



# PARTICIPATION FOR EMPOWERMENT:

*How are indigenous peoples faring in the SDGs?*



Indigenous peoples from Asia at the 2019 High-level Political Forum on sustainable development



**Published by:**

Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)

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“Sustainability is about maintaining the equilibrium of nature and avoiding over exploitation of natural resources. Sustainable development is about our self-determined development and development with identity.”

**Mamta Kujur, India**

## PARTICIPATION FOR EMPOWERMENT

AIPP has a vision to ensure that Indigenous peoples in Asia are fully exercising their rights, maintaining their distinct cultures and identities, living with dignity, and enhancing their sustainable management systems on lands, territories and resources (for their own future and development) in an environment of peace, justice and equality.

AIPP and its member-organizations and networks have been engaged in the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Four years into the implementation of the SDGs, there is seen a widening inequalities in wealth, power and resources between the rich and the poor and on ethnic lines and between countries. For indigenous peoples, some of the agenda, such as clean energy projects, pose serious risk because often these projects are implemented on the lands and territories of indigenous peoples. It is, therefore, very important that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda takes place in the spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This means that indigenous peoples’ self-determined development is respected and promoted.

Land for indigenous peoples is the only basis for the continuity of their identity and for their holistic development. Hence, this aspect needs to be radically considered and respected to ensure that indigenous peoples are not left behind in the vision 2030 Agenda.

In this context and in line with the theme of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), AIPP gathered perspectives of the indigenous peoples in Asia on the 2019 HLPF theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.”

The following represents the outcome of the responses from indigenous organizations and leaders in Asia: Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Philippines and Malaysia.

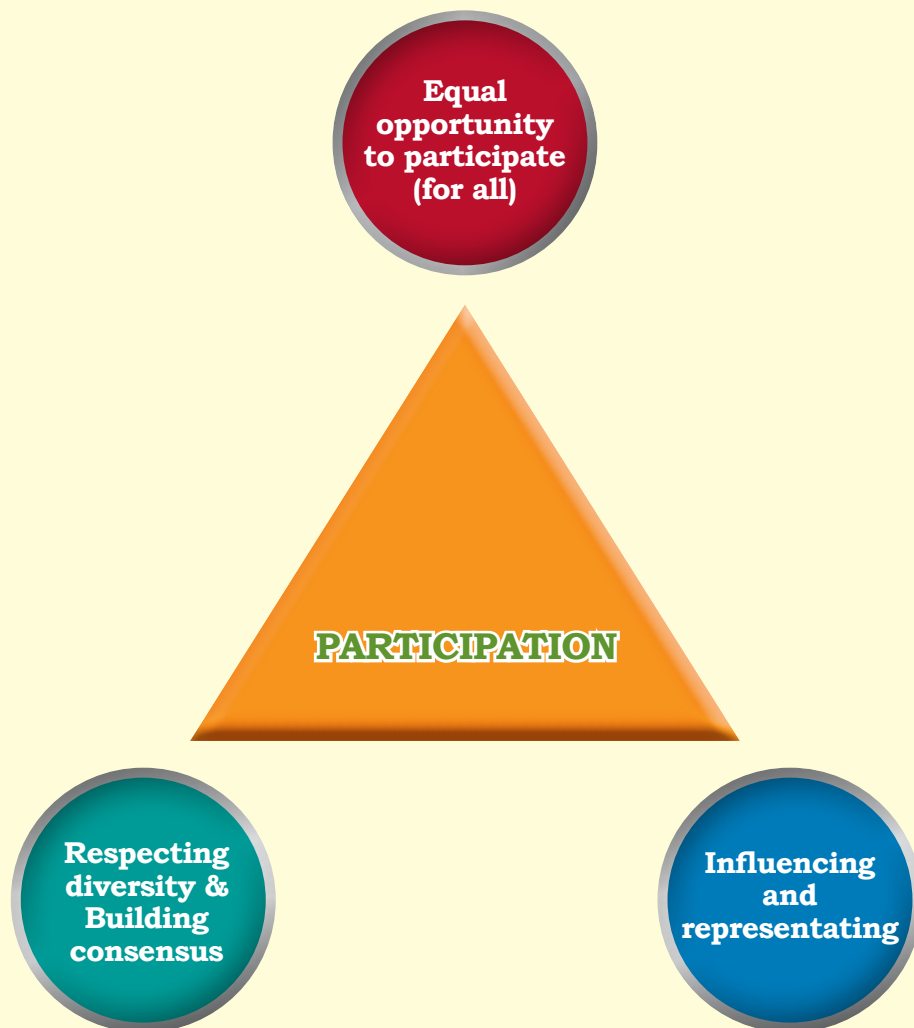
# THE PARTICIPATION TRIANGLE

“Participation is both social and political, involving diverse individuals and collective actors. It involves engagement in political and social processes characterized by integration, inclusion and diversity.

