The ILO’s work on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples

Indigenous and tribal peoples are among the most marginalized and impoverished communities in the world. When the UN system dedicated a “Decade for the World’s Indigenous Peoples”, the UN committed itself to addressing the challenges these people face. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is currently the only international agency that has adopted specific standards covering indigenous and tribal peoples. The ILO Convention No.169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples was adopted in 1989 and has been ratified by 14 countries. As a process of dialogue with the governments, the ILO supervises the application of the convention and works for enhancing dialogue with countries that have not ratified it. The organization has taken a two-fold approach to address the issue: 1. Promoting the ILO Convention No.169 (1989) at the government level, and 2. Technical assistance addressing indigenous peoples issues. In practice, these two approaches form the basis for the work of two initiatives within the ILO: 1. The Project to Promote ILO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (policy-oriented), and 2. The INDISCO Programme (technical assistance at grassroots level). These two supplement each other and undertake both individual and joint activities in various countries of the world.

The Project to Promote ILO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (C169 Project) has been financed by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) since its beginning in 1996 with the following objectives: 1) to promote awareness of the ILO’s work on indigenous and tribal peoples, 2) to encourage the application of relevant standards in this respect, especially the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ Convention (No.169), and 3) to enhance the capacity of indigenous and tribal peoples to participate in development processes affecting them.

The INDISCO Programme was launched in 1993 under the DANIDA/ILO Framework Agreement on “Cooperative Development in Rural Areas” aimed at strengthening the capacities of indigenous and tribal peoples; helping them to design and implement their own development plans and initiatives through their own organizations, and ensuring that their traditional and cultural values are safeguarded. The objective is to contribute to the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of indigenous and tribal peoples through demonstrative pilot projects and the dissemination of best practices for policy improvement.

These two ILO initiatives supplement each other while carrying out an integrated approach of grassroots and policy level support. The principal focus of both is on Africa, South-East Asia, and parts of Latin America.

This Newsletter is dedicated to

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

The opening of the first Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on 13 May in New York is an important event as it marks the will of the UN to further integrate and raise indigenous concerns at the international level. The Forum, which is scheduled to meet once a year, will serve as an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council and it will provide expert advise and recommendations to the Council, raise awareness and promote the integration and coordination of indigenous activities within the UN system, and prepare and disseminate information.

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Global Activities

General News
Unforeseen changes in the budgets of both the C169 Project and INDISCO have affected a number of ongoing activities. However, the ILO still remains highly committed to indigenous and tribal peoples’ issues and it will continue its promotion of the Convention No. 169 and its income-generation activities at the grassroots level. The ILO continues its commitment to indigenous issues within the UN system: it has contributed to the work of the UN Special Rapporteur with relevant information on indigenous and tribal peoples; it has been active in the establishment of an inter-agency support group to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and in the overall organizing of the inaugural session of the forum; it continues to participate in various UN meetings as e.g. the OHCHR workshop on indigenous peoples and the private sector held last December in Geneva in which the Project funded the participation of two indigenous leaders from Asia and Africa. Also with a global focus is an ongoing joint initiative between INDISCO and the ILO’s International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) for a study on indigenous and tribal children, child labour and education challenges.

Inter-Agency collaboration
The ILO has been involved in ongoing inter-agency discussions regarding the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. In this respect, a number of meetings have been held, including most recently a two-day workshop, in which 15 United Nations Agencies discussed and developed a proposal for providing support and guidance to the Forum according to the specializations and individual mandates within the United Nations system. The Support Group will also:

- Coordinate the UN System contributions to the Forum sessions;
- Analyse recommendations of ECOSOC and examine the most effective responses on the basis of mandates, resources and capacity of each organisation;
- Provide advice to the secretariat of the Forum on issues relevant to indigenous peoples as they relate to the UN System;
- Develop relationships with donors, CSOs, indigenous peoples organisations, and others to consider cooperative ways of supporting the Forum; and
- Interact with the Forum and provide advice and guidance as appropriate.

