



Reaching the Roots: Social Protection for Indigenous Women and Girls

An event sponsored by the Justice Coalition of Religious parallel to the 63rd UN Commission on the Status of Women

15 March 2019

4:30-6:00pm

4 West 43rd Street (Blue Room), New York, NY, USA

Indigenous people around the world are disproportionately represented among those living in poverty and extreme poverty.¹ This has been a result of a complex interaction of multiple factors including colonization, top-down policies and policies, and paternalistic approaches to development.² Globalization and economic liberalization have destroyed indigenous subsistence economies and displaced entire communities from their lands. Indigenous peoples' experience of poverty is also characterized by poor health due to insufficient sanitary facilities, lack of clean drinking water, and limited access to health services and facilities. Education opportunities for indigenous women and men are also limited by a lack of mother tongue resources, geographical barriers to accessing schools, and prohibitive school fees and expenses.³

Even without, the International Labour Organization asserts that it is safe to assume that indigenous peoples comprise a large proportion of the 5.2 billion people with little or no social protection coverage. Even in nations in which governments support social protection floors aimed at the assurance of a minimum standard of living for all, there remain substantial gaps. For example, historic and ongoing cultural discrimination and exploitation of indigenous people and land have rendered significant linguistic, infrastructural, and socially exclusionary barriers to their enjoyment of state-sponsored protections for nutrition; water; health, especially in childhood and maternity; income support; education for children; and safe, dignified employment opportunities.⁴

¹ World Bank, 2011

² [United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2009](#) (Briefing Note No. 2)

³ [United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2009](#) (Briefing Note No. 1)

⁴ ILO, 2017

Poverty experienced by indigenous people is not simply a function of their communities' historical rurality. Today, just under half of indigenous Latin Americans live in urban areas. While indigenous people in urban settings have significantly greater access to basic services, education, healthcare, and formal employment than their rural indigenous counterparts, their access continues to lag significantly behind their *non-indigenous*, urban counterparts. City-dwelling indigenous peoples must also contend with losses of the "social safety nets" and traditional land tenure systems that would be available to them in rural settings.⁵

The ethnic and gender identities of indigenous women and girls intersect to heighten their need for social protections of their physical, educational, and socioeconomic well-being. As child-bearers and primary care-takers in most indigenous households, women and girls are disproportionately burdened by poverty's signature resource and opportunity deficiencies. While gender was not traditionally a prominent aspect of indigenous peoples' lives, it has become an important factor in the wake of increasing inter-cultural contact, the spread of state institutions and developments, and mainstream socialization and urbanization. Through these globalizing phenomena, gender norms characteristic of colonialist and dominant cultures have increasingly infringed on indigenous women's economic and educational opportunities, access to land and other natural resources, and participation in decision-making bodies both within and outside their communities.⁶ Along with the under-representation of indigenous women in decision-making bodies, inadequate collection and disaggregation of data on indigenous women continues to hinder public response to the grossest violations of their human rights.⁷ The policies and programs that emerge from this lack of information frequently fail to address the social protection needs of indigenous women as they do not adequately account for indigenous women's priorities, needs, interests and expectations. and make invisible or misrepresent their rich diversity of perspectives as a single experience.⁸

In this parallel event on the margins of the 63rd UN Commission on the Status of Women, a panel will shine a light on the particular ways that social protection gaps are affecting indigenous women and girls in several distinct corners of the globe, including Ecuador, Vanuatu, Nepal, and Canada. The event will also highlight the ways in which indigenous women and girls are overcoming those gaps in government-sponsored protection. Panelists will follow this call to action with a presentation of recommendations for

⁵ World Bank, 2015

⁶ [United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2009](#) (Briefing Note No. 1)

⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Inclusive Social Development of Indigenous Peoples

⁸ [United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2009](#) (Briefing Note No. 2)

the UN Member States, UN agencies, private sector representatives, and civil society actors who are ready to answer that call.

Panelists will include:

- **Hilda Anderson-Pyrz**, Manager, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls Liaison Unit at Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. in Canada
- **Yasso Kanti Bhattachan**, Vice Chair of the Nepalese National Indigenous Women Forum; Co-Founder & Advisor of National Indigenous Women's Federation; and Regional Council Member of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
- **Maria Nicole Insuasti Torres**, Volunteer at International Presentation Association and Specialist in work with indigenous communities in Cotopaxi, Ecuador
- **Molly Gerke**, Executive Assistant at UNANIMA International and former primary school teacher in West Ambae, Vanuatu