Participation is where diverse actors, including communities, women, youth and elders, etc., freely share their views and build consensus.

Participation is where those furthest behind influence and have representation in the decision-making processes.”

*Gam A. Shimray, AIPP*





Photos Credit: **Gam Shimray**

Participation can mean different things to different people, communities or actors, but it comes with specific rights and obligations. The above illustration is an outcome of a survey conducted among indigenous communities and leaders of their perception of participation for empowerment. It reflects the collective general perception of different organizations and communities in Asia where the survey was carried out. The perceptions may be explained as follows:

**a) Equal opportunity to participate for all**

- Equal opportunity means equality of opportunity to participate without discrimination and creating an enabling environment for those furthest behind.
- For all means being inclusive of individuals and collective actors e.g. indigenous communities, local communities, minorities, women, youth, etc.

**b) Respecting diversity**

- Respecting diverse views and perspectives of diverse actors.
- Removing barriers and building trust between diverse actors.
- Building consensus and cooperation or partnership among diverse actors.

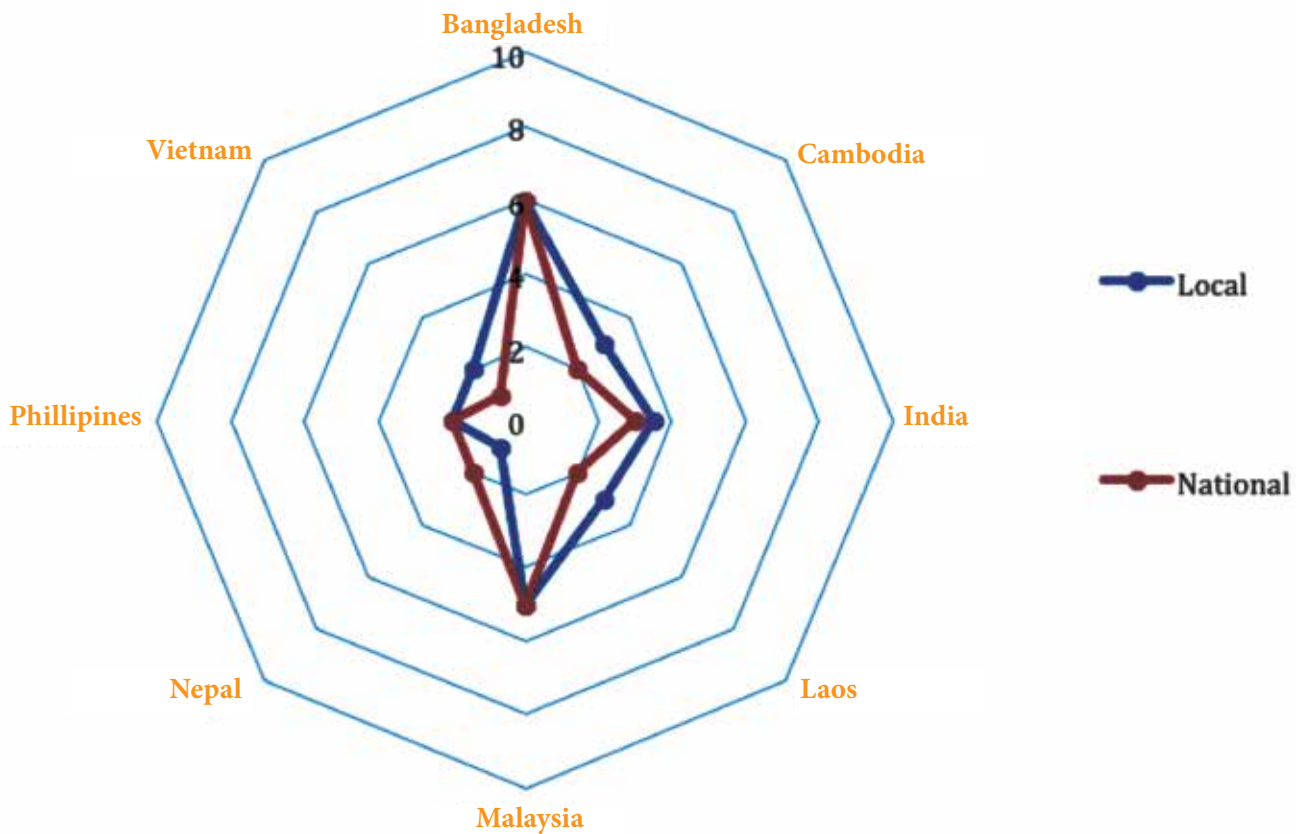
**c) Influencing**

- Participation is not limited to taking part in something, but in influencing public opinion formation and in decision-making processes.

**d) Representation in SDGs processes**

- Those furthest behind influence and have representation in the decision-making processes.

# EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION



There is a high level of discrimination in accessing equal opportunities for indigenous communities in all the countries as the survey responses indicated. Among the 10 countries surveyed, it is only Bangladesh and Malaysia that fared better in terms of accessing opportunities at the local and country-level because some of their government departments are open to consultations. However, there is no meaningful participation and actual influencing of the policies and programmes on SDGs yet in both countries.

