



UNFPA Work on Indigenous Issues





UNFPA Work on Indigenous Issues

Introduction

This report is a summary of recent UNFPA programmes and initiatives that have supported indigenous peoples, particularly in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, population and development, and gender, in line with the recommendations by the United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues (UNPFII).

UNFPA has supported indigenous peoples' increased access to enhanced "intercultural" reproductive health services and also promoted the adoption of pertinent policies and norms and the improvement of services aimed at addressing maternal mortality among indigenous women. UNFPA has contributed to advancing gender equality and empowerment among indigenous women and their organizations, also targeting indigenous adolescents and youth.

Through research studies and data collection, dissemination and usage promotion, UNFPA has increased the knowledge base on the situation of indigenous peoples, particularly of women, in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Additionally, UNFPA has focused its activities around population and development, particularly on the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of disaggregated data on indigenous populations.

In all its work, UNFPA incorporates a gender and culturally sensitive, human rights-based approach, promoting inclusive, participatory initiatives responsive to the needs and rights of indigenous peoples



UNFPA Strategy on Indigenous Issues

In line with the Forum's recommendation that governments and UN organizations adopt policies on indigenous peoples, UNFPA is developing a corporate strategy on indigenous issues. The strategy is grounded in international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The strategy is the result of a global consultation held at UNFPA headquarters in New York which included members of the UNPFII, NGOs, indigenous leaders, UN agencies and UNFPA staff. The purpose of this consultation was to reach a consensus and common understanding on UNFPA engagement on indigenous issues, the nature of its commitment, and the specific processes to guide its work. It draws from the recommendations made by the UNPFII from 2003-2010 as well as from the UNFPA Strategic Framework 2008-2013.

The purpose of the strategy is to create a practical framework and establish a set of unified criteria for UNFPA programming and policy-making. While recognizing that indigenous communities are not a homogeneous group and that there can be no "one size fits all" approach to UNFPA programming efforts, the strategy strives to be flexible enough to address a variety of indigenous contexts, yet specific enough to be operational at regional and country levels.

The strategy document will:

- Identify strategic priorities which form the core of UNFPA programming efforts with indigenous peoples;
- Lay out the principal elements of an operational plan for implementation and follow-up, which includes creating an enabling environment for indigenous peoples and networks;
- Place emphasis on capacity development and partnership.

UNFPA Implementation of the UNFPII Recommendations:

Facilitating Factors: In some regions, an environment of open communication on indigenous peoples' issues has helped to increase understanding between governments and indigenous organizations and facilitate progress on these issues. At the country level, strong commitment and proactive support from indigenous communities and national institutions dealing with indigenous peoples concerns, as well as strong alliances with main government institutions, traditional authorities and non-governmental organizations, especially indigenous women's groups, has been a significant factor in facilitating UNFPA work in this area.

The commitment of local government staff responsible for the programme coordination is key to the success of UNFPA activities. The incorporation of indigenous issues and rights into national legal frameworks, public policies and programmes, and the development of socio-demographic and health information systems that collect data on indigenous peoples has been an asset. Inter-agency collaboration, such as the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programming in Belize, has strengthened programming efforts. UNFPA partnerships with women's machineries in many countries also provides opportunities to reach more indigenous women.

Challenges: Challenges encountered in UNFPA work on indigenous issues have varied greatly across countries, and have been influenced by a number of factors including national priorities and political opportunities. In many countries, issues of sexual and reproductive health and gender issues are still not national priorities. In some cases, there is a lack of understanding and interest in indigenous issues in particular, and in human rights issues in general.

The lack of disaggregated data as well as reliable and up-to-date research studies on indigenous peoples is an impediment to the formation of policy and programmes. There is no clear information on gaps in policy, programming, capacity, systems and resources. In some countries, the lack of government or civil society institutions that monitor and evaluate the recommendations of the Permanent Forum constitute an obstacle for actual integration of the Permanent Forum recommendations into national policies. In certain cases, national health systems and health providers are reluctant to incorporate cultural perspectives into national programmes. In many countries, both indigenous and non-indigenous women do not enjoy the full range of human rights afforded to men.

