEM. Now, the National Plan to combat violence against women, implemented by several ministries, invite the indigenous women leaders of the Cotacachi to present their experience in a national policy arena

In the framework of the United Nations Trust Fund to Eliminated Violence Against Women, UNIFEM supported the awareness-raising among community leaders in Bolivia and Ecuador implementing informal indigenous justice systems in the Amazonian Province of Sucumbíos, Ecuador and the Amazonian Department of Pando, Bolivia. The initiative used a 20 minute documentary on the prevention of violence against women in the informal justice system and through indigenous community radio networks. As a result, a team of promoters of "Good Treatment" is working in 45 indigenous communities in Sucumbíos, and the indigenous organization FONAKISE has created a "Law of Good Treatment", consisting of an alternative route for victims of violence against women, initiated in the community as first place to recur, the office of the indigenous organization as second, and the ordinary justice system for cases that cannot be solved in the other instances or involving crimes, such as rape. In Pando, Bolivia, the community leaders have also been trained to rule in accordance with women's rights when implementing indigenous justice.

UNIFEM is involved in several inter-agency initiatives on indigenous issues; among others, it is part of the inter-agency group on indigenous issues in Mexico; in Ecuador UNIFEM participates in the Thematic Group on Indigenous Issues; and in the Latin American and Caribbean Region, UNIFEM participates in the Regional Directors Group on Indigenous issues. UNIFEM and UNDP were given the mandate to facilitate an Indigenous Women's Fund for the Caribbean with support from national women's machineries in the region, as per the 2008 **Regional Advisory Group on Gender**, (RAGG) held in Barbados 27-28 November, that led to a consensus by participating UN agencies, CARICOM, donor partners and regional NGOs for the development of workplans for areas identified for inter-agency collaboration.

4. UNIFEM's policies on Indigenous issues

(a) Policies or other similar tools on indigenous peoples' issues

UNIFEM strategic plan, 2008-2011 (DP/2007/45) outlines how UNIFEM will contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed goals in the period from 2008 to 2011. The plan highlights the importance of UNIFEM's work in the United Nations system as a catalyst and innovator that promotes gender equality in line with national priorities. The plan is grounded UNIFEM's dual mandate, as per General Assembly resolution 39/125 (1984), asking UNIFEM to provide innovative and catalytic programming and financial support to countries to achieve gender equality in line with their national priorities, and strengthen action on gender equality across the United Nations system of development cooperation.

In the strategic plan, UNIFEM acknowledges that programmes must take into account the diversities of women's interests, opportunities and challenges. UNIFEM will deepen its analysis, advocacy, partnerships and programming to reach excluded groups of women, including indigenous women, to help ensure that the most discriminated and those whose voices are rarely heard are brought into the mainstream of national efforts to achieve gender equality.

UNIFEM's work is driven by a single goal: National commitments to advance gender equality and women's empowerment are implemented in stable and fragile states. One of the Strategic Plan's specific outcomes (Outcome 6) is that "the most excluded women (including indigenous women have increased resources, capacities and voice to ensure that their priorities are included in relevant policies, programmes and budgets" (DP/2007/45).

(b) Recent programmes on indigenous peoples' issues

- Incorporating Gender, Racial and Ethnic Equality Dimensions into Poverty Eradication Programs in four Latin American Countries (950,000 US\$)
- Working against Ethnic and Gender based Discrimination - For the Effective Exercise of Latin American Indigenous Women's Rights (260,000 US\$)

(d) Activities on indigenous peoples' issues

Mentioned above under 1.