Other elements of inter-agency collaboration aside from that within the context of individual country activities, which is outlined above, include the C169 Project’s Participation in a Botswana workshop in February this year on Multiculturalism in Africa: Peaceful and constructive group accommodation in situations involving minorities and indigenous people, organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The C169 Project provided training for participants on the contents and principles of Convention No.169. Additional indigenous participation was also funded. The C169 Project has also participated in the planning of the workshop organized by the OHCHR on Indigenous peoples, private natural resource, energy and mining companies and human rights. Apart from participation in the meeting, additional indigenous participation was funded by the C169 Project.

ILO Fellowship Programme
As many readers will be aware, the C169 Project had intended to implement an indigenous and tribal peoples fellowship programme during 2002, with the aim of equipping four indigenous or tribal persons with some of the skills and knowledge necessary (in particular the Convention No.169) for the promotion and protection of the rights of their peoples/communities. The programme would have included briefings, trainings and practical working experience for the fellows, both at ILO headquarters in Geneva, and in Africa and Asia in the field offices of the C169 Project.
As a result of the budgetary changes, it has been necessary for the C169 Project to make considerable alterations to the activities foreseen for this year. We sincerely regret to inform readers that we have no alternative but to cancel the 2002 Fellowship Programme, and once again, extend our apologies to all those who had applied for this year’s programme. It is, of course, extremely unfortunate that we have been put in this situation, as the Programme is a very important undertaking, and constitutes a unique opportunity in many respects. Measures are now being taken to ensure that next year’s programme will go ahead as planned.

Regional Focus

ASIA

INDIA

The ILO is collaborating with the Indian Government on the improvement of policies and programmes that concern indigenous and tribal peoples, and special attention has been given to the Tribal Sub-Plan. Both the C169 Project and INDISCO have on different occasions met with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the Ministry of Labour, and the dialogue between the ILO, the government and the indigenous and tribal peoples’ organizations is strengthening.

The C169 Project

The C169 Project had a meeting with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in November 2001 with the participation of indigenous representatives. It was agreed that a seminar would be held later, in which the ILO may present its policy on indigenous and tribal peoples. The Government may apprise ILO of its policies/programmes, as well as particular concerns on C169. In addition, it has been suggested that indigenous and tribal peoples will have the opportunity in a parallel session to express their particular concerns. In general, various indigenous and tribal peoples’ organizations have been informed about the work of the C169 Project.

The INDISCO Programme

After having completed five pilot projects in four States under DANIDA and CIDA funding, INDISCO now has an expanded project in Orissa funded by USAID, DANIDA, and WFP. The project has the objective of contributing to the socio-economic empowerment of tribal people through a cluster level approach to job creation for tribals and strengthening of tribal organizations. A second project in Gujarat, which aims at creating jobs for tribal women through self-help groups is under finalization for donor funding.

In collaboration with IFP/CRISIS of the ILO, INDISCO has made a case study on tribal peoples and natural disasters in the regions of Mayurbhanj (O rissa) and Dungarpur (Rajasthan). Guidelines on integrating indigenous knowledge in project planning and implementation prepared jointly with CIDA, World Bank, and INDISCO have been tested recently in India. A baseline survey on the Bondo Highlanders in Orissa has been carried out together with the Tribal Research and Training Institute and a study on tribal cooperatives in five Indian States has been inalised. These two studies will be used to develop technical assistance projects.

PHILIPPINES

At the national level, the ILO has been involved in supporting the policy improvement and the institutional strengthening of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the Governmental body with the mandate to implement the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA). The ILO is now in the process of opening up discussions with the Government to renew the process of ratification of Convention 169.

The C169 Project

The current project partner in the Philippines is PANLIPI-Cordillera - with whom the C169 Project has agreed to implement a one-year research project aimed at analysing the current state of legal protection for indigenous peoples’ rights in the Philippines and how it can be implemented more effectively or strengthened. An important component of this study is also a comparison
of existing legislation with the principles contained in Convention No. 169. The process will involve extensive consultations with indigenous people’s organizations, relevant Government bodies and officials and other legislative research. This study will contribute to the identification of legal protection for indigenous peoples within the Philippine framework. Aside from the above, which constitutes the C169 Project’s principal undertaking in the Philippines, an independent media outfit (NORDIS) that collates and distributes relevant information to indigenous organizations has also been supported.