UNFPA Country Office Progress

The following pages document how UNFPA Country Offices in Latin America, Asia and Africa are supporting indigenous issues in the areas of population and development, sexual and reproductive health and gender equality.

Belize

UNFPA provided technical and financial support to the Belize Family Life Association to build the capacity of 55 community-based volunteers, including indigenous peoples from rural communities, in contraceptive technology. UNFPA provided financial support for a women's symposium that had participation of 106 women representing 51 women's groups from urban and rural communities, including indigenous women. UNFPA contributed to the revision of the National Gender Policy and the drafting of a situational analysis to inform the updating of the policy. The health and social issues affecting the Mayan population were highlighted in the situational analysis.

Additionally, UNFPA provided financial support for the development of quality improvement guidelines for maternal and neonatal care in response to a number of incidents related to maternal and infant mortality, particularly among the Mayan population. As a result of these guidelines, the Ministry of Health is able to provide improved quality of care to the population.

Bolivia

UNFPA has collaborated with indigenous organizations for the inclusion of ethnical definition data (self-identification) and gender in the 2011 census. UNFPA focused on language and communications as an instrument to incorporate the intercultural perspective. The official website of UNFPA Bolivia is available in three native languages – Quechua, Aymara, and Guaraní. UNFPA has conducted joint research on sexual and reproductive health with various indigenous Universities and the Ancestral Community of the Millennium Heritage, which favours an approach focused on the concept of “quality livelihood”.

UNFPA partnered with the Indigenous Fund and PAHO/WHO, to collect and document indigenous peoples' knowledge of sexual and reproductive health. UNFPA conducted workshops on the rights of women and sexual and reproductive health with an emphasis on maternal health, contraception and the prevention of cervical uterine cancer. There was significant participation by indigenous women in the National Conference on Public Policies and Protection of Women's Rights. Outcomes from the Conference included concrete recommendations and proposals on issues of violence against women, specifically indigenous women.

In addition, UNFPA Bolivia is working with the “Viceministerio de Justicia Indígena Originaria Campesina” (VJIOC) to include the gender and generational approach in the Law of Jurisdictional Demarcation. (This law confers legal status to the indigenous jurisdiction at the same level as the ordinary legal system.)

Colombia

In 2010, UNFPA Colombia's work with indigenous peoples included technical and financial support for the consolidation of a National Council of Indigenous Women. Hence, women were well-represented at the last National Indigenous Congress. However, UNFPA Colombia still recognizes the need for increased investments to scale up the participation of indigenous women to secure positions for women in the Indigenous Parliament. UNFPA also provided technical and financial support to the Colombian Indigenous Organization to design a proposal for a study on the current situation of indigenous women around reproductive health, gender, and gender-based violence.

Public servants, health personnel and indigenous midwives from six countries (Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia) attended the International and Inter-Cultural Health Meeting organized by UNFPA. Participants shared their experiences on working with an intercultural approach to improve the health of indigenous women. Finally, after three years of supporting the Embera Wera people in Risaralda, the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) was prohibited by the community. The direct participation and empowerment of women in the Embera Wera community was a significant factor in this outcome.

Ecuador

UNFPA Ecuador is supporting a project (with support from Spain) to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity and to strengthen indigenous women's organizations advocacy work to influence public policy-making and to empower women and young girls.

UNFPA Ecuador supported the following meetings and conferences:

- National and regional forums with indigenous women's organizations on women's rights, particularly reproductive rights and the right to a life free of violence
- The First National Congress on Indigenous Women's Rights
- V Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas
- VIII and IX Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

El Salvador

UNFPA has provided support for the promotion of participation of indigenous peoples in decisions which directly or indirectly affect their lifestyles, traditional lands and territories, cultural integrity or any other aspect of their lives, considering the principle of free, prior and informed consent. In 2010, UNFPA in Salvador supported four regional meetings and a national gathering of several indigenous organizations that requested assistance to work on a common agenda to present to governmental authorities.



