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2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Update on indigenous peoples and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present report provides an update on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development from the perspective of indigenous peoples. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as an expert body of the Economic and Social Council, plays a significant role in providing advice on how to ensure that the rights of indigenous peoples are effectively accounted for and realized in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In the report, the Permanent Forum sets out key elements of General Assembly resolution [73/156](#) on the rights of indigenous peoples and the activities and outcomes of the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development, including an overview of the Member State voluntary national reviews that included references to indigenous peoples. The report concludes with highlights from global reports on sustainable development and indigenous peoples and reflections on the theme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development for 2019, “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”.

* [E/C.19/2019/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, set a transformative and ambitious global agenda. The Agenda includes six specific references to indigenous peoples, including a commitment to doubling the agricultural output of indigenous small-scale farmers (target 2.3) and a commitment to ensuring equal access to education for indigenous children (target 4.5). In the Agenda, Member States also expressed a strong commitment to empowering and engaging indigenous peoples in the implementation of the Goals and were encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress in achieving them, including at the national level, and to draw on the contributions of indigenous peoples in those reviews (General Assembly resolution [70/1](#), para. 79). In addition to specific references to indigenous peoples, a central promise of the Agenda is to leave no one behind and to reach those furthest behind first. Therefore, indigenous peoples' concerns also apply across the Agenda. An update on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development from the perspective of indigenous peoples was mandated in the report on the seventeenth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues ([E/2018/43](#)).

2. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples constitutes a framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, well-being and rights of the world's indigenous peoples. It provides a road map for incorporating the rights of indigenous peoples into equitable, participatory and people-centred sustainable development.

3. The Permanent Forum is an expert body of the Economic and Social Council and plays a key role in ensuring that the rights and priorities of indigenous peoples are entrenched in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The present report provides follow-up to the update on indigenous peoples and the 2030 Agenda that was prepared for the seventeenth session of the Forum ([E/C.19/2018/2](#)). It includes substantive inputs from the Permanent Forum for the thematic reviews of the high-level political forum on sustainable development to be convened in 2019 under the auspices of both the Council and the General Assembly.

II. Gaps and challenges in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

4. As an advisory body of the Economic and Social Council on indigenous issues, the Permanent Forum has regularly included a standing item for the consideration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on the agenda of its annual sessions. Many of the issues addressed under other agenda items are also of direct relevance to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. In the report on its seventeenth session, the Permanent Forum made several recommendations and observations relating to gaps and challenges for indigenous peoples in relation to the 2030 Agenda, on the basis of the key issues emerging from expert panel discussions and dialogues that had been focused on the collective rights of indigenous peoples to lands, territories and resources. In its report, the Forum reiterated that challenges to the promotion and protection of such rights were at the heart of indigenous peoples' struggles around the world and emphasized that achieving the Goals would not be possible without fulfilling those rights. Furthermore, safeguarding the collective rights of indigenous peoples to lands, territories and resources was necessary not only to ensure their own well-being, but also to address some of the most pressing global challenges, such as climate change and environmental degradation.

6. The Permanent Forum also called upon States to include the recognition of customary rights or tenure of indigenous peoples to their lands and resources under target 2.3 of the Goals, in particular in its focus on secure and equal access to land. Furthermore, the Forum reiterated its request to the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators to make the land-related indicator operational, including in relation to changing land use and the security of land tenure in the traditional territories of indigenous peoples. The Forum also highlighted the need for strengthened disaggregation of data by ethnicity with regard to issues of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in the census to better illustrate maternal mortality rate disparities in the context of the Goals.

7. The Permanent Forum reiterated that countries undergoing voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum on sustainable development should include indigenous peoples in their reviews, reports and delegations and invited States to report on good practices in that regard to the Forum at its eighteenth session. The Forum noted that the implementation of Goal 7, on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, provided opportunities for indigenous peoples, but also posed threats to them. The Forum encouraged States to work with indigenous peoples to develop guidelines for responsible renewable energy development.