Indigenous peoples often occupy bottom position in Human Development indicators. Development aggression and economic growth-oriented policies hinges on the land of indigenous peoples. Also, there is an increasing trend of militarisation of the territories of indigenous peoples. In recent times, under different government regimes, there has been increasing threat to the rights of indigenous peoples on their lands, territories and resources and it is very important to take urgent measures to promote and protect those rights. Those rights are extremely critical to achieve the SDGs in line with the pledge of States to ensure “no one will be left behind” and to endeavor to “reach the furthest behind first”.



Photos Credit: **IPF**

In Bangladesh, even reserved seats for indigenous peoples are often occupied by the dominant groups. Land grabbing, eviction and ethnic conflicts are frequently taking place in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). All these have caused tremendous sufferings in the lives of indigenous Jumma people.

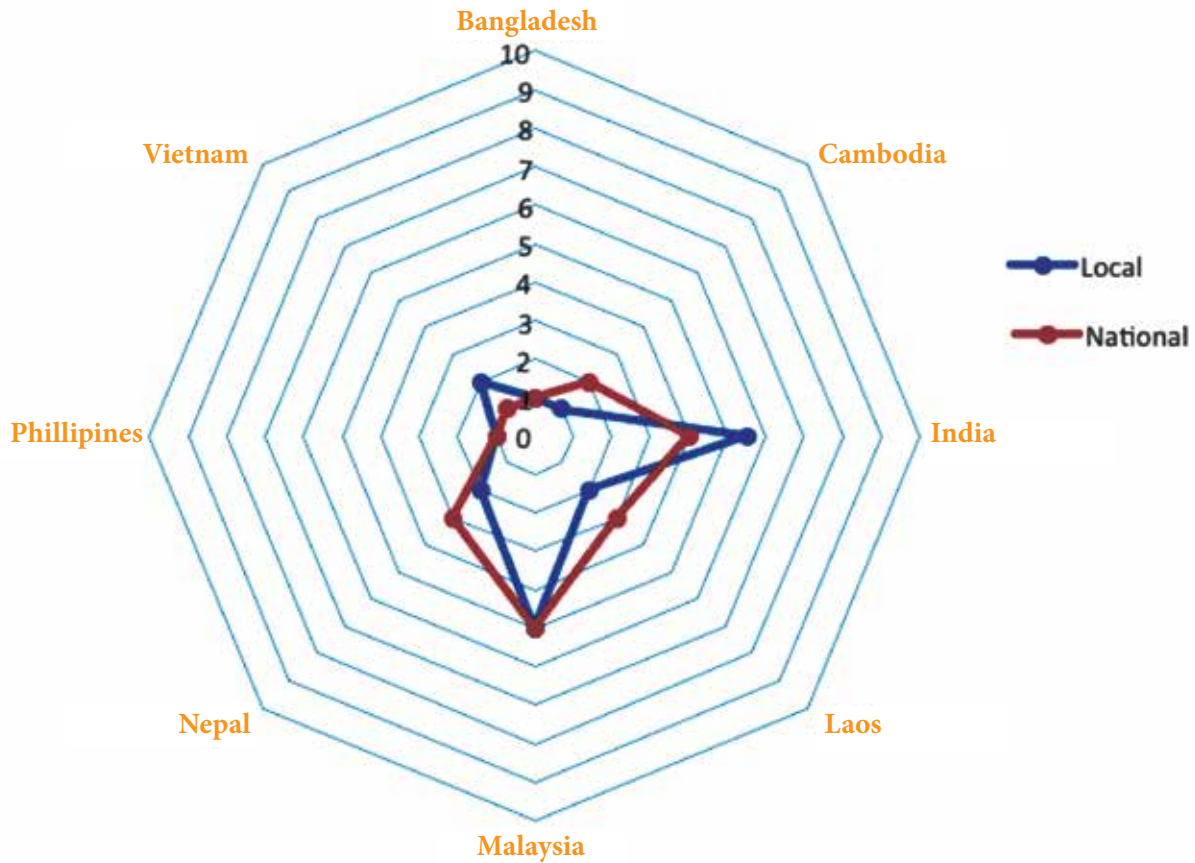
In Vietnam, there are only few indigenous peoples representation at the decision-making levels. The constitution of Nepal 2015 has 11 articles against indigenous peoples, 23 discriminatory articles and 49 articles are exclusionary provision for indigenous peoples<sup>1</sup>. In India there are many supportive acts, policies and schemes for indigenous peoples but discrimination and non-implementation of those provisions is the major issue. Laos' constitution promotes equal opportunities and non-discrimination, but in reality a lot of indigenous peoples lack access to education, quality health service and access to justice.

