
ROLE PLAYED BY THE ILO IN MAKING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS A REALITY FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Neethu S.T, Research Scholar, Department of Law, University of Kerala

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals are based on a vision of transforming our planet. They want to create a society free of poverty, starvation, and disease, where every woman and girl has complete gender equality, the environment is safeguarded, and everyone has access to a great education and good job. This will be a more inclusive, sustainable, peaceful, and affluent society, devoid of prejudice based on race, ethnicity, cultural identity, or handicap. These are just a few aspects of an ambitious and global vision that has been accepted with the pledge that "no one will be left behind."

This vision is vital for the world's almost 370 million indigenous peoples, many of whom have historically suffered tremendous injustices and continue to confront marginalization, exploitation, and exclusion. Despite significant progress in poverty elimination, indigenous peoples remain among the poorest of the poor. Their traditional ways of life, livelihoods, and traditions are under threat from a variety of sources, including a lack of acknowledgment and protection of their rights, discriminatory state policies, and the effects of climate change. A confluence of concerns, including loss of access to traditional lands and natural resources, workplace discrimination, forced migration, and limited access to opportunities, has made them even more susceptible to social situations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework provides a historic opportunity to address such issues and ensure that indigenous peoples too are not left behind.¹

¹ <https://www.ilo.org> , [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_503715.pdf#:~:text=The Sustainable Development Goals%28SDGs%29 framework provides,indigenous peoples through its Decent work Agenda.\(visited on July 4th 2022\)](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_503715.pdf#:~:text=The+Sustainable+Development+Goals%28SDGs%29+framework+provides,indigenous+peoples+through+its+Decent+work+Agenda.(visited+on+July+4th+2022))

Indigenous peoples understand that if they are to survive as a people, they must live in peace with the environment, and indigenous peoples have devised successful techniques for living sustainably. They also face the consequences of unsustainable activities daily, such as environmental degradation and climate change caused by unregulated, unbridled development.

They have seen many “development” strategies that not only destroy the environment but take their lands and impoverish their communities—from agricultural development to dams and roads, even environmental conservation projects have sometimes resulted in the expulsion of indigenous peoples.

Recently, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have begun to discuss "sustainable development" and the green economy, adopting new climate-change policies and mechanisms such as payment for ecosystem services or Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)². "REDD cowboys" and businesses are even looking for ways to profit off indigenous peoples' usage of the environment and natural resources.

Indigenous peoples are the natural world's caretakers in various ways. It has been proved that maintaining indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, territories, and resources, as well as developing their capacity to administer territories, is one of the most successful ways of conserving the earth's biodiversity and natural systems. Unfortunately, many development projects attempt to seize or limit the resources of indigenous peoples.

Through its Decent Work Agenda, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has been at the forefront of promoting indigenous peoples' rights. The ILO, with its knowledge and experience in this field, as well as its unique tripartite structure, has a critical role to play in assisting concerned stakeholders in ensuring that the SDGs are met for everyone. The ILO works to empower indigenous women and men because, without their involvement, there can be no inclusive and sustainable development.

Indigenous peoples are critical change agents whose livelihood practices, traditional knowledge, and ways of life are critical for mitigating climate change and achieving the

²<https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=183155#:~:text=REDD%2B%20aims%20to%20achieve%20climate,of%20forests%20through%20REDD%2B%20actions.> (Visited on 17th June 2022)

ambitious goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Indigenous peoples: international instruments and frameworks

- ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989, the only international treaty on indigenous peoples open to ratification. It has been ratified so far by 22 countries.
- ILO Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957, the older ILO instrument on the issue. Though no longer open to ratification it remains in force for 17 countries.
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007: the most recent expression of indigenous peoples' aspirations at the international level.
- World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, 2014: forum at which States reaffirmed their commitment to respecting, promoting, and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.
- Paris Agreement, 2015: outcome of the 2015 summit on climate change, in which States highlighted the importance of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge in combating climate change.³

The ILO's role in making sustainable development goals a reality for indigenous people

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges that decent work is both a means and an objective in itself for achieving sustainable development and eradicating poverty.

As a result, the ILO Decent Work Agenda - an integrated policy framework - plays a critical role in minimizing indigenous peoples' distinctive social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities, as well as addressing their high levels of poverty. Without decent work, indigenous women and men would be unable to achieve their full potential as critical agents of change required for inclusive and sustainable development, as well as progress in addressing climate change. As a result, the Decent Work Agenda is critical for empowering indigenous women and men and ensuring that they are not left behind.⁴

³ wcms_243275.pdf (ilo.org) https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---nylo/documents/publication/wcms_243275.pdf (Visited on 18th July 2022).

