



# UNFPA Work on Indigenous Issues





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# 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, Aimara, 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.



# 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/HIV/AIDS, 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

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