The INDISCO Programme
Funding agreement has just been made between INDISCO and the UNDP for a new project aimed at supporting policy and programme development towards full implementation of the IPRA, and a new project has also been submitted to the Dutch Embassy on biodiversity protection and promotion of indigenous knowledge. Previously carried out INDISCO case studies and pilot projects on ancestral domain management, indigenous knowledge, income generation and cooperative organization building are being used for policy improvement. Projects funded by Dutch Embassy, AGFUND, and the Philippine International Association have been phased-out and evaluation reports disseminated.

MALAYSIA

The C169 Project
Discussions were held with various indigenous peoples’ organizations, NGOs and government agencies. The government has indicated its willingness to start a process of dialogue. The indigenous NGO (Borneo Resources Institute Malaysia, or BRIMAS) is preparing a national seminar on the rights of indigenous peoples to take place on 12-14 August this year. This seminar will be held in August this year with government participation, and in collaboration with the Office of the Chief Minister of Sarawak.

THAILAND

The C169 Project
A national seminar involving indigenous organizations will be held in Chiang Mai 29-30 May to come up with a common position regarding policy advocacy. This is a preparatory activity for another seminar that will include government agencies. The C169 Project will continue its efforts to strengthen the capacities of the indigenous and tribal peoples’ organizations.

The INDISCO Programme
INDISCO Pilot projects funded by DANIDA and Dutch NGOs on testing culture-specific curricula among indigenous communities have been phased-out and the curricula have been taken over by the Ministry of Education for finalization and replication in primary schools in tribal areas. Jointly with the ILO/AIDS programme, a pilot project on HIV/AIDS prevention among hilltribe peoples in Northern Thailand is being prepared on the basis of a survey carried out previously.

CAMBODIA

The C169 Project
The C169 Project has been engaged in capacity building for Government agencies on issues pertaining to indigenous peoples and development issues in general. An ADB Policy Paper on indigenous peoples seems to have increased the attention to indigenous issues in the country and there seems to be a strong wish to learn from the experiences of the other Asian countries in dealing with these issues funded by the Project. One recent legislative development of particular importance to the indigenous peoples is the passage, in 2001, of a new Land Law. This Law recognized collective ownership of land of indigenous peoples, and therefore provides for communal ownership rights to land, recognizing the traditional decision-making mechanisms and structures of indigenous peoples in respect of this land. Previously, the C169 Project has provided policy and technical advice in specific relation to this Law, and the Draft Policy Highland Peoples’ Development, resulting in the recognition of some important
principles of Convention No. 169 in the
drafting of these two legislative instruments.
A national seminar to inform government
officials/agencies about the different policies
and programmes by the various international
agencies took place in April this year. It is
hoped and expected that the seminar will
result in a more concerted effort to have the
Highland Peoples' Development Policy
adopted as part of Cambodia's laws. The
seminar will also result in a more systematic
programme of action to address the different
concerns of indigenous and tribal peoples in
Cambodia.

VIETNAM

The INDISCO Programme
Co-funded by the Rabobank Foundation and
DANIDA, an INDISCO pilot project among
ethnic minority communities generated
alternative non-farm small businesses, and
the ethnic minorities continue on their own to
manage the revolving loan funds and plan
and implement their own development plans
and income-generating activities.

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES IN ASIA

The C169 Project
During the World Bank's revision of its
Indigenous Peoples Policy, the C169 Project
participated and actively promoted ILO
principles, both during the meeting with
indigenous organizations in the Philippines
and during the meeting with government
bodies. Discussions have also been pursued
with the World Bank during the inter-agency
meeting convened in Manila last October.
The Project participated and presented a
paper during the ADB Regional Workshop on
Indigenous Peoples and Poverty Alleviation in
Planning and fund raising is being
undertaken for a Trainers' Training for
indigenous leaders in Asia. This will be a five-
day training for 10 indigenous professionals
(2 from each of five countries in South and
South-east Asia) on the contents and
principles of Convention No. 169, the ILO 's
overall organization, structure and mandate,
implications of ratification on governments
and indigenous and tribal peoples' organizations, and other relevant
international standards pertaining to
indigenous and tribal peoples.
The training is envisioned for indigenous
lawyers or para-legals that have had
experience in community education work and
are committed to echoing the results of the
training in their respective countries. The
participants will be asked to facilitate training
of indigenous organizations and government
agencies on the contents of C169, when
requested, and as such, will be asked to
develop a module that reflects and responds
to the specific conditions and needs of
indigenous peoples in their countries.

