THE ILO’S SUPPORT FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The ILO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that seeks to promote social justice and internationally-recognized human and labour rights. Its goal is to promote Decent Work, opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The Decent Work Agenda covers four integrated pillars, namely: rights, employment, social protection, and social dialogue.

In its pursuit of universal social justice, the ILO has been involved in indigenous peoples (IPs) virtually since its inception. In the 1920’s, the ILO first looked at the issue of rural workers where many indigenous workers were found. They were also referred to as “native workers” in colonies. In the 1930s, the ILO adopted a number of Conventions which were applicable to indigenous and tribal workers including ILO Convention No. 29 or the Forced Labour Convention of 1930. An IP-specific ILO Convention was subsequently adopted, namely, ILO Convention No. 107 or the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention of 1957. This was later updated and revised as ILO Convention No. 169 or the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989. ILO Convention No. 169 Convention No. 169 is an international treaty that is legally binding for States that have ratified it.

ILO action regarding indigenous and tribal peoples is based on a dual strategy: firstly, to promote their human rights; and, secondly, to reduce poverty among them, with the promotion of gender equality as a cross-cutting concern. This strategy is carried out through various technical cooperation projects such as PRO 169 or the Project to Promote ILO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.

ILO Support for IPs in the Philippines

In the Philippines, the ILO’s work for the IPs started in 1994 through several technical cooperation projects carried out under INDISCO or Inter-Regional Programme to Support Self-Reliance of Indigenous and Tribal Communities through Cooperatives and Self-Help Organizations.

Several donor agencies and institutions supported the programme, including the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Arab Gulf Fund (AGFUND), the Netherlands Government, Rabo Bank Foundation, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Philippine Association International (API), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Embassy of Finland in Manila and the Government of Spain through Agencia Española de Cooperacion Internacional para el Desarrollo (AECID) or Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation.

The programme assisted indigenous communities to achieve practical decent work goals such as, but not limited to, enhanced awareness of their human rights, higher level of income and employment, land and resource tenure security, stronger environmental protection and health care, improved interaction with other stakeholders, as well as increased gender equality. It also helped the IPs relate the experience, lessons and good practices generated to the policy environment – an effort that contributed to the conceptualization of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR), which are consistent with the principles of ILO Convention No. 169. Overall, the programme aimed to strengthen IP
individual and collective self-reliance through a community-driven participatory development (CPDP) approach that builds on the IPs’ indigenous knowledge systems and practices or IKSP and resources within their ancestral territories. This approach also reflects the development framework established in ILO Convention No. 169, highlighting the principles of consultation and participation of the IPs in all matters that affect them.

Some of the existing and continuing activities of the ILO in support of the IPs include the following:

- Support to the implementation of ancestral domain sustainable development and protection plans (ADSDPP) by the indigenous peoples in the CARAGA Region in partnership with the Government of Spain through AECID.
- Support to indigenous peoples community development and management of ancestral domains focusing on poverty reduction and promotion of human rights among the Tboli and Ubo peoples in Lake Sebu, South Cotabato, in partnership with the Embassy of Finland in Manila.
- Mainstreaming of IP issues in employment policies and programmes through training with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and with the Coalition of IP Rights Advocates (CORE 169).
- Promotion of and advocacy for the ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 in the Philippines with CORE 169 and NCIP.
- Support to the conduct of policy and programme development studies on the Implementation of the IPRA in partnership with NCIP.
- Information dissemination, advocacy, and promotion of IP rights through the annual World IP Day celebration in collaboration with donor agencies, UN agencies, governmental, and non-governmental institutions.

Contact Us

International Labour Organization
19th Floor, Yuchengco Tower, RCBC Plaza, Ayala, Makati City
Tel: 5809900, Fax: 8567597
Website: http://www.ilo.org/manila