© UN/Milton Grant

Guatemala

In 2010, UNFPA Guatemala participated in several meetings to promote disaggregating health data for indigenous peoples, in coordination with CEPAL and ECLAC. The office conducted a total of 27 project activities directed to indigenous peoples' issues.

Guyana

Under the Youth Friendly Services Initiative, UNFPA supported the establishment of a youth friendly space in Region 7 which is one of the hinterland regions populated by Amerindians as well as ongoing support for youth-friendly spaces in Region 1, also inhabited by Amerindians. The Space provides opportunities for adolescents and young people to access information on SRH/HIVAIDS, Gender/GBV, Life Skills and recreational activities.

The Maternal Health Thematic Fund Initiative in the programme development phase identified specific areas of work that directly impact the quality of life and reproductive and maternal health of the Amerindian population including strengthening family planning and increasing access to information and services. A maternity waiting home for the Amerindian population was completed and will be opened in 2011.

Mexico

In the area of population and development, UNFPA Mexico has promoted the inclusion of indigenous peoples in socio-demographic data collection, such as in the 2010 Population and Housing Census, and has also promoted the use of this information in the formulation and evaluation of public policies. UNFPA has participated in technical committees for the discussion of census questionnaires and in the review of the indicators for the evaluation of poverty among indigenous peoples. In the areas of sexual and reproductive health and gender equality, UNFPA supported two relevant projects: one on maternal health and prevention of gender-based violence among indigenous communities in the States of Chiapas, Hidalgo and Veracruz; and an interagency programme for the prevention of gender-based violence in indigenous communities in Mexico with an intercultural approach, focusing on children and teenage girls and boys in 30 municipalities in the States of Oaxaca and Chiapas. UNFPA has also supported a project on sexual and reproductive health with indigenous and afro-descendant young people, with the participation of state institutions and local communities in the State of Oaxaca.

In 2011, UNFPA will support the Third Congress of the National Network on Indigenous Population Studies. The office will also support a seminar for Reviewing the Progress of the State Components of the Project on Maternal Mortality and Prevention of Gender Violence among Indigenous Communities: Chiapas, Hidalgo and Veracruz.

Nicaragua

In coordination with the Nicaraguan Women's Institute, UNFPA Nicaragua provided financial and technical support for the development of a Gender Equality Policy in Multi-Ethnic settings in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region. This Gender Policy is an important tool to achieve the goals outlined in the Statute of Autonomy of Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Communities of the Autonomous Regions. The aim is to have a multi-ethnic society where women and men of Miskitu, Panamahka, Twahkas, Creoles and Mestizos origin can live with dignity and justice. UNFPA provided technical and financial support for the development of an International Conference of Afro Latin American and Afro Caribbean women.

Panama

UNFPA Panama conducted one main indigenous peoples' programme and eight project activities, both locally and at the inter-agency level.

Locally, UNFPA supported the Ministry of Health for the organization of the first Congress on Interculturality and Gyneco-Obstetric Health, held in Chiriquí Province. UNFPA also supported the Ngöbe Women's Congress. For the launch of the State of the World Population 2011, UNFPA included indigenous Ngöbe and Buglé women as panelists to share their emergency recovery experiences with a large audience.

At the inter-agency level, UNFPA Panama chaired the Technical Group on Indigenous Peoples, which came into existence in 2010 as a consequence of UNCT discussions over the course of 2009.

The group completed its terms of reference and held five regular and two extraordinary meetings, with seven participating agencies and the OCR, including an exchange with indigenous women leaders. The group also led the interagency collaboration for commemorating International Indigenous Peoples Day with the Ombudsperson office.

Suriname

UNFPA supported the Medical Mission, which provides healthcare to people living in marginalized conditions. The Medical Mission currently manages 55 clinics, serving an estimated 50,000 persons scattered across a scarcely populated area. This organization employs health assistants who are trained specifically in these areas.