AFRICA

TANZANIA

The Project
With the support of the ILO Area Office in
Dar es Salaam, the C169 Project has been
introduced to various social partners, and
has established contacts with the Ministry of
Labour and with NGO’s dealing with Hunter-
Gatherers and Pastoralists. In addition, a
partnership has been established with Oxfam
(G B) with the objective of supporting
Pastoralists and Hunter-Gatherers in their
efforts to raise their voice and engage in a
dialogue with the Government with regards
to the new Draft Rural Development Strategy.
In this respect a Pastoralist and Hunter-
Gatherers preparatory workshop has taken
place and a national workshop, including
government representatives will take place in
2002. The activities are coordinated by the
Pastoralists Indigenous NG O’s (PING O’s).

The INDISCO Programme
Local consultancy has been provided by
INDISCO, under DANIDA funding, for the
Maasai community to establish their own
multipurpose cooperative and revive their
traditional and sustainable practices.
Policy-related activities on employment and
traditional livelihood problems of the Maasai
have been carried out. A pilot project has
been implemented by this Maasai
cooperative under the funding of the ILO ‘s
Jobs for Africa programme, aimed at job
creation and capacity building among the
Maasai indigenous communities.
The C169 Project and INDISCO have also supported a policy study on Decent Work for Pastoralists and sustainable livelihoods.

KENYA

The C169 Project
Pastoralists’ and Hunter-Gatherers’ priorities and needs have been identified by the C169 Project and appropriate strategies for intervention elaborated. Meetings with Government representatives have also taken place. The support of the C169 Project is to be seen in the light of the current Constitutional Review Process in Kenya in which the Government has shown possibility for public participation.
A national workshop - supported by the Project and hosted by CEMIRIDE (Centre for Minority Rights Development) - took place from 28th to 30th November 2001. The primary aim of this workshop was to facilitate the coordination of an effective strategy for the collection and elaboration of a position paper for pastoralists and hunter-gatherers in Kenya to be presented to the Constitutional Review Commission, and for the effective participation of these peoples in this process. The ILO Convention No.169 was also presented during the workshop.
A working group of pastoralists and hunter gatherers, representative of all the main groups in Kenya has been formed in order to co-ordinate efforts in this regard. Dialogue with parliamentarians has been initiated. It is anticipated that a common position paper be presented and discussed in a national workshop this year.

SOUTH AFRICA

The C169 Project
Contacts have been made with relevant government agencies and the Project is in a position to initiate more concrete activities here. Meetings have been carried out with the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Provincial and Local Government, the Department of Constitutional Development, indigenous and tribal peoples’ organizations and the South African Human Rights Commission.
The C169 Project is also playing an active role in the work of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, under which a working group on indigenous peoples has recently been established.

CENTRAL & WEST AFRICA

The C169 Project
The Ministry of Labour in the Central African Republic has requested the assistance of the C169 Project on “pygmy” issues. Recognizing the existence of similar problems in neighbouring countries, contacts are sought and being established with ILO offices in Cameroon and the Central African Republic, and with indigenous peoples’ organizations in Cameroon, Rwanda, Burundi and the Congo’s.

CAMEROON

The INDISCO Programme
Baka communities have been supported by INDISCO to establish their own self-help organization, and a project, under the funding of ILO’s Jobs for Africa programme, is being implemented together with the Pygmies. The projects in both Cameroon and Tanzania will continue helping the communities to strengthen their traditional livelihoods, reduce out-migration and eliminate discrimination in national employment policies.

LATIN AMERICA

ARGENTINA

The C169 Project
Argentina ratified ILO Convention No. 169 in July 2000. In addition to co-operation with Argentina from the ILO Office in Buenos Aires, the C169 Project is supporting an initiative aimed at the Promotion and Diffusion of Convention 169, in collaboration with the ILO’s Area Office, the University of Buenos Aires and ACCESOS. The main objective of the project is to increase awareness of the convention among the indigenous peoples, and in general it will serve as a capacity building initiative for the indigenous organizations when dealing with the ILO’s supervisory mechanisms and Convention No. 169.
Latest ILO Publications


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