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SUMMARY REPORT ON A THEORETICAL STUDY¹ OF WFP ASSISTANCE TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN LATIN AMERICA

ABSTRACT

In view of the growing interest in the rural development of indigenous peoples, the Office of Evaluation has examined the documents of two projects for indigenous communities (in Mexico and Colombia), and two implemented in indigenous areas (Guatemala and Peru). Drawing on lessons learned from this analysis, the following factors were identified as being decisive for effective WFP assistance to these groups.

WFP must:

- recognize that assistance to indigenous communities draws attention to those sections of the population that are most seriously affected by hunger and poverty;
- adopt a special strategy to help indigenous peoples, gearing its activities to the needs of those peoples. This strategy must be based on:
 - i) a governmental policy aimed at targeting rural development programmes to isolated groups with a strong indigenous identity;
 - ii) planning productive activities, as these are optimum means of applying food for work and enabling WFP to comply with its essential mandate of eradicating hunger and poverty;
 - iii) strengthening the ancestral groupings of indigenous populations and their traditional working methods based on mutual aid, and promoting their full participation in designing and implementing the activities;
 - iv) a plan of activities that recognizes their special relationship with the environment and their traditional technologies (cropping practices, soil and water management practices, and knowledge of plants and genetic resources); and
 - v) setting up national or international entities with responsibility for transferring technologies, in order to guarantee sustainable increases in the production of staple foods.

¹ The study was based on an analysis of the following projects: Mexico 3324—“Assistance to education and rural development in indigenous communities”; Colombia 2740—“Support to socio-economic activities and environmental protection in indigenous communities; Peru 5162—“Ecological rehabilitation of Andean micro-watersheds” (1995-1999); and Guatemala 2587.01—“Soil conservation and agro-forestry activities in depressed areas”.

This paper was prepared by an economist from FAO and an officer of the WFP Office of Evaluation.

NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted for consideration to the Executive Board.

Pursuant to the decisions taken on the methods of work by the Executive Board at its First Regular Session of 1996, the documentation prepared by the Secretariat for the Board has been kept brief and decision-oriented. The meetings of the Executive Board are to be conducted in a business-like manner, with increased dialogue and exchanges between delegations and the Secretariat. Efforts to promote these guiding principles will continue to be pursued by the Secretariat.

The Secretariat therefore invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document, to contact the WFP staff member(s) listed below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting. This procedure is designed to facilitate the Board's consideration of the document in the plenary.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The reduced availability of resources for development in general and food aid in particular raises a number of issues regarding the future focus of food aid for the development of human resources and the corresponding use of that aid. The Office of Evaluation therefore decided to coordinate this thematic review in order to draw on experiences that might be applied to assist WFP in performing its primary mandate, namely, to serve people in extreme poverty and suffering from food insecurity.
2. Latin America has a high concentration of indigenous peoples with the greatest rates of total and relative poverty, food insecurity and marginalization. WFP's development portfolio has been promoting the participation of indigenous groups in one way or another ever since the seventies. This experience has certainly helped WFP identify the kind of strategy that is needed to assist indigenous groups, bearing in mind their specific cultural traditions, aspirations and potential.
3. On the basis of the above, it was decided to conduct a study of two projects designed for indigenous communities (Mexico and Colombia), and two implemented in indigenous zones (Guatemala and Peru). This examination is based on an analysis of the following documentation: background information on the problems of indigenous peoples in Latin America, project summaries, plans of operation, progress reports from country offices, and reports of evaluation and management review missions, with the intention of drawing specific lessons and incorporating them into the section on "Lessons learned and recommendations".

THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF LATIN AMERICA

4. The present indigenous population of Latin America and the Caribbean is estimated at between 20 and 40 million, unevenly distributed, representing about 10 percent of the total population in the whole region. The exact number of indigenous people in Latin America is unknown, largely due to a lack of agreement on a definition (Burger, 1987) which differs from one country to another depending upon the data-gathering techniques used (see the Annex). The three criteria most commonly used are the language spoken, self-identification and geographic concentration. The language therefore defines the indigenous population in Bolivia and Peru, self-identification defines them in Guatemala and geographic concentration defines them in Mexico. Columbia defines indigenous people as those who recognize that they belong to a specific ethnic group with a cultural tradition pre-dating the Spanish conquest, and live in the territory which their community occupies.
5. Regardless of the number, there are two important demographic factors that characterize the indigenous peoples of Latin America: the geographic concentration and the relative decline in their numbers. At least 80 percent of the indigenous people in the region live in five countries: Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru, concentrated in the rural areas (Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE), 1992). An increasingly smaller percentage of the population today identifies with the indigenous cultures (CELADE, 1992). Latin America can be divided into three groups of countries, depending upon the concentration of the Amerindian peoples:



- a) the **Andean region** (Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, and parts of Colombia and Chile) and **Mesoamerica**, where the percentage of the indigenous population is equal to or greater than that of the non-indigenous population.
 - b) **Central America, Amazonia and the mainland Caribbean**, where the indigenous people are national minorities and represent a clearly differentiated and easily identifiable group, concentrated in large areas of regions or countries.
 - c) **Northern Mexico, the Southern Cone and the Caribbean Islands**, where the Amerindian populations are small and isolated.
6. The indigenous groups in Latin America have suffered from a gradual process of “ruralization”, which has made them lose many of the traditions and features of their Amerindian origin. For historical and social reasons, in the past this process led to the appropriation of indigenous lands, the dismemberment of villages and communities, the loss of traditional know-how on the environment and cropping practices, and the destruction of their cultural identity. It also created different group typologies, according to the means of subsistence and the type of contacts with the rest of national society:
- a) **isolated tribal groups:** completely cut off or having accidental contact with other nationals. These groups are independent as far as their subsistence is concerned;
 - b) **semi-isolated indigenous groups:** with occasional contacts and limited economic relations with national society, these indigenous communities subsist by adopting traditional processes, thus retaining a high degree of cultural autonomy;
 - c) **groups with permanent contacts:** with some degree of permanent regional communication with different representatives of national society; and
 - d) **integrated communities:** frequently represent a labour force or specialized producers of certain consumer goods, which makes them difficult to differentiate from rural peasants. However, they are generally not fully assimilated, because they are identified with and identify with indigenous peoples rather than nationals.
7. As a rule, what underlies the current controversy on the indigenous or peasant condition is the basic problem of land ownership and possession. The most important issue facing indigenous peoples in Latin America is their customary rights over the land and the territory—a matter of vital importance to their cultural identity. This is particularly true in the case of the highlands of Mexico, Central America and the Andes, where most of the indigenous population are concentrated (IFAD, 1994).
8. A number of surveys have documented the existence of conditions of dire poverty among indigenous groups in the region, particularly in countries where over half of the population are Amerindians. In Bolivia, 65 percent of the indigenous population live in poverty; in Guatemala 87 percent of indigenous households live below the poverty threshold, and 61 percent below the extreme poverty threshold. In Mexico, 80 percent of the indigenous population are poor; in Peru 79 percent of the population is extremely poor.
9. Within the indigenous population as a whole, women suffer the greatest marginalization. High rates of illiteracy and low school attendance are compounded by precarious working conditions. At the present time, demands are being made for the recognition of the right of women to possess land, and for women to be represented in the legislative chambers and every traditional, communal, municipal, central and federal government body.
10. Significant differences between indigenous and non-indigenous groups have been documented in economic and social indicators. The serious economic deterioration of the



former is seen in terms of shortcomings in institutions and basic services, low levels of school attendance and low incomes. They also have high fertility and infant mortality rates, together with a low level of women's participation in the labour force and a high level of illiteracy and child labour.