In 2010, UNFPA Suriname purchased commodities in support of the Medical Mission projects, "Integration of cervical cancer screening and early treatment services in the first line health centres of sixteen indigenous communities in the interior of Suriname" and "Towards delivery of quality integrated primary health care services in the Hinterland of Suriname."

In 2011, UNFPA and PAHO have committed to deliver technical assistance to the Medical Mission cancer screening project. UNFPA will also continue to support the health team group members in improving primary health care.



© Carina Wint/UNFPA

A mother and child at the UNFPA-supported maternity clinic in Hato Chamí, in the Ngöbe-Buglé indigenous area in Western Panama

Cambodia

UNFPA Cambodia as part of the Health Sector Support Programme jointly funded by seven development partners, focuses on ensuring that indigenous peoples' rights, cultures, and traditions are fully respected. Indigenous peoples' issues are a part of the Health Sector Support Programme jointly funded by UNFPA, the French Development Agency, AusAID, the Belgium Technical Cooperation, DFID, UNICEF, and the World Bank, with programmes aimed at providing access to health care services to indigenous peoples. Staff working at the health centres and health posts in indigenous areas have been selected locally and can communicate in the local languages.

Enhanced community participation in the indigenous communities has been achieved in the form of community score cards on health care services which encourage the involvement of indigenous peoples in providing feedback on the quality of health care services.

In addition, UNFPA supports reproductive and maternal health initiatives with focused attention on locations where most indigenous peoples live such as Rattanakiri, Mondulakiri, Stung Treng, Kratie, Preah Vihear and Siem Reap provinces.



China

UNFPA considers ethnic minorities in the framework of the UN Joint Programme, “*Culture and Development Partnership Framework*” (CDPF) which covers the period 2009-2011, which aims at integrating culture into development for China’s ethnic minority populations by building government capacity to undertake rights and culture-based development and supporting China in implementing policies that promote the rights of its ethnic minority groups. Within this framework, UNFPA, jointly with UNICEF and WHO, is piloting a culturally-sensitive approach to maternal health care and service provision in ethnic minority areas.

UNFPA China’s main support activities in 2010 include:

- Elaboration of an advocacy toolkit on maternal and child health in ethnic minority areas for health providers and decision makers. This toolkit contains the first set of programme and policy level recommendations for the consideration of local governments.
- Development of a pilot training course on community-based interventions and client-friendly and culturally-sensitive service provision for maternal health care providers operating in ethnic minority areas by encouraging dialogue and collaboration with ethnic minorities’ stakeholders.

- Support of locally-designed maternal health care promotion activities involving community stakeholders.
- Finalization of a qualitative study on maternal and child health (MCH) on the traditional beliefs and practices of six ethnic groups.

Lao PDR

UNFPA, in collaboration with UNICEF and USAID as well as other development partners, supports the Government in carrying out the Lao Social Indicator Survey (MICS/DHS) which covers 1,000 sampled villages including those of tribal or ethnic groups. The survey covers various topics, such as RH, education, domestic violence, and youth issues. The analysis will be disaggregated at the national and provincial level.

UNFPA is supporting the Ministry of Health and community-based organizations to reach the most vulnerable and remote ethnic communities to provide family planning services. In addition, UNFPA supports capacity strengthening of the National Commission of the Advancement of Women and the National Assembly in order to facilitate participation of women, including ethnic women, in decision-making spheres at all levels.

Mongolia

To address issues such as high maternal mortality and gender inequality, UNFPA has been implementing projects in the Bayan-Ulgii province since 2002, mainly focusing on improving quality of sexual and reproductive health services, changing behaviors, and raising awareness on gender-related issues. Similar projects are supported by UNFPA in Khuvsgul province, as the “Tsaatan” population is currently the only indigenous group formally recognized in the country.

UNFPA supports activities include provision of mobile sexual and reproductive health services to remote and vulnerable population groups, development and distribution of behaviour change communication materials on sexual and reproductive health issues, organization of capacity building trainings for health service providers and other social service providers, and sensitization activities among local decision makers, community and religious leaders on gender issues.