By and large, implementation of SDGs process has not been inclusive and has ignored the indigenous peoples' aspirations for their development. Nevertheless, indigenous organisations in some countries have started to influence the inclusion of their development agenda at the local and country level. The pledge of the agenda to "*leave no one behind*" therefore, must reflect strongly the principles of equality, inclusiveness and non discrimination and also respect the self-determined development of indigenous peoples.

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous Peoples' Network for SDGs (2017). Report of Nepal's Indigenous Peoples for Voluntary National Review of Nepal: Under the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

# INCLUSIVENESS FOR THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



For an indigenous person, inclusion would mean to fully participate and be represented in all process of development (social, economic, cultural and political, etc.) and state mechanism on the basis of identity and proportional representation. Indigenous peoples' aspirations must be included in all the processes of development and it must be reflected throughout the cycle. Particular focus should be on indigenous women and their aspirations should be included. This implies that enabling environment is created for indigenous women and their concerns are prioritized and equal opportunities are given.

From the community's perspective, full implementation of the collective rights of indigenous peoples must be understood and accounted in the development efforts. Their right to self-determination, autonomy, and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), etc. that are stipulated in UNDRIP must be recognized and implemented.

For indigenous peoples, inclusiveness, among others, means the exercise of direct democracy in decision-making processes as an expression of the right to self-determination. Direct democracy is a traditional practice of indigenous peoples where children, adult women and men, and elders are gathered together to deliberate and achieve consensus on the community's state of affairs and well-being.

Implementation of SDGs process has not been inclusive and has ignored the indigenous peoples' aspirations in development interventions. Although indigenous peoples' organizations have started to engage in the process to influence the implementation of the SDGs processes, it is still negligible and ineffective.

In Vietnam, ethnic minorities are allowed to decide their community affair but at the national level, the government directs all development processes.

In Nepal, there is 28.49% representation of indigenous peoples in central-level government. But they do not speak on behalf of indigenous peoples because they represent their political parties that are not sensitive to indigenous peoples' issues. In this context, indigenous peoples of Nepal are demanding direct representation from their traditional organizations. There are 31.64% (Municipality-38.7 and Rural Municipality 24.57) indigenous representatives in the local government. However they represent the view of the mainstream political parties and most of them are not from marginalized, highly marginalized or threatened indigenous groups. But there is still a window of opportunity to influence decisions through efficient advocacy.

In India, the indigenous peoples are not very much aware of the SDGs processes happening at the country level. NITI Ayog, a government institution formulates and implements the programmes relating to SDGs as per the agreed national priorities. But no mass awareness on SDGs and consultations on the processes are carried out to involve people from the ground. At the local level, the indigenous peoples through workshops and seminars try to understand SDGs and what it could mean for indigenous peoples.

In Cambodia, SDGs implementation has not been very benefitting for indigenous peoples, however, dialogues and advocacy efforts are going on to include IPs in the SGD processes. At the local level, people do not know about SDGs except for some organisations located in the capital city.