11. The degradation of the environment in which indigenous people live (since they harvest forest resources without any basic eco-system regeneration programmes), soil erosion, the lack of an adequate technology suited to environmental conditions, demographic growth and increased pressure on resources, are just a few of the factors which have converted many of them into late 20th century nomads.

WFP PROJECTS FOR THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Mexico

12. The National Institute for Indigenous Populations (Instituto Nacional Indigenista—INI) estimated the Mexican indigenous population at 10 million in 1995. The cultural diversity of Mexico is evidenced by the use of at least 59 different languages, with a large number of strongly contrasting dialectal variations. While more than one million people aged five and above speak *Náhuatl*, approximately 250,000 speak five different languages (*Maya*, *Zapoteco*, *Mixteco*, *Otomí* and *Tzeltal*).
13. According to the 11th General Population and Housing Census, the proportion of economically active population (EAP) among indigenous people is 41 percent. Of these, 69 percent are employed in the primary sector, 13 percent in the secondary sector, 15 percent in the tertiary sector and the others in unspecified activities. Productive activities are concentrated in the primary sector, essentially for household consumption. The lack of infrastructure for the collection, storage and marketing of their products forces indigenous people to sell their scarce surpluses to local brokers, placing them at a considerable disadvantage on the market.
14. Under the National Development Plan for 1995-2000, the Government has undertaken to encourage the following for the indigenous communities: a) measures to promote equitable and balanced development between the different cultural components, social sectors and geographic regions; b) radical institutional reform; and c) the introduction of a new legal order which will lead to recognition of and respect for the rights of indigenous peoples.
15. INI was established in 1948 as a public decentralized federal government entity, with the purpose of designing and directing government policy for indigenous peoples. In its early years it concentrated on surveys, consultancy, information dissemination and training, in order to improve the living conditions of indigenous groups. However, with the passing of time, INI has taken on various operational functions because of the lack of action by the federal and central government institutions in regions with a high concentration of indigenous people.
16. In 1986 INI set up a Community Fund for Productive Projects for Indigenous Communities. Institutional measures were based upon participatory working methods such as community analysis and the collective definition of projects, because this experience had shown that indigenous organizations were perfectly capable of administering the resources earmarked for their development.



17. **Project Mexico 3324—“Assistance to education and rural development in indigenous communities”** - ended in August 1997. Its immediate objectives were: to help 90 percent of the indigenous children living in the INI school hostels to complete their basic education, improve their performance at school and increase their food intake. As a result of WFP aid, monetized funds amounting to the equivalent of 13.5 million dollars were raised, to be used as follows: a) 15 percent for educational projects; b) 40 percent for productive projects in school hostels, to produce basic foodstuffs and to market them in the indigenous communities; c) 20 percent to improve the basic installations and facilities in 8,000 rural homes; and d) 25 percent to fund specific projects for women.
18. In designing the project, no account was taken of the needs and selection of the target population, or of any alternative forms of assistance; INI's existing multi-disciplinary strategy continued to be applied. WFP's interventions focused on the school hostels and productive projects to cater for indigenous communities, in accordance with the decentralized structure of INI. Exploiting INI's working strategy proved to be positive, based as it is on a participatory approach. However, WFP ought to have revised the procedures, modalities and forms of participation in accordance with its specific mandate.
19. A total of 63,400 children benefited in the 1,233 INI school hostels, together with the community members engaged in productive projects in the marginal zones of 25 states. With regard to the school hostels, the project's activities were well focused because they catered for the resident indigenous children. But in the case of the productive projects, efforts were more scattered because of the need to cover many different states.
20. With regard to productive activities, information available in July 1997 showed that about 800 such activities had been implemented in 25 states. The productive activities, for which most of the funds had been earmarked, were targeted at the express wish of the communities to improving the production of commercial crops, livestock activities, and the processing and marketing of the communities' output. However, due to the great diversity of activities in many states, it was difficult to apply homogeneous criteria in those areas that were assumed to be of extreme poverty.
21. Activities to improve the homes of 8,000 indigenous families and educational activities did not raise any major problems because they were easily identifiable. But problems did arise with those activities that attempted to incorporate women into the production process, because there was an evident lack of direction for activities designed specifically for the female productive population, partly due to a lack of proper sensitization and a lack of skills on the part of the authorities and technicians at INI in identifying and formulating this kind of activity.
22. The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system was short on basic indicators for both the educational and production process components, which would otherwise have made it possible to make a quantitative and qualitative assessment of progress made in school hostels and community development.
23. From existing documents, it may be deduced that WFP aid has clearly improved the diet of indigenous children in the hostels and probably helped to double the number of girls enrolling in school and improved their learning capacity. The project complied with the National Programme for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, which gives priority to the direct funding of productive projects in indigenous communities. WFP assistance helped to complement INI's resources. The funds generated were used for a variety of activities which were not always targeted to the right areas and communities. A lack of



