PROJECT ON THE PROMOTION OF ILO POLICY ON INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL PEOPLES

In 1996, the ILO initiated the Project on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples to respond better to requests for information on the ILO’s work on indigenous and tribal peoples. The Project is within the framework of the International Decade for the World’s Indigenous People (1995-2004) and is financed by DANIDA.

Managed by two indigenous persons, the Project cooperates with governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations, indigenous and tribal peoples’ organizations, and NGOs to focus attention on the situation of indigenous and tribal peoples. It is inter-regional in focus, with an emphasis on South and South-East Asia, and Southern Africa.

In addition, Project support to the Central and South American region is complementary to, and in support of, the activities undertaken by the relevant ILO offices.

The issue of indigenous and tribal peoples is extremely sensitive and highly politicized. By encouraging dialogue and cooperation between governments and indigenous and tribal peoples in policy formulation, and by strengthening the capacity of indigenous and tribal peoples at the regional, national and local levels, the Project hopes to facilitate harmonious coexistence with respect for each other’s differences.

OBJECTIVES

- To increase awareness of the ILO’s work on indigenous and tribal peoples
- To promote the application of relevant standards, especially the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169)
- To strengthen the capacity of indigenous and tribal peoples to address their needs

MEANS

- Policy advisory services
- Training workshops and seminars
- Pilot projects
- Publications

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC PILOT PROJECTS

BOLIVIA

The International Conference on the Administration of Justice and Indigenous Peoples was held from April 2-4, 1997 under the auspices of the Vice-President of Bolivia and the ILO. It brought together judges and lawyers working with indigenous and tribal peoples as to how best to take account of the special needs of indigenous peoples in their work.

Due to the success of this workshop, a similar one is planned for Costa Rica as a follow up.

CAMBODIA

The Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) of the Government of Cambodia is the focal point for highland peoples’ development. It was established in 1994 and has since been engaged in formulating a policy to enable the effective and coordinated implementation of development assistance to indigenous and tribal peoples.

In February 1997, the IMC requested Project assistance for its work in elaborating a policy for highland peoples’ development assistance. Project assistance focused on policy advice to the IMC to ensure that the policy guidelines are culturally sensitive, incorporate the basic provisions of Convention No. 169 and are formulated with the participation of indigenous and tribal peoples.

A series of training workshops on development management were carried out during January-June 1998 with the IMC as the
implementing agency. The workshops were designed to provide government officials at the central, provincial and district level with an understanding of the methodology and approach in devising development plans for highland peoples with emphasis on participatory models. The ultimate beneficiaries of the project were the indigenous and tribal peoples in North-Eastern Cambodia (highland peoples) who are the main recipients of development plans in these areas.

The Project continues to cooperate with the IMC to facilitate dialogue and cooperation with government officials and highland peoples in implementing a participatory approach to development.

COSTA RICA

In 1996, the Project supported the establishment of a Radio Programme to explain the basic principles of ILO Convention No. 169 and relevant national legislation to selected indigenous communities in Costa Rica. The local radio programme, entitled “SEMILLAS” or “seeds”, consisted of a series of radio broadcasts answering practical questions on indigenous rights and Convention No. 169, while also incorporating indigenous legends and music into the programming. Planned and implemented with the direct involvement of the indigenous peoples concerned, this pilot project serves as a model for future indigenous media initiatives. It is envisaged that this will be simulated elsewhere.

Workshops on the Empowerment of Women in Tribal Areas of Andhra Pradesh were organized in 1997 to share perspectives on the impact of displacement on indigenous and tribal women. This pilot project was implemented by Laya, an NGO working in the area of indigenous and tribal development in Andhra Pradesh, India.

The consultations took place in three phases and focused on the themes of women and displacement, rights and reflections on external interventions, and the development of action plans in local contexts. The main objective of the programme was to provide an opportunity for indigenous and tribal women from various districts of Andhra Pradesh to discuss issues of concern to them.

Follow-up activities to the consultations are under discussion with the indigenous and tribal women, Laya and the Project. The objective is to further the legal and traditional rights of indigenous and tribal women in India.

SOUTH AFRICA

The Project commenced activities in Southern Africa to initiate dialogue and cooperation between the Government and indigenous and tribal peoples to participate more fully in the development and implementation of national policies relevant to these peoples.

Following upon a fact-finding mission in November 1997, the Project, in cooperation with the Ministry for Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development, organized the Conference on the Constitutional Accommodation of Vulnerable Indigenous Communities held from May 23-24, 1998 in South Africa. Participants included representatives from the Nama, Koranna and San peoples, the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee, the Council of Traditional Leaders, the Ministry for Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development, and the ILO Office in Pretoria.

The Conference was an exercise in confidence-building and networking. It concluded with the adoption of a resolution recognizing, for the first time, the existence of the indigenous peoples by the South African Government.