III. General Assembly resolution 73/156 on the rights of indigenous peoples

8. The General Assembly, in its resolution 73/156 on indigenous peoples, addressed the connection between the 2030 Agenda and indigenous peoples. The Assembly again stressed the need to ensure that no one was left behind and to reach the furthest behind first, including indigenous peoples, who should participate in, contribute to and benefit without discrimination from the implementation of the Agenda. It further encouraged Member States to give due consideration to all the rights of indigenous peoples while implementing the Agenda. In that light, the General Assembly:

(a) Encouraged Member States to give due consideration to all the rights of indigenous peoples in fulfilling the commitments undertaken in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the elaboration of national action plans and programmes, as well as international and regional programmes, applying the pledge to leave no one behind and to endeavour to reach the furthest behind first;

(b) Encouraged States to consider including information related to indigenous peoples in their voluntary national reviews for the high-level political forum on sustainable development and their national and global reports on progress made and challenges noted in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, bearing in mind paragraphs 78 and 79 of the Agenda, and also encouraged States to compile disaggregated data in order to measure progress and ensure that no one is left behind;

(c) Encouraged States, according to their relevant national context and characteristics, to collect and disseminate data disaggregated by ethnicity, income, gender, age, race, migratory status, disability, geographic location or other factors, as appropriate, in order to monitor and improve the impact of development policies, strategies and programmes aimed at improving the well-being of indigenous peoples and individuals, to combat and eliminate violence and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against them and to support work towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda;

(d) Stressed the need to strengthen the commitment of States and the entities of the United Nations system to mainstream the promotion and protection of the rights

of indigenous peoples into development policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels, and encouraged them to give due consideration to the rights of indigenous peoples in achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda;

(e) Invited the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples to give due consideration, within their mandates, to the rights of indigenous peoples as related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

IV. Monitoring the progress of indigenous peoples in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

9. As recommended by the Permanent Forum and authorized by the Economic and Social Council in 2017, an international expert group meeting was held in New York, from 23 to 25 January 2018, on the theme “Sustainable development in the territories of indigenous peoples”. In the ensuing report (E/C.19/2018/7), experts noted that, while there were six explicit references to indigenous peoples in the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, including target 2.3, on committing to double the agricultural output of indigenous small-scale farmers, and target 4.5, on ensuring equal access to education for indigenous children, there was no indicator relating to indigenous land rights. They also noted that the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination, development and their lands, territories and resources, as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, were inextricably linked to sustainable development. Those rights were also central to other key 2030 Agenda targets relating to, inter alia, ending poverty, ensuring healthy lives, and ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education. Target 1.4 was of particular relevance, as it contained a call for ensuring equal rights for all men and women, in particular the poor and vulnerable, to ownership and control over land and natural resources.

10. Experts further noted that the 2030 Agenda was unequivocally anchored in human rights, and linked peace with development. They stressed the importance of highlighting those connections in the attainment of the Goals, using the Declaration as a tool for implementation. To that end, they noted that the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples’ Issues was an important vehicle for highlighting the rights of indigenous peoples, through national policy dialogues and capacity development at the national and regional levels, through United Nations country teams. The experts set out a number of recommendations for the consideration of Member States, the Permanent Forum and the United Nations system, to promote the participation and inclusion of indigenous peoples and their development priorities in the implementation of the Goals at the international, regional and national levels.

A. 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development

11. At the 2018 high-level political forum, an in-depth review of progress was undertaken on six of the Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 6, on water and sanitation for all; Goal 7, on affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; Goal 11, on cities and human settlements; Goal 12, on sustainable consumption and production patterns; Goal 15, on the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainable forest management, combating desertification, halting and reversing land degradation and halting biodiversity loss; and Goal 17, which is reviewed annually, on the global partnership for sustainable development. Representatives of indigenous peoples participated in the 2018 high-level political forum, as they had in 2016 and