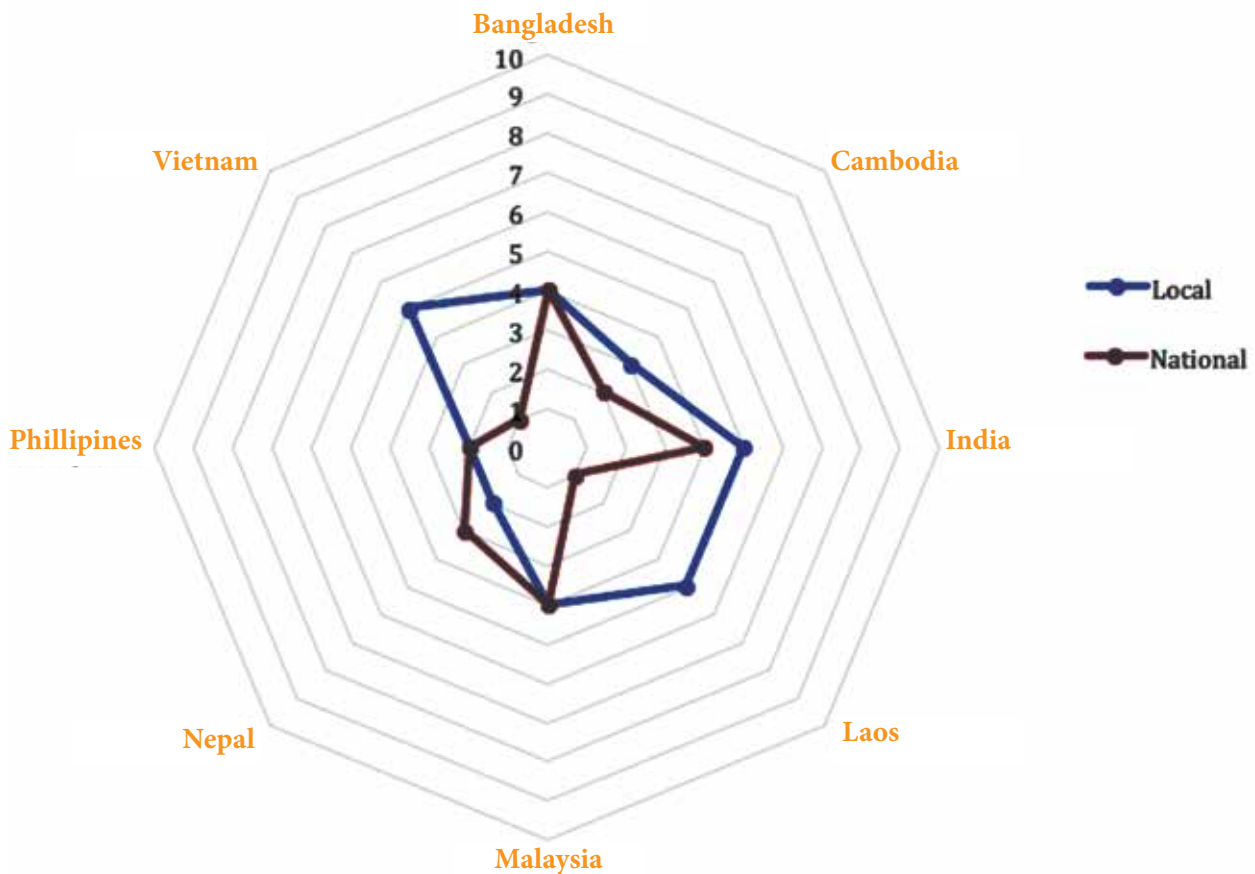
In the Philippines, laws are fundamentally designed to ensure land monopoly of local elites and foreign corporations. The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) has been manipulated and used against indigenous peoples themselves favoring businesses through misused of the right to FPIC. Further, the state, with the use of indigenous paramilitaries is fomenting divide-and-rule game among indigenous communities. The president has openly warned against anyone who would come in the way of his economic policy and programme that is rigorously trying to attract investors in ancestral domains of indigenous peoples, despite avowed goals of achieving SDGs targets.



## PARTICIPATION AT LOCAL AND COUNTRY-LEVEL

“Everyone has the right to know what SDGs are and have the right to choose the appropriate form of sustainable livelihood practices.

