On Tuesday, 28 May, PAHO, the Permanent Missions of Ecuador and of Panama to the United Nations, in collaboration with the MDG Fund co-sponsored a side event during the 12th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII) to share regional lessons learned from MDG projects in Indigenous communities, in order to facilitate participation of Indigenous voices in shaping the way forward for a future, inclusive and sustainable global development agenda.

The panel was moderated by **Dr. Isabel Noguer,** Manager, Gender and Cultural Diversity, PAHO, and included participation by: **Dr Myrna Cunningham**, President, Center for Autonomy and Development of Indigenous Peoples (CADPI); **Mr German Flores,** Coordinator, Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, Ecuador; **Ms Rosalee Coatlicue,** Member, International Federation of Indigenous Women (IFIW); **Mr. John Scott**, Member, Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes, Alaska and Leader, Indigenous health and disaster risk reduction(DRR); **Ms Paloma Duran**, Senior Advisor, MDG Fund.

Dr Noguer began by underscoring that health services must respect traditional knowledge as a key driver of any development objective, evidencing the integral role of Indigenous Peoples in shaping the post 2015 health and development agenda, as well as achievement of the MDGs. She also highlighted that social determinants of health were critical to an inclusive and sustainable human development agenda and underscored PAHO’s commitment to universal health coverage (UHC).

She highlighted two main priorities:

* Access to health services for all, requiring intercultural services to increase access and produce better health outcomes.
* Improvements to health information systems, through the inclusion of evidence-based decisions and by defining health policies. She noted that disaggregated data by ethnicity was essential to improve all information systems throughout the Americas.

Dr Cunningham began by describing the Indigenous concept of health and the advances made in the autonomous Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, where Indigenous Peoples exercise their cultural and collective communal rights. She noted that this was the model for autonomous public health services, underscoring the need for the promotion of culturally relative policies and practices, most specifically in having coordination and complementarity with the Ministry of Health for indigenous and western medicines.

**She called on the WHO to support intercultural public health services and centers globally, using regional advances that will afford the opportunity for western practitioners to make referrals to Indigenous practitioners. She noted that this was of crucial importance in documenting and controlling Indigenous sicknesses**.

She cited the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states, among other things, that Indigenous Peoples have equal rights to fully enjoy the highest levels of physical and mental health; the right to access, without discrimination, all health services; rights to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their plant, animal and mineral remedies.

She reminded that in the LAC region there are at least 17 countries which recognize the rights of ethnic groups, including in their health services that respect traditional medicines and cultural diversity. She called for structural changes in the organization and provision of health services to include:

* The right to practice and develop their traditional medicine;
* Access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services that the State offers
* The adoption of measures to eliminate the equity gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous peoples in order to enjoy quality and equal physical and mental health services

Mr Floresdiscussed theadvances being made in Ecuador to promote and protect Indigenous medicines and practices, which had previously been prohibited by police and medical practitioners. The revival and respect for Indigenous cultural practices in the mainstream community was afforded by an increase in social sector investment, from 4.2% in 2006 to 7.7% in 2012.He noted that such investment had helped to reduce poverty and inequality from 37% in 2006 to 27% in 2012.

The investments fostered the creation of various programs that the Ministry of Economic and Social inclusion developed to improve the quality of life, including for Indigenous Peoples. Examples of programs include sexual and reproductive education of youth to prevent teenage pregnancy; cash transfer systems to ensure children stay in school; expanded care for disabled persons, the elderly and child development programs, as well as programs to prevent drug use.

With regards to the culturally relevant health system improvements, Mr Flores stated that the fundamental element to improving access to public health services for Indigenous Peoples was for Western practitioners to have a greater understanding of Indigenous sicknesses and to be inclusive and nondiscriminatory.

Ms Coatlicuepresented an IFIW multimedia resource on MDG projects, supported by the MDG Fund, from the Indigenous perspective. Of particularly importance was the MDG project on water and sanitation, that was led by Indigenous Peoples living in Panamá. She highlighted best practices and lessons learned, noting that it was critical to include women leaders and to empower women at the community level. She reiterated that the Indigenous voice was essential to the success of any development project within Indigenous territories.

Mr. Scottdescribed how PAHO/WHO, ISDR and the United Nations Permanent Forum are collaborating with Indigenous Peoples throughout the Americas, and globally, to improve DRR strategies and management. He noted that LAC was extremely vulnerable to a wide variety of hazards, which were constraining development efforts, regarded as of particular concern given the middle-income status of most countries in the region.

He noted that traditional Indigenous knowledge, values and culture are important risk reduction tools that must be valued and incorporated into DRR strategies. He stated that Indigenous Peoples have a deep understanding of and respect for the environment, but that outside development practices were adversely affecting their environment, leading to manmade disasters and, at times, rendering traditional knowledge irrelevant. He underscored the need for the Indigenous voice and called for a codified set of protocols for engagement with Indigenous Peoples. He called for more culturally appropriate information sharing on disaster preparedness, which must be available in Indigenous languages in order to adapt traditional knowledge, preparedness and response patterns to minimize the risk of a disaster.

Ms Duranbegan by providing background information on the MDG Fund, which was created in 2007 through an agreement between the Spanish Government and the UN. The Fund, through a partnership with UNESCO, is also supporting efforts to position cultural diversity in the post-2015 agenda as a key factor for sustainable development. Top of Form

Ms Duran discussed the global monitoring and evaluation strategy that was implemented at the program level with baseline indicators, which were developed in a participatory and culturally relevant manner. She highlighted that necessary information was collected to measure progress of these indicators to demonstrate the gap in terms of progress towards the MDGs of Indigenous Peoples. The communication and advocacy strategy, which was also implemented globally, promoted that joint programs incorporate communication and advocacy activities in their actions, using the MDG agenda as a tool for social mobilization and a basis for discussions on development.

Further, MDG-F was worked to guarantee knowledge management of lessons learned in the implementation of joint programs and have also been innovative and strategic in combining and supporting three key agendas, namely: the MDG Declaration, the Paris Declaration and UN reform.

In closing, Ms. Duran shared best practices through MDG-F partnership with IFIW, including examples generated through the various strategies of the Fund.

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