2017. The Permanent Forum was represented by one of its Vice-Chairs, Tarcila Rivera Zea.

12. In the lead-up to the 2018 high-level political forum, international expert group meetings were held by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat to thematically examine the set of Goals under review. Goal 15, which addresses the conservation and sustainable use of forests, other terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity, including halting desertification and land degradation and combating the illegal trade in endangered species, was deemed to be of relevance to indigenous peoples. Review participants recognized that actions taken to implement the Goal directly affected the lives and well-being of many indigenous peoples and local communities often viewed as excluded, marginalized or at risk of being left behind. The fact that indigenous peoples inhabit and manage approximately 22 per cent of the Earth's surface, which collectively contains around 80 per cent of the planet's biodiversity was also noted, as was the fact that land tenure rights over forests, pasture and farmlands are unclear, effectively incentivizing exploitation rather than sustainable management and longer-term investments. Key areas for supporting implementation mechanisms and partnerships included strengthening producers' organizations and indigenous peoples' groups to ensure their access to information, rights, quality input, new technologies and practices, funding and markets and engaging local communities, drawing upon traditional knowledge and promoting the inclusion of women and indigenous populations.¹

13. In her summary of the 2018 high-level political forum,² the President of the Economic and Social Council noted that certain populations, including indigenous peoples, remained vulnerable and at high risk of being left behind. She referred to statements made by many participants, who reiterated that indigenous peoples also disproportionately suffered from a lack of recognition of their rights in some countries and that meaningful consultations were often the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, many vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples, remained invisible, had no access to basic services, faced structural or economic barriers or contended with political oppression due to the tendency of some entities to value "profit over people", which was identified as a major obstacle for sustainable development.

14. In her summary, the President noted that many participants had agreed that strengthening statistics on vulnerable groups such as women, children and youth and indigenous peoples, among others, would require more and better data, as well as improved use of existing data; that synergies between modern and indigenous knowledge were important; and that interdisciplinary science should incorporate indigenous knowledge more fully. She also highlighted the need for governments and communities to consult and engage with indigenous peoples in the management of water resources. She further observed that many participants had stressed the need to ensure that the custodians of terrestrial ecosystems were not forgotten in the implementation of Goal 15, as well as the need to empower rural women, respect the rights and knowledge of indigenous peoples and engage young people and other marginalized groups in planning and implementation in order to increase the sustainable management of resources.

15. Indigenous issues were raised at a side event on the topic "Learning from indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge", organized by the Department of

¹ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/200087.8_Formatted_Background_NoteSDG_15.pdf.

² See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/205432018_HLPF_Presidents_summary_FINAL.pdf.

Economic and Social Affairs and co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Canada. The event, held on 9 July 2018, brought together representatives of indigenous peoples and Member States in order to deepen understanding on the contribution of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge to the achievement of Goal 15. Speakers provided examples of indigenous knowledge being used to provide clean and sustainable energy to indigenous communities in Malaysia, monitor wildlife in the Kalahari Desert and sustainably management forests in Kenya. In addition to illuminating the crucial role of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge in achieving the Goal, panellists identified challenges to the recognition of the value of traditional knowledge and its potential to benefit larger societies and the environment.

16. Together with the Department of Public Information, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs also organized a press conference on the topic "Is the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals respecting the rights of indigenous peoples?" Speakers included a Permanent Forum member, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and an indigenous activist from the United States of America. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs also supported the coordination of a Sustainable Development Goals media zone event on the theme "Indigenous Peoples and the 2030 Agenda", through which attention was drawn to the continued need to include the rights of indigenous peoples in the global agenda for development. The media zone event featured numerous indigenous representatives and activists speaking on a variety of topics. Both events were broadcast live via Facebook stream.

B. Voluntary national reviews at the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development

17. In 2018, 10 out of 46 Member States referenced indigenous peoples in their voluntary national reviews. Those references were incorporated in different ways, as outlined below.

18. Several Member States briefly mentioned efforts to address inequalities experienced by indigenous peoples, who were also referred to using other terminology, such as minority groups, ethnic minorities and highland peoples. Under Goal 10, Ecuador reported on its efforts to end hunger through food sovereignty initiatives and its efforts to improve indigenous access to quality education. For example, Ecuador had created incentives for indigenous farmers who voluntarily committed themselves to food production, conservation and the protection of their native forests. Ecuador also reported improvements in indigenous peoples' access to high school and had worked with the United Nations Children's Fund and indigenous young people to identify problems faced by indigenous adolescents and children.

19. The Lao People's Democratic Republic acknowledged disparities in education and health for ethnic groups living in remote mountain communities and considered efforts to institute a poverty monitoring system and promote women's rights through the Lao Women's Union mandate to represent all ethnic groups. Namibia acknowledged inequalities within its rural and urban populations, noting the higher number of minority groups living in rural areas with higher rates of poverty.