Equality is about the application of same standard of laws and policies to everyone, regardless of whether one is from the minority or majority communities.khampanh keovilaysak”



The above graph reflects that indigenous peoples have not been able to participate in any substantive sense in the SDGs processes, and there are hardly any mechanisms put in place for their participation. Information on the implementation of SDGs are hardly accessible at the local level and not localised in the context of indigenous peoples. The collective rights centred on their lands, territories and resources and their indigenous institutions are often not recognised which creates barriers in their participation. Many are still oblivious of the SDGs Agenda and processes, although some have been able to participate in making decision in their village affair.

# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

“ Sustainability means enhancing the positive aspects of Indigenous Knowledge, Skills and Practices (IKSP) systems and shedding off the negative ones. IKSP systems that have been honed throughout centuries have acquired scientific recognition in the economic, socio-cultural and physical environment spheres. The global capitalist system has been unsustainable and worked against the holistic worldview of indigenous peoples. ”

*Dulphing Ogan & Yang Tiangco, Phillipines*

Countries	Issues/ Challenges	Opportunities
<b>LAOS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The information and understanding on SDGs is limited to some institutions of the government.</li> <li>• Implementation of SDGs is centralized and hence locals have no say in the processes.</li> <li>• The constitution of Laos upholds equal opportunities and non-discrimination for all but these principles is yet to be achieved on the ground, especially for indigenous peoples.</li> <li>• There are conflicting development policies which do not support and respect the indigenous ways of living.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UN agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and IFAD, etc. are supporting the implementation of SDGs in Laos. Indigenous peoples can work with these organisations to ensure inclusiveness in SDGs implementation</li> <li>• Few CSOs working at the community-level support and promote inclusiveness</li> </ul>
<b>Cambodia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The implementation of SDGs is centralized and not integrated into the plan of the sub-national level and hence awareness about SDGs and implementation is lacking at the local level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous Peoples could advocate and lobby for the integration of SDGs in the National Development Plan.</li> <li>• IPs could network closely with international, national and indigenous peoples NGOs to build pressure on the government to include indigenous peoples' aspirations in the SDGs.</li> </ul>

Countries	Issues/ Challenges	Opportunities
<b>India</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In India, the principle of inclusiveness is present in the constitution and policies but the reflection on the ground is just the opposite.</li> <li>• Development is often limited to the idea of economic and infrastructure development and often ignores the indigenous peoples' ways of living.</li> <li>• The development and recognition of indigenous peoples' aspirations are often limited to rhetoric.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous peoples can come together and demand for the inclusion in the SDGs implementation process.</li> <li>• At the national and state level, indigenous peoples can influence in the process of development of roadmaps for SDGs implementation.</li> </ul>
<b>Nepal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous peoples are very few in the position of power in politics, and hence not able to influence the implementation of SDGs.</li> <li>• Major Political parties are not very supportive of indigenous peoples' aspirations. The new constitution failed to include the fundamental rights of indigenous communities.</li> <li>• There are a number of laws and policies which undermines the provision of ILO 169 and UNDRIP.</li> <li>• The rights of indigenous peoples are often undermined by the dominant caste group and even private corporations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since Nepal is party to a number of international human rights instruments including ILO 169, UNDRIP and other conventions, indigenous peoples can use this to advocate for their rights in line with SDGs.</li> <li>• There are significant number of indigenous peoples at the policy making levels and hence can use this as an opportunity to influence inclusion and participation of indigenous peoples in process and outcome.</li> </ul>
<b>Vietnam</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about SDGs and implementation is not disseminated very well at the local level.</li> <li>• The development for ethnic minorities follows the top down approach and hence they have no say in their own development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vietnam launched SDGs implementation program and ethnic minorities can influence the process to include their development plans.</li> <li>• The policy on the development of ethnic minorities are being revised.</li> </ul>

