



**Interactive dialogue**  
**Focus area: The empowerment of indigenous women**  
**Wednesday, 15 March 2017, United Nations Headquarters**

***Background***

In accordance with its working methods the Commission, as necessary, discusses emerging issues, trends, focus areas and new approaches to questions affecting the situation of women, including equality between women and men, that require timely consideration, taking into account developments at the global and regional levels as well as planned activities within the United Nations, where increased attention to gender perspectives is required, and with attention to relevant issues on the agenda of the Economic and Social Council, in particular the annual main theme of the Council, as applicable.

In 2016, the Commission on the Status of Women acknowledged its intention to consider the issue of the empowerment of indigenous women as a focus area of its sixty-first session. Such a consideration in 2017 is timely as it coincides with the 10-year anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The Declaration calls for focused attention to the rights and needs of indigenous women, for effective measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions and full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination (cf. articles 21 and 22). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledge to leave no one behind provides additional momentum and impetus for addressing the situation of indigenous women.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognized that indigenous women often face barriers both as women and as members of indigenous communities. The 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action revealed that indigenous women across the world face disproportionate levels of discrimination, exclusion and violence.<sup>1</sup> Available data suggests that there are significant disparities between indigenous and non-indigenous women's access to social services, economic opportunities and political participation, among others.<sup>2</sup>

Indigenous women actively participate as change agents in global processes, including the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). Their contributions to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) of 2014, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Conference of the Parties on climate change have been further opportunities for indigenous women to bring to the forefront their collective priorities, experiences and lessons for transformative change for present and future generations, especially within the context of sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Report of the Secretary-General, E/CN.6/2015/3.

<sup>2</sup> UNDESA. 2009. The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

## ***Objectives***

The event will present policy options, opportunities, entry points and lessons learned from ongoing efforts at addressing a number of specific issues affecting indigenous women and girls. Consideration of the focus area of the empowerment of indigenous women will aim to:

- Review gains and development challenges facing indigenous women
- Highlight opportunities for accelerating the empowerment of indigenous women
- Identify measures to support the empowerment of indigenous women in the context of the implementation of global commitments.

The consideration of the focus area could give particular attention to issues such as: a. indigenous women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels; b. violence against indigenous women and girls; c. indigenous women's economic opportunities; and d. the impact of climate change on the empowerment of indigenous women and their responses. It could also give particular attention as to how intergovernmental processes in a range of sectoral and thematic areas could further advance the empowerment of indigenous women.

## ***Issues and elements for discussion***

### ***a. Indigenous women's participation in decision making processes at all levels***

Indigenous women consistently channel their voices, expectations and contributions through a number of national, regional and global processes on various issues impacting on their wellbeing. To strengthen their roles as active agents of change, decision-making spaces for indigenous women must be widened for the continued articulation of their demands, particularly in relation to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Experience to date demonstrates that targeted interventions for indigenous women can improve their participation, in particular in politics. These include capacity building for indigenous female political candidates; civic education and sensitization campaigns on the importance of their participation in national affairs; legislative and constitutional reforms to ensure fair access to political spheres as voters, candidates and elected officials. The use of temporary special measures, such as electoral quotas and measures to prevent violence against women candidates have also proven to have significant impacts on their standing for, and remaining in, political office.<sup>3</sup> Despite these achievements, patriarchal attitudes and stereotypical norms and practices continue to prevent indigenous women from participating actively and equally in decision-making at all levels and in all spheres.

The following questions could be addressed in the discussion:

- 1. How have constitutions and electoral laws promoted indigenous women's participation in decision-making at both local and national levels?*
- 2. To what extent have indigenous women benefited from temporary special measures and what other factors have accounted for their success?*
- 3. What types of capacity development initiatives have supported indigenous women running as political candidates and why?*

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<sup>3</sup> UN Women. 2015. Submission to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on UN Women's Programmatic Initiatives in Support of the Implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2013-2014).

### b. Violence against indigenous women and girls

Violence against women and girls is a global pandemic, affecting one in three women worldwide.<sup>4</sup> While violence against any woman or girl is unacceptable, the limited available data suggests that indigenous women and girls tend to experience higher levels of violence compared to their non-indigenous counterparts.<sup>5</sup> The Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, for instance, finds that indigenous women are significantly more likely to experience rape than non-indigenous women and that more than one in three indigenous women are raped during their lifetime.<sup>6</sup>

Good practice initiatives demonstrate that a combination of legal, policy and institutional interventions are needed to address impunity for violence against indigenous women and girls. Violence related services which are underpinned by intercultural approaches are also regarded by indigenous women and girls as more effective and sustainable in countering and tackling violence. Indigenous women effectively contributed to the Commission's work on the agreed conclusions on preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls (CSW57), advocating for strengthened implementation of legal and policy frameworks and accountability.