20. Mexico reported inequalities stemming from past discrimination against indigenous peoples and emphasized the need for focused action on specific Goals relating to poverty reduction, education, water and sanitation and energy. For example, the Indigenous Infrastructure Programme has reportedly improved the backlog for the provision of drinking water, drainage and sanitation in indigenous communities; as a result, 87.2 per cent of indigenous households now have potable water and 73.1 per cent have drainage.

21. Paraguay reported several initiatives to mainstream the principle of free, prior and informed consent in its institutional partnerships with indigenous peoples. For example, the country's Instituto Paraguayo del Indígena has been working on a national action plan that would serve as a guide to all institutions for carrying out actions aimed at indigenous peoples. The Institute and other partners have held several national meetings to validate the protocol for free, prior and informed consent, including a meeting held in June 2018 and attended by 100 leaders of seven indigenous peoples to turn the action plan into State policy.

22. Sri Lanka is in the process of drafting a new constitution, which may include references to the recognition of the rights of ethnic communities. It also has a new national policy for social integration that promotes cultural pluralism. Uruguay reported on its implementation of a United Nations Development Programme-Global Environment Facility project on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing in the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity and on its efforts to strengthen the capacity of indigenous communities to participate in the project.

23. Sudan reported on its efforts to include indigenous skills and knowledge in agricultural development and acknowledged the crucial role of local communities in all processes geared towards peace and conflict resolution. For instance, Sudan cited the system of native administration as an effective form of local governance that plays an essential role in peace and conflict resolution through customary law. The native administration system also manages land allocation and use, delivers justice, settles disputes and represents the Government.

24. Australia, noting that all 17 Sustainable Development Goals were of significance to indigenous peoples, reported on its taking practical and system-based approaches to the Goals. For instance, in recognition of indigenous expertise in managing traditional resources, Australia had promoted partnerships between indigenous peoples and Emissions Reduction Fund projects that have achieved reductions of over 1.5 tons of emissions and supported more than 300 indigenous jobs per year over 10 years.

25. Canada highlighted issues pertaining to indigenous peoples throughout its report, emphasizing that building strong, culturally appropriate institutions was not only an essential part of the country's path to reconciliation with indigenous peoples, it was a precondition for its implementation of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Notably, Canada established an official body to review relevant laws, policies and practices to help to ensure that they meet the country's constitutional obligations with respect to indigenous rights. Canada was the only country to mention self-determination in its voluntary national review.

26. Although most countries focused on developing targeted policies and programmes aimed at benefiting indigenous peoples, several also engaged in active partnerships with indigenous peoples to design and implement them. Although there were several positive indicators in the reports of countries that mentioned indigenous peoples, the priorities, rights and concerns of indigenous peoples remained inadequately reflected in most voluntary national reviews.

C. Global reports on sustainable development

27. In his report on supporting resilient societies in urban and rural communities (E/2018/61), the Secretary-General highlighted that globally, groups such as smallholders, including pastoralists and indigenous peoples, managed a significant share of natural resources, while being among those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss. He also noted that, critically, those groups were often repositories of rich, varied and locally rooted knowledge

systems and that an enabling institutional and policy environment was needed for those actors to contribute to enhancing the broader sustainability of societies (para. 62).

28. In a note by the Secretariat transmitting the input from the fourth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (E/HLPF/2018/2/Add.4), the summary and key messages contained an emphasis on the need to strengthen rights and access to land resources and participative approaches to the management of land, freshwater, forests and biodiversity. According to the report, it was particularly important to enhance access and participation by indigenous peoples, local communities and various groups, including women and young people, as central to ensuring equitable benefit-sharing and that no one was left behind. Countries therefore needed to strengthen their land governance, including resource tenure systems, in order to contribute to efforts to combat land-grabbing (para. 66).