Countries	Issues/ Challenges	Opportunities
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Top-down’ approach of development or imposed development is one of the biggest challenges for inclusive development.</li> <li>• Unavailability of data on indigenous peoples.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is separate ministry for CHT Affairs for CHT people and Special Affairs Division under the Prime Minister’s Office for dealing the matters of plain land indigenous peoples. These institutional establishments could be an opportunity for Bangladesh to ensure inclusiveness, which could act as a focal ministry to coordinate the works of SDGs implementation.</li> <li>• Bangladesh government promises to ensure equal and inclusive development for disadvantaged people of the country in its 7<sup>th</sup> Five-year Plan. Therefore, its a good opportunity to approach government to implement its commitment.</li> </ul>
<b>Malaysia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of written policy in place to make the process or practice mandatory.</li> <li>• The development policy tends to give priority to “development and business” over indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination, rights to customary lands and resources, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous peoples’ movements are actively challenging the laws and development policies that are discriminatory and are demanding to include expressly written policy at the local, state and national levels towards SDGs for all.</li> </ul>
<b>Philippines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of land laws that continue colonial and post-colonial monopolies, of educational systems that assimilate rather than “include” and respects self-determination.</li> <li>• Migration policies that minoritize indigenous populations, and other policies, laws and programs that exclude, dominate, oppress and exploit indigenous peoples.</li> <li>• Forceful exclusion of indigenous peoples through militarization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong indigenous peoples movement at the local and national level are willing to fully participate in the process of implementation of SDGs but this effort has to be based on genuine emancipation from domination, exploitation and oppression.</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen the participation of indigenous peoples at the local and country-levels, it is important that governments take special measures to ensure that indigenous peoples and others at the margin of the society are not left behind. In addition to the issues of inclusion, non-discrimination and equal opportunities, the bottom line for the success of the vision 2030 Agenda would greatly depend on the successful localization of the SDGs vision, programmes and implementation strategies itself.

Therefore, localization must be at the heart of SDGs and indigenous peoples and other minority communities must be kept at the centre of its programming and implementation. Localizing SDGs would imply establishing locally accessible mechanisms and information systems, using local languages and symbols, and integration of SDGs processes and events into local activities and seasonal calendar, etc. This also implies that SDGs targets and indicators must be localized with the participation of indigenous peoples and other communities.

It is necessary that governments, development agencies, UN Agencies and relevant institutions dedicate financial and other resources and work in tandem with indigenous peoples and other communities. In addition, from the perspective of indigenous peoples, it is very important that the three aspects below are accounted for:

- Indigenous peoples must be **protected from adverse impacts** of mainstream development, which may undermine their rights and well-being;
- Indigenous peoples have the right to **fully participate and benefit** from general development efforts;
- Indigenous peoples' collective right to **self-determined development** must be supported.



Photos Credit: **AIPP**

Further, the roles and contribution of indigenous women must be recognized and made visible, and the participation of youth should also be prioritized. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda must be backed by enhanced data disaggregation by sex and ethnicity.

# COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS FOR SDGs VISION 2030

1

## Dai Seng La Network (indigenous women's Network)



**Representatives of Dai Seng La Network.**

Photo credit: **Mr. Moses Htun Salai of CHRO**

Dai is one of the indigenous groups of Kanpetlet town in the Chin State of Myanmar. Seng La means women, so Dai Seng La network means the network of Dai women. The network represents indigenous women of 11 villages and actively works on strengthening livelihoods of indigenous women, particularly on agro-forestry, animal husbandry as well as on the revival of their indigenous practices such as weaving and traditional dances, among others. The women folks of this network have become the drivers in improving and achieving sustainable livelihood in their respective communities using indigenous knowledge as their main application.



Photos Credit: **IPF**

The establishment and operationalization of this indigenous women's network is the result of Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and Chin Human Rights Organization's (CHRO) partnership on REDD+ project supported by Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) since 2016.

## Sustainable shifting cultivation in Asia



*AIPP secretariat and interns helping Ban Hor village head man (Thailand) and his wife in weeding their rotational agriculture field in Chiang Mai, Thailand.*

Photos Credit: **AIPP**

Shifting cultivation (rotational agriculture) is the cultural heritage of indigenous communities and their source of livelihoods, biodiversity enhancement and conservation, and food security for millions of indigenous peoples in Asia. The traditional knowledge, cultural, spiritual and nutritional values attached to these livelihood systems demonstrate that rotational agriculture is not merely a technique of land use but their way of life.

AIPP works with several communities in strengthening their shifting cultivation for sustainability, particularly in Thailand. There are several community champions who have proven time and again that shifting cultivation is a sustainable way of life and is a solution to climate change and not a liability. Several of these communities are building up their networks and diversifying their livelihood practices and increasing their cash income as well.

AIPP, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) undertook case studies on shifting cultivation in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Nepal and Thailand in 2015<sup>2</sup>. The case studies reaffirmed that sustainable shifting cultivation is playing a significant role in providing livelihoods and ensuring food security to indigenous communities, and does not lead to deforestation. The studies also reconfirmed that indigenous peoples' life and culture are intricately linked to shifting cultivation.