The following questions could be addressed in the discussion:

- 1. What must law enforcement agencies and service providers do differently to effectively address the higher proportion of violence against indigenous women and girls?*
- 2. What strategies have been effective in preventing and addressing violence against indigenous women among stakeholders and how can these be scaled up for greater impact?*
- 3. What role do indigenous and non-indigenous men and boys need to play in combating violence against indigenous women and girls?*

### c. Indigenous women's economic opportunities

Providing indigenous women with a wide range of economic opportunities is an important pathway to poverty elimination. Indigenous peoples account for 5 per cent of the world's population, while representing 15 per cent of those living in poverty.<sup>7</sup> As many as 33 per cent of all people living in extreme rural poverty globally are from indigenous communities.<sup>8</sup> Economic opportunities include ensuring that indigenous women have equal access and control over indigenous land, territories and resources; access to technology, extensions services, animal husbandry and credit; equal pay for equal work and recognition of indigenous women's unpaid work in the care and domestic economies.

The opportunities for indigenous women must extend beyond informal sector and small scale entrepreneurial activities to medium to large scale business ownership as well as their effective participation in the formal economy. Good practices demonstrate that these can be achieved by ensuring that indigenous girls achieve a full course of education to the highest level through

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<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization. 2016. Violence against women. Intimate partner and sexual violence against women. Fact sheet. Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>

<sup>5</sup> UN Women. 2014. "Elimination and responses to violence, exploitation and abuse of indigenous girls, adolescents and young women." A thematic paper prepared by the UN Inter Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues.

<sup>6</sup> General Assembly. 2015. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli Corpuz. A/HRC/30/41. Para 47.

<sup>7</sup> UNDESA. 2009. The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples. Page 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

scholarship and mentoring programmes which promote the participation of girls in mathematics, science and technology. Effective land titling programmes and gender responsive extension services ensure that indigenous women have access to productive resources.<sup>9</sup>

The following questions could be addressed in the discussion:

- 1. What are examples of effective ways of eradicating poverty among indigenous women and how can such initiatives be sustained and replicated?*
- 2. How have indigenous women secured and protected their rights to ancestral lands, territories and resources, and what partnerships have been most effective towards this end?*
- 3. What opportunities are being provided to indigenous women to effectively participate in economic life and decision-making, and how are those expanding economic opportunities for indigenous women?*

d. The impact of climate change on the empowerment of indigenous women and their responses

Indigenous women are highly dependent on their lands and natural resources, including for their way of life and survival. Indigenous peoples may live in areas that are rich in biodiversity and particularly vulnerable to changes in the environment, including those due to climate change. Climate change impacts differentially on women, and even more so on indigenous women. Thus their role in and contributions to mitigation and adaptation are crucial when climate change policies are formulated and programmes designed, implemented and evaluated. Addressing climate change from this perspective encourages to highlight issues of social justice, equality and empowerment of women.<sup>10</sup>

Indigenous laws, beliefs and customs provide the framework for harmonious relations between indigenous peoples and their environment. Based on their long-term relationship with their dwelt-in environments, indigenous women often possess sophisticated traditional ecological knowledge of weather patterns, including complex adaptive responses towards cycles of climatic variability. They have developed good practices that support low carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions based on traditional environmental practices. Indigenous women thus have a key role and must fully participate in the design and implementation of policies and plans related to climate change impact mitigation.

The following questions could be addressed in the discussion:

- 1. How have indigenous women strategized for action on climate change and what strategies have been effective?*
- 2. What alliances and partnerships have indigenous women built across different constituencies and how have those contributed to awareness raising and policy action on climate change?*

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<sup>9</sup> UN Women. 2015. Submission to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on UN Women's Programmatic Initiatives in Support of the Implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2013-2014).

<sup>10</sup> Indigenous Women, climate change and forest, Tebtebba Foundation.  
<http://www.tebtebba.org/index.php/content/196-iw-cc-tfm>

3. *What strategies and policies have contributed to mitigating the effects of climate change on the well-being of indigenous women and what have been the enabling factors for their success?*

***Suggested format***

The consideration of the focus area will take place in an interactive format that provides opportunity for Member States, indigenous women and their organizations, of bodies and mechanisms such as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as representatives of the UN system to participate.

Participants will be invited to comment on leading questions (see above), and the Chair/Moderator will support the dialogue and its interactive nature through follow-up questions.

Consideration of each of the four thematic areas will begin with comments by invited speakers, followed by an interactive dialogue. Ministers will participate in the dialogue on a voluntary basis. No speakers' list will be kept. However, Ministers wishing to participate in the dialogue will be invited to communicate this intention in advance. A lead discussant will be invited to provide wrap-up comments to conclude the dialogue.

The outcome of the consideration of the focus area will be a Chair's summary which will highlight measures to strengthen indigenous women's empowerment. The Chair's summary could provide an input to the work of the Permanent Forum, the 10-year anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the 2017 High-Level Political Forum.