29. The indigenous peoples major group for sustainable development produced a technical policy brief on Goal 15 for the high-level political forum, entitled “The central roles of indigenous peoples and local communities in achieving global commitments on biodiversity”.³ In the brief, which was prepared by the Forest Peoples Programme, the major group emphasized that biological and cultural diversity increased resilience to social, environmental and climate change and that indigenous peoples and local communities played a significant role in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. The major group, with contributions from the Danish Institute for Human Rights, also prepared a briefing paper on sustainable energy and indigenous peoples,⁴ highlighting indigenous peoples’ lack of access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy and the fact that large renewable energy projects often take place on indigenous peoples’ land and territories without meaningful consultation or the free, prior and informed consent of the peoples concerned. It also prepared a background paper on renewable energy and indigenous peoples relating to the Right Energy Partnership,⁵ funded by the Oak Foundation, focusing on patterns of progress and investment in renewable energy, the negative impacts of poorly planned renewable energy on indigenous communities and the potential of indigenous-led renewable energy to lead the way.

D. Reflections on the theme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development for 2019: “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”

30. Participants at the high-level political forum convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council at its 2019 session will consider the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality” and will also review Sustainable Development Goals 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17. At the time of writing, 51 countries, including 10 that had participated previously, had volunteered to present national reviews. The high-level political forum convened under the auspices of the General Assembly will meet in September 2019. All the Goals under review are relevant to the concerns of indigenous peoples, who often experience vast

³ Available from www.indigenouspeoples-sdg.org/index.php/english/all-resources/ipmg-position-papers-and-publications/ipmg-submission-interventions/95-the-central-roles-of-indigenous-peoples-and-local-communities-in-achieving-global-commitments-on-biodiversity/file.

⁴ Available from www.indigenouspeoples-sdg.org/index.php/english/all-resources/ipmg-position-papers-and-publications/ipmg-submission-interventions/83-doing-it-right-sustainable-energy-and-indigenous-peoples/file.

⁵ Available from www.indigenouspeoples-sdg.org/index.php/english/all-resources/ipmg-position-papers-and-publications/ipmg-submission-interventions/93-renewable-energy-indigenous-peoples/file.

inequalities, including in relation to poverty and marginalization, and are frequently excluded and left behind in comparison to other societal groups.

31. In the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Member States recognized the importance of education for the empowerment and well-being of children, as well as the right of indigenous peoples to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning (article 14; see also Goal 4). It is therefore relevant that the General Assembly proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, on the basis of a recommendation of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and to encourage urgent action to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages (resolution [71/178](#), para. 13).

32. In the Declaration, Member States also reinforced the notion that indigenous peoples had the right to the improvement of their social and economic condition, including in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and social security (article 21 (1); see also Goal 8) and that they had the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples (article 7 (2); see also Goal 16).

33. Participants in several international expert group meetings held over the past decade have also provided insights regarding the empowerment, inclusion and equality of indigenous peoples. For example, the topic addressed in 2010 was “Indigenous peoples: development with culture and identity”. The meeting included discussions on how the development model of economic liberalism ignored indigenous peoples’ governance, economic, social, cultural, educational, spiritual and knowledge systems and the natural resources that had sustained them for generations (see [E/C.19/2010/14](#)). In addition, at a meeting held in 2015, it was noted that indigenous peoples were specifically referenced in various parts of the 2030 Agenda, including in target 2.3, on agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, and target 4.5, on eliminating gender disparities and increasing access to education, as well as in commitments made by Member States to empowering indigenous peoples and providing them with inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels (paras. 23 and 25).

E. International expert group meeting on conservation and the rights of indigenous peoples

34. From 23 to 25 January 2019, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized an international expert group meeting on the theme “Conservation and the rights of indigenous peoples”. At the meeting, which was held in Nairobi, experts highlighted both the significant role played by indigenous peoples in conserving the environment and the undue pressures and impacts on indigenous peoples of climate change and of the dispossession of their lands and territories (Goal 13).

35. Building on that theme, and given the importance of traditional knowledge and the contributions of indigenous peoples to ameliorating climate change and achieving environmental sustainability, the special theme of the eighteenth session of the Permanent Forum will be “Traditional knowledge: generation, transmission and protection”. The session will also include a discussion on indigenous peoples and the 2030 Agenda. The report of the Forum will be submitted to the Economic and Social Council to provide input for the 2019 high-level political forum to be convened in 2019 under the auspices of both the Council and the General Assembly.