accuracy in the M&E system made it difficult to ascertain the economic viability of the productive projects.

24. The documents consulted therefore reveal a lack of consistency in WFP assistance to educational and productive activities, due to the fact that they were implemented separately and were designed to meet the needs of INI rather than according to the idea of a project with its own identity and with its components interrelated. The fact remains that even though the criterion laid down was that indigenous children living in the hostels were supposed to come from the communities which the project was helping through other productive activities, this was not always the case in practice.

Colombia

25. The indigenous population of Colombia is estimated to number 620,000, or less than two percent of the national population. There are 81 ethnic groups scattered throughout 27 of the 33 departments into which the country is divided.
26. According to their mode of subsistence (National Planning Department, 1980) the Colombian indigenous peoples fall into three categories: a) farmers in the Andean zone: farmers whose lands are incorporated into the national economy or which are currently being incorporated into it; b) hunters, fishermen and hunters, and gatherers: indigenous people from the Pacific Coast, Amazonia, the *Cordillera Oriental* and the *Sabanas del Oriente*; and c) pastoralists from Guajira. If account is taken of the groups classified into subgroups b) and c), these integrated communities account for about 70 percent of the national indigenous population.
27. Indigenous communities in the Andean zone and the inter-Andean valleys were pushed out of their ancestral territories and into areas with adverse conditions: far away from urban centres, on high moorlands (the most vulnerable eco-systems), in wild and tropical territories (with low productivity but of great strategic and environmental value) and semi-arid areas which in many cases were degraded by the indigenous people themselves in their efforts to guarantee their subsistence.
28. Present government policy for indigenous peoples is set out in: a) the Colombian Constitution (1991), which was debated and adopted with the participation of publicly elected indigenous village representatives; b) the 1994-1998 National Development Plan, which defined the intentions of the Government to support the indigenous peoples; and c) the Programme for the Support and Ethnic Enhancement of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia, 1995-1998, under which the Government has undertaken real commitments to the indigenous people in terms of supporting their social, economic, educational, cultural, health and social governance systems.
29. In this context the project **Colombia 2740.01—“Support to socio-economic activities and environmental protection in indigenous communities”**, which the Network for Social Solidarity of the President’s Office began implementing in 1995, is designed exclusively for the indigenous communities, in accordance with government policy and the demands and requests of the indigenous people. The objective is to improve the socio-economic status of these communities through productive activities that take account of environmental sustainability in terms of land and water conservation, and environmental protection activities.
30. The target population and the activities to be supported are selected on the basis of socio-economic feasibility studies co-financed by WFP and the Government in the most depressed areas of eight micro-regions (north, centre, south and east of Cauca,



Narino-Putamayo, the south of Tolima, *Sabanas del Caribe* and *Sierra Nevada*), which represent approximately 50 percent of the country's total indigenous population.

