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International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

Message from FAO Director-General

FAO's mandate is to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity, better the lives of rural populations and contribute to the growth of the world economy. To accomplish this, FAO works towards reducing poverty levels, improving access, availability and utilization of food and ensuring stability in access to food for the most vulnerable, marginalized and food insecure.

Where data exists, as recently noted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, they show that levels of hunger and malnutrition among indigenous peoples are much higher than among the non-indigenous population. Available data on indigenous peoples' nutrition show that development efforts as carried out so far, often intensify the marginalization, poverty and food insecurity of indigenous peoples. To address this, FAO launched in November 2010 its Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. The policy was the result of a thorough consultation process including indigenous peoples' organizations, civil society and FAO technical officers in Headquarters and decentralized offices.

The FAO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples comprises a series of core principles aligned with International and UN principles, such as the use of prior and informed consent and the principle of self-determined development defined as the right of Indigenous Peoples to decide the kind of development that takes place among their



people and on their lands and territories, in accordance with their own priorities and well-being.

In ensuring Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determined development, which constitutes a precondition towards the implementation of free, prior and informed consent, FAO recognizes that communication systems play a key role, particularly those put in practice by indigenous peoples. Indigenous Peoples' organizations in several regions of the world have used their creativity to implement communication systems and strategies that fit their own needs for development. These are fundamental tools to share knowledge and improve Indigenous Peoples' participation in decision-making, as well as to support initiatives and practices that enable the sustainable management of their territories and equitable access to information, knowledge and natural resources.

FAO, through initiatives like Communication for Sustainable Development Initiative (CSDI) world-wide, has supported Indigenous peoples' capacity to manage communication processes. These efforts have assisted in promoting their active participation in public decision-making, as well as including indigenous issues in the policy agenda at national, regional and international levels. Furthermore, the use of participatory communication strategies and community media allows indigenous communities to address agricultural and environmental challenges and promote climate change adapted livelihoods. In addition, communication efforts with local community media will help in ensuring isolated indigenous communities' access to their basic rights and new opportunities provided by international agreements, such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security.

In FAO's view, Indigenous media and communication systems fulfill three crucial functions in fostering self-determined development:

- Access to information: Indigenous media facilitate access to information for the most vulnerable and remote groups and make sure they are aware of policies and programs that affect them.



- **Participation:** Indigenous media play a fundamental role in Indigenous Peoples' right to free, prior and informed consent, not just in terms of disseminating information, but as catalysts of a participatory process in which Indigenous Peoples can express their own point of view and influence decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods. Indigenous media are also important in enhancing Indigenous Peoples' mobilization and participation in venues where they can define and defend their own vision of development.
- **Knowledge exchange and capacity enhancement:** Indigenous media play an important role in conserving Indigenous Peoples' identity and cultural heritage, as well as in the recovery and documentation of local knowledge and its interaction with technical and scientific knowledge. This is crucial not only for the conservation of a part of the world's culture and heritage that otherwise will be progressively lost, but also it establishes linkages with scientific innovations thus increasing the value of this knowledge.

FAO considers indigenous and tribal peoples, with their wealth of ancestral knowledge, key strategic partners in the fight against hunger. Their voices must be heard in order to find together a new balance between human needs and the needs of the planet, new mechanisms able to guarantee environmental and social justice, and new models of food production, distribution and consumption to relieve the pressure on natural resources and ensure to future generations the resources they will need to feed themselves. To this end the right to communicate should be considered as one of the basic conditions to ensure equitable and sustainable self determined development for Indigenous Peoples.

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