⁴ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19452829.2019.1574725> (Visited on 20th June 2022)

Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth is the strongest articulation of the Decent Work Agenda in the Sustainable Development Goals framework. Decent work is not just a goal, however: it is a driver of sustainable development. Elements of the Decent Work Agenda, which is underpinned by the ILO's Conventions and Recommendations may be found in a number of the Sustainable Development Goals. About indigenous peoples, ILO Convention No. 169 is particularly significant as it is the only international treaty open for ratification which specifically addresses their rights and well-being. Emphasizing the principles of equality, consultation, participation, and cooperation, the Convention is a framework for participatory democracy, social peace, and sustainable development. Its provisions cut across numerous goals and serve as an important point of departure for making the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples as agents of change

While indigenous peoples face a host of challenges in their lives, their proactive participation as agents of change is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. With their wealth of traditional knowledge and practices, their role is particularly important in the following contexts that cut across several Goals:

- Ensuring the sustainable management and use of natural resources such as forests or marine resources.
- Enhancing sustainable agricultural practices and food security.
- Achieving effective climate change mitigation and adaptation to build resilient communities.
- Enhancing sustainable forms of livelihood, creating green jobs, and spurring climate-sensitive innovation, entrepreneurship, and businesses.
- Achieving gender equality and the greater participation of women, including in decision-making and natural resource management.
- Raising productivity and economic growth while taking into account environmental considerations.
- Securing the peaceful and stable societies necessary for inclusive social and economic development.
- Establishing strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure that no one is left behind

- Enhancing knowledge-sharing and collaboration to implement and achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The approach of the ILO to the empowerment of indigenous peoples and achieving sustainable development goals.

The ILO carries institutional responsibility for Conventions Nos. 169 and 107, the only legally binding treaties specifically dedicated to indigenous peoples. It is therefore in a unique position within the United Nations system and has historically been at the forefront of promoting indigenous peoples' rights and well-being. Its interventions, in collaboration with UN partners, have covered several countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe.

The ILO has addressed indigenous peoples' concerns from many viewpoints by assisting governments as well as workers', employers', and indigenous peoples' groups, with gender equality and non-discrimination as core principles. This includes governance interventions such as the establishment of consultation frameworks, capacity building for legal and policy reforms, addressing and preventing violations of fundamental rights at work, promoting sustainable livelihoods and entrepreneurship development, strengthening access to traditional lands and natural resources, and the creation of inclusive social protection floors. Indigenous people with impairments are also receiving more attention. The ILO's Decent Work Agenda has played an important role in empowering indigenous women and men in a variety of nations, and this empowerment has enabled them to meaningfully participate in society.

With its experience and expertise in indigenous peoples' issues, the ILO is in a strong position to support stakeholders in ensuring that the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals do not leave indigenous peoples behind. As a UN specialized agency devoted to promoting social justice, the ILO has a unique tripartite structure that brings together governments, trade unions, and employers' organizations. This gives the ILO the additional capacity to reach across local, national, regional, and international boundaries in promoting the ownership and harnessing partnerships that are crucial to the realization of the visionary 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The ILO's strategy for action regarding indigenous peoples was designed through a consensus-driven process and has been endorsed by its tripartite constituents. Its key elements are:

- Promoting Convention No. 169 for rights-based, inclusive, and sustainable development
- Strengthening institutionalized dialogue, consultation, and participation
- Improving livelihoods and working conditions

- Extending social protection
- Addressing specific challenges faced by indigenous women
- Closing the knowledge gap
- Enhancing and strengthening partnerships⁵

Conclusion

The question of universality in conceptions of sustainable development has implications for both the selection of goals, targets and appropriate indicators to represent, quantify and measure sustainable development across nations and communities around the world. Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups tend to fall to the side of the conversation. On one level, Indigenous people are calling for disaggregated data as a first step toward making visible their circumstances and outcomes. With its experience and expertise in indigenous peoples' concerns, the ILO is well-positioned to assist stakeholders in ensuring that the Sustainable Development Goals are implemented and monitored in a way that does not leave indigenous peoples behind.

⁵ 2030 Development agenda: ILO Focus targets (The 2030 development agenda)
<https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/sdg-2030/targets/lang--en/index.htm> (Visited on 18th July 2022).