



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

THEMATIC REPORT FOR THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM OF AGENDA 2030 FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2020

THEME: ACCELERATED ACTION AND TRANSFORMATIVE PATHWAYS: REALIZING THE DECADE OF ACTION AND DELIVERY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After four years of SDG implementation, indigenous peoples across the globe are not just left behind but pushed further behind. This is demonstrated by the continuing widespread grabbing of indigenous peoples' lands and resources, criminalization, increasing poverty and hunger, loss of livelihood, destruction of cultural heritage, forest degradation, loss of biodiversity, conflicts on resource-use and development, increased violence against indigenous women and girls, rising inequality and lack of access to justice, among others.

While indigenous peoples are further being marginalized and systematically discriminated, they continue and persist to practice the essence of sustainable development in their communities and territories. Whereas indigenous peoples are 6.2 % of the global population, they represent 15 percent of the world's poorest. In spite of this, they protect 80 percent of the planet's remaining biodiversity in their lands and territories. Through centuries of reciprocal relations with nature, indigenous peoples have developed their collective systems of sustainable resource management and indigenous knowledge about the complex and interdependent life forms, which sustain their collective survival and enhance their diverse cultures. This holistic approach and knowledge is the basis of indigenous peoples' conservation of biodiversity, which is essential for virus prevention; for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and; for sustainable development.

Indigenous peoples are one with their natural environment and their survival and wellbeing is intrinsically linked to their lands, territories and resources. However, when indigenous peoples take action to protect their rights and defend their lands, territories and resources from destruction and expropriation, they are being criminalized with increasing cases of persecution, extra-judicial killings and other gross human rights violations. This illustrates the huge gap in the respect, protection and realization of the rights and wellbeing of indigenous peoples in relation to the implementation of the SDGs. It is contrary to the commitment of States to respect and protect indigenous peoples' rights as imperative to achieving the SDGs.

The Global Witness reports in 2016 and 2017 state that indigenous victims of extra-judicial killings constitute 40% of the total documented cases. Those killed were defending their lands and protecting the environment.

For 2018, the Frontline Defense Global Analysis states that 77 % of the 321 killed were activists defending land, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights. Many of these cases are related to agribusiness expansion in indigenous territories, as well as extractive industries and State-sponsored development projects and infrastructures without the consent of affected communities. In 2019, there were at least 125 documented cases of killings of indigenous leaders. To date, most of the families of the victims are still waiting for justice.

Unless indigenous peoples are fully secured in their territories and freely pursue their self-determined development that benefits other people and the planet, the pledge of "leaving no one behind" will remain as lip service.

This year, the world is gripped by the covid-19 pandemic, which poses serious risks to achieving the SDGs. This pandemic is increasing the vulnerabilities and risks of marginalized indigenous peoples; not only to contract the virus but to die from it in their numbers. This is already taking place in the U.S. and Brazil. The high-risk factors for indigenous peoples include a combination of prevailing health conditions as well as lack of access to protective equipment, sanitation and health and medical services. For example, indigenous peoples in the Amazon have less immunity to virus; there are widespread cases of diabetes among peoples in North America, and a majority of indigenous peoples have limited access to health services. As indigenous elders are highly vulnerable to the virus, their demise as traditional knowledge holders will have profound impacts on the continuity of indigenous knowledge and practices, which are vital to indigenous peoples collective survival and distinct ways of life.

As the corona virus is spreading, many indigenous communities have imposed self-isolation to prevent contamination. This has been successful for a number of communities that have sufficient food supply and are able to continue their subsistence economy and other livelihood activities. However, it remains uncertain how long they can meet their needs in self-isolation or prevent the entry of potential carriers of the virus and unwarranted entry of illegal loggers, business and other vested interest groups in their territories.

Further, the response measures of many States to the covid-19 pandemic have further exposed structural discrimination of indigenous peoples. Accurate information on the covid-19 and on preventive measures hardly reach indigenous peoples in remote areas in forms and languages understood by them. Food packages, relief items, cash transfer and other livelihood assistance from the states often do not reach indigenous families or communities; and virus testing is almost not accessible. Millions of indigenous peoples in impoverished conditions have to fend for themselves in this pandemic.

Moreover, strict lockdowns, social distancing and other restrictions without appropriate support and assistance by the State to marginalized sectors also expose underlying inequalities along with the lack of State accountability and citizens participation in designing appropriate actions to address this pandemic. The strict lockdowns result in the loss of livelihoods, hunger, worsening poverty, criminalization, extra judicial killings of indigenous land and environment defenders, land grabbing, increasing violence against indigenous women and girls, among others. The deep concerns expressed by UN top officials on serious human rights violations under the pretext of covid-19 include increasing cases relating to indigenous peoples in different countries.

Accelerating Actions and delivery of the 2030 Agenda in the next ten years will require coherent policies, appropriate measures and decisive actions on the ground by States to overcome and recover from the covid-19 pandemic and pursue sustainable development. This must include systemic measures to reverse the regression of some SDGs. Urgent transformational actions by States and other development actors must be based on a human rights framework; addressing the root causes of inequality by reversing the global economic order to serve the people and align with environment protection; provide necessary mechanisms to dismantle systemic discrimination and racism; and strengthen the accountability of States, including in ensuring the democratic space for citizens. Indigenous peoples as rights-holders must be legally recognized including full respect and protection of their collective rights, access to justice and concrete actions to end their discrimination as affirmed by international human rights instruments. They must be able to meaningfully participate in decision-making related to response measures on the covid-19 pandemic and processes related to SDGs at all levels. Respectful partnerships with indigenous peoples will enhance their roles and contributions to sustainable development. Further, political will and resources are urgently needed to undertake data-disaggregation by ethnicity in the monitoring and reporting on the SDGs at all levels to make indigenous peoples visible and accounted for in the SDG implementation.