Nepal

UNFPA has ensured that Issues of caste and ethnicity have been added to the questionnaire of the upcoming population census for 2011. This will provide disaggregated data for planning and monitoring development policies and programmes.

UNFPA Nepal has also ensured that Issues of caste and ethnicity have been added to the questionnaire of the upcoming population census for 2011. This will provide disaggregated data for planning and monitoring development policies and programmes.

UNFPA is a member of the inter-agency Social Inclusion Action Group (SIAG), which promotes workforce diversity within the UN. Within that framework, the SIAG is supporting the government to revise the civil servant personnel record system to include caste and ethnic information. The government has a policy and commitment to achieve 45 per cent representation in government posts at all levels by socially excluded groups including indigenous peoples.

The Philippines

UNFPA supports data collection that includes basic demographic information in the National Census on Population and Housing on indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, as well as initiatives in favor of indigenous youth. UNFPA supported intercultural human rights approaches to sexual and reproductive health, including programmes aimed at ensuring availability and access to modern, safe and effective methods of birth spacing through localized and customized distribution system of family planning supplies including the provision of culturally sensitive-information on family planning.

In addition, UNFPA supports initiatives to prevent gender-based violence and empower indigenous women as well as gender mainstreaming in development plans and programmes, including those for indigenous peoples.

Thailand

The ongoing UNFPA funded project on population ageing (2007-2011) supports Thailand's efforts to build capacity of the government, NGOs, media and civil society organizations at national and sub-national levels for effective policy formulation and implementation in response to the rapid population ageing in Thailand. This includes older persons in urban and rural areas, both the Thais and the ethnic groups. The project is being implemented in three Northern provinces namely Chiang Mai, Lampang and Mae Hong Son because ageing is faster in the Northern provinces than other regions and they are home to the ethnic minorities of different cultures, languages and ways of life.

UNFPA supports national efforts to improve access to maternal health services for women at reproductive age in selected areas of Narathiwat, where Thai-Malay groups live, and Mae Hong Son where Karen groups live. UNFPA Thailand's project activities include: strengthening of service provision; capacity building of health services personnel; advocacy; and distributing IEC material, commodities and medical supplies.



Viet Nam

UNFPA has supported the government in the analysis and dissemination of population and household census data, advocating for the utilization of the findings for evidence-based research, policy planning and development and for inclusion of issues of ethnic minority groups, such as education, migration and urbanization, age structure and marital status, and mortality and fertility. In spite of substantial progress made in achieving MDGs, ethnic minority groups are still vulnerable and left behind. UNFPA has developed policy briefs with suggestions for policy options to improve the gaps in education, health care, maternal health, and living conditions for ethnic minority groups. The government of Viet Nam is developing several new strategies for 2011-2020 that pay special attention and priority to remote and mountainous areas as well as vulnerable populations, including ethnic minority groups. For this new period, UNFPA has supported and advocated for the integration of gender-based violence and gender mainstreaming into national strategies.

Republic of Congo

In 2009 and 2010, UNFPA held several consultations with indigenous leaders at national and provincial levels to define its strategy for action to promote and protect the rights of the 43,378 indigenous peoples in the Republic of Congo. In partnership with the government and other international development partners, programmes, UNFPA has

advocated for the integration of indigenous peoples concerns in policies and programmes. UNFPA has strengthened the institutional and technical capacities of the National Indigenous Peoples Network (RENAPAC) and organized sensitization activities on reproductive health, gender, HIV and sexual violence. UNFPA supported the adoption of a law to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, a landmark in Africa

In 2011, UNFPA will strengthen its support in favor of Congolese indigenous peoples, including technical and financial support to the International Forum of Indigenous Peoples of Central Africa; the production of a documentary film on Congolese indigenous women; enhanced HIV prevention support to indigenous peoples; a survey on the conditions of living of indigenous women; and advocacy for greater involvement of indigenous peoples in the social, economic and political decision-making processes.



A baby at a UNFPA-supported clinic for a routine health check-up