A follow-up workshop is planned for late August 1998 in coordination with the Department of Constitutional Development and the South African San Institute. This aims to further stimulate dialogue at the local, regional and national levels as a means of influencing policy initiatives directed at improving the situation of indigenous and tribal peoples in South Africa in an informal setting.

THAILAND

In November 1997, the Project, together with UNDP, organized a three-day workshop in Chiang Mai on Information Exchange on Development Experiences with Highland Peoples. This was in cooperation with the Tribal Research Institute of the Department of Public Welfare and Chiang Mai University.

The workshop, whose participants included government officials, indigenous and tribal peoples,
representatives from international agencies and NGOs, focused on the implementation of development projects and emphasized the interaction between culture, environment and development. The final day of the workshop also featured field trips to study the impact of development on highland peoples.

During the workshop, dialogue was initiated between the Department of Public Welfare and the indigenous and tribal peoples on how to improve their living conditions. Taking into consideration the 1997 Constitution of Thailand which emphasizes participatory approaches, the ILO Project has had preliminary discussions with the Tribal Research Institute of the Department of Public Welfare to continue this dialogue. A national policy workshop on indigenous and tribal peoples’ issues will take place in October 1998 in Thailand with this objective.

VIETNAM

The Project recently briefed participants at a national workshop on highland peoples’ development from February 16-20, 1998 in Hanoi. During the workshop, the Project elaborated on the principles of Convention No. 169 and the need to include indigenous and tribal peoples in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of development projects. Project participation was at the request of the Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas (CEMMA).

In an effort to facilitate the exchange of project formulation and implementation experiences among and between indigenous communities, the Project is organizing a study tour by CEMMA to an indigenous community in the Phillipines. In addition, a pilot project is under discussion.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES

The Project is planning to implement pilot projects in Botswana, Cameroon, Namibia and South Africa. Pilot projects will also be initiated in Bangladesh and Laos.

PUBLICATIONS & PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Basic Guide to Convention No. 169

The Project is currently completing a simplified guide to Convention No. 169. It will be complemented by slides for use at the community level. The aim of this training package is to explain the ILO and Convention No. 169 in an easy to understand manner.

Translations of the Basic Guide

To promote the ILO standards to a wider public, the Basic Guide will be translated into various languages including Spanish.

Internet Homepage

Information on the Project and the ILO’s work with indigenous and tribal peoples will soon be accessible worldwide through the Internet. This is currently in progress.

Database on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples

Based on a questionnaire, a database on indigenous and tribal peoples’ organizations is being developed in order to strengthen networking and cooperation with these organizations.

Publication on Customary Law

The publication on the Customary Law of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples aims to contribute towards advancing the understanding of legal issues and indigenous and tribal peoples. The aim is to draw attention to the issue of customary law in order to stimulate the formulation of relevant strategies for incorporation into national law and policy-making.

Publication on Traditional Occupations

The aim of the publication on Traditional Occupations is to raise awareness of issues related to traditional occupational practices and explore its socio-economic viability.
"INDIGENOUS TO INDIGENOUS" MODULE

The "Indigenous to Indigenous" Exchange module is devised within the framework of the 1989 ILO Resolution to guide the implementation and enhancement of the provisions of Convention No. 169.

Conceptualized primarily as a training module, with an educational orientation, the aim of the "indigenous to indigenous" approach is to enable indigenous and tribal representatives from a specific people/community to live among other indigenous and tribal peoples in order to learn about their ways of life, traditions, cultures and strategies of survival. The ultimate objective is to facilitate and thereby strengthen indigenous to indigenous cooperation.

This training module will be undertaken as a pilot project with selected communities in Project countries. It will focus on key areas of interest, such as self-management, the environment, land and natural resources, and will be designed with the cooperation of the peoples concerned. The module will be based on reciprocity, with each community hosting the other, to further the development of indigenous networks and coalitions. Implementation will commence during the second phase of the Project.

TRADE UNIONS

Working within the ILO’s tripartite structure of governments, employers and workers, the Project has made efforts to engage trade unions and indigenous and tribal peoples in a dialogue aimed at cooperation and respect.

During the "Forum on Indigenous Education" on July 23, 1997 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia sponsored by Educational International (EI), an international federation of education unions, the Project initiated discussions with EI regarding future cooperation in increasing awareness and understanding of indigenous and tribal peoples issues in Asia.

Contact has also been established with the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions and Confederation of Cameroon Trade Unions to promote ILO standards on indigenous and tribal peoples in the Southern African region.

The Public Service International, an umbrella union of public service officials, also identified indigenous and tribal peoples as an area of focus and requested the Project’s cooperation in organizing a workshop on the relationship between indigenous peoples and trade unions held on November 11-12, 1998 in Yokohama, Japan.

Further cooperation with trade unions is envisaged in the future.

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