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<sup>2</sup> The research is available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4580e.pdf>.

## 3

## Indigenous People's and Seeds Preservation

*Seeds for life*



Photos Credit: **AIPP**

Seed is crucial to the food security of the present and future generations and for climate change adaptation. Indigenous women play a crucial role in preserving indigenous seeds, maintaining food security and ensuring well-being of their community members. Indigenous women facilitate the transfer of knowledge and cultural values associated with seeds and food systems of indigenous peoples to younger generations.

AIPP has been supporting women's and community's initiatives in revitalizing indigenous knowledge and adapting its application for varied purposes, including innovations.

Under the project called "Building the resiliency of indigenous communities on climate change adaptation" supported by Misereor through AIPP, Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NIPT) documented local initiatives on seeds banking in seven indigenous community champions that are part of AIPP's networks<sup>3</sup>.

AIPP member-organizations in India are also facilitating the exchange of indigenous seeds among indigenous communities by organizing exchange visits and forming networks.



Photos Credit: **Christian Erni**

<sup>3</sup> Under this partnership, AIPP produced a documentary "Indigenous Peoples and Seeds" and is accessible at <https://aippnet.org/aipp-documentary-seeds-and-indigenous-peoples/>



4

## Community mapping



*Initiatives for defending and managing indigenous peoples' lands, territories and resources*



Photos Credit: **IMPECT**

Community mapping is a very important tool for indigenous peoples in Asia to manage their resources sustainably as well as to assert their rights to lands, territories and resources. Community mapping has enhanced their resource management, food security and propagation of indigenous knowledge among several communities in Asia.

In Thailand, Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT), one of the AIPP members, has long been supporting community mapping in Thailand. IMPECT has so far supported community mapping in more than 80 villages in Northern Thailand. Indigenous peoples who have benefitted from the mapping initiative include: Akha, Dara-ang, Hmong, Kachin, Lahu, Lisu, Lua, Karen, Mien and Shan groups.



Photos Credit: **IPF**

AIPP member organizations in India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam are also mapping their lands, territories and resources of indigenous peoples.

## 5

## Tagal system in Malaysia

*Tagal river*



Photos Credit:  
**IPF and PACOS**

With the declining fish stocks and species, the indigenous communities in Sabah, Malaysia decided to revive its indigenous governance and management system called the Tagal Hutan. The governance and management system involve the collective ownership and responsibility for the sustainable use of resources.

Partners of Community Organizations in Sabah (PACOS), a member of AIPP, was instrumental in reviving this system starting with inland fisheries among the Kadazandusun communities. Several community champions were mobilized and they revived the system, and the management covers hundreds of kilometers now. The system is so successful that the Sabah Fisheries Department has formally recognized the system under the Sabah Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Enactment 2003. Tagal means prohibition in the Kadazan language, while hutan means forest in Bahasa Malaysia. The system is now extended to conservation and protection of land, forest, water catchment and wildlife.

## About AIPP

The Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) is a regional organization established in 1992 by indigenous peoples' movements as a platform for solidarity and cooperation. AIPP is actively promoting and defending indigenous peoples' rights and human rights; sustainable development and management of resources and environment protection. Through the years, AIPP has developed its expertise on grassroots capacity building, advocacy and networking from local to global levels and strengthening partnerships with indigenous organizations, support NGOs, UN agencies and other institutions. At present, AIPP has 48 members from 14 countries in Asia with 7 indigenous peoples' national alliances/networks and 35 local and sub-national organizations including 16 are ethnic-based organizations, five (5) indigenous women and four (4) are indigenous youth organizations.

## Our Vision

Indigenous peoples in Asia are living with dignity and fully exercising their rights, distinct cultures and identity, and enhancing their sustainable management systems on lands, territories and resources for their own future and development in an environment of peace, justice and equality.

## Our Mission

AIPP strengthen the solidarity, cooperation and capacities of indigenous peoples in Asia to promote and protect their rights, cultures and identities, and their sustainable resource management system for their development and self-determination.

## Our Programmes

Our main areas of work among the different programmes are information dissemination, awareness raising, capacity building, advocacy and networking from local to global. Our programmes are:

- Communication Development
- Environment
- Human Rights Campaign and Policy Advocacy
- Indigenous Women
- Organizational Strengthening and Movement Building
- Regional Capacity Building

*AIPP is accredited as an NGO in special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and as observer organization with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). AIPP is a member of the International Land Coalition (ILC).*

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