31. In selecting the beneficiary communities, account was taken of the dynamics of each community, their basic needs, their economic infrastructure and level of organization. The project beneficiaries were 304 indigenous communities mainly in the Colombian Andes, comprising 30,821 households (totalling 170,295 persons) who benefited directly from food for work (66 percent) and credit (33 percent) activities.
32. The project's credit component, which has nation-wide coverage, has enabled the indigenous communities to acquire credit for the very first time through the National Indigenous Credit Account, which was established with WFP and government contributions. In the past, indigenous communities had been marginalized in this respect because their properties were collective and could not legally be mortgaged, and the communities could not provide the collateral they needed to obtain loans. The activities funded through loans are the following, in order of importance: livestock production, marketing, medium-term agricultural production, poultry raising, mining and short-term production.
33. The project's main feature is the beneficiaries' high level of participation at a decentralized level. The beneficiaries took part in the planning and management of project activities through fora set up specially for that purpose. The indigenous authorities took part in project formulation at the national, regional and local levels, coordinating on an ongoing basis with the *Cabildos Indígenas*,¹ which are the grass-roots indigenous authorities recognized by national legislation. The project's technical support teams comprised trained indigenous members, whose profile was adjusted to meet the indigenous producers' support requirements in terms of the productive activities recommended in the pre-investment surveys and studies.
34. In some of the productive activities, women's participation was outstanding. They have benefited less from the credit and organizational activities because the project has been tailored to tie in with community customs and in terms of the traditional role of women, who do not normally hold positions of leadership in the *cabildos*. As concerns credit schemes, the promissory notes were signed by the men, with the women being jointly liable.
35. Bearing in mind the poverty levels in the communities, the main function of food aid is to transfer income, and it is of great strategic value in channelling government and private investment as counterpart inputs for community labour. Moreover, the food-for-work approach for conservation work (water, soil, forests) has helped to foster investment in indigenous areas because of its ability to attract the communities, and its compliance with current legislation.
36. Profitable productive activities supported by loans are an excellent way of developing indigenous communities. However, because of the large number of activities, it is difficult to calculate their repercussions on incomes, production and the economic conditions within the communities. In short, it is difficult to know to what extent and in what way the communities have benefited from this new and innovative opportunity to acquire credit.

¹ Indigenous groups live in communal reserves where they have an indigenous territorial organization responsible for administering the lands and distributing small parcels of land between the inhabitants.



WFP PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED IN INDIGENOUS AREAS

Guatemala

37. Depending on the sources consulted, the indigenous population in Guatemala is estimated at between 2.5 and 5.3 million, namely between 42 percent and 66 percent of the total population (see the Annex). Guatemala is one of the countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region with the highest concentration of indigenous people, with an average annual demographic growth rate in excess of 2.8 percent.
38. Poverty in Guatemala has tended to increase constantly, from 65 percent in 1980 to 80 percent in 1989. Over the same period, extreme poverty rose from 33 percent to 59 percent (INE–United Nations Fund for Population Activities), particularly in the departments with the largest percentages of indigenous people: Quiché, Huehuetenango, Alta Vera Paz, Baja Vera Paz, San Marcos, Sololá, Totonicapán and Jalapa. In 1990, about 80 percent of the indigenous people lived in rural areas, with 72 percent of the households below the poverty threshold and 45 percent below the extreme poverty threshold. Of the total number of illiterates (40.3 percent in 1989), 70 percent were indigenous, which was very high compared with 30 percent of illiteracy among the “Ladinos” (Spanish-speaking indigenous groups).
39. The departments in the western highlands have a high density of indigenous people, with very uneven land distribution. Fewer than one percent own farms over 2,500 hectares, but 2.2 percent of the landowners possess 65 percent of the total land. Seventy-three percent of all farms are under 3.5 hectares, and account for 10.5 percent of the agricultural land (1979 Census). Basic cereals are grown for subsistence on many smallholdings under poor soil conditions. The critical consequence of this process is heightened poverty and particularly food insecurity in the highland areas which are inhabited by indigenous people.
40. The social situation of indigenous peoples in the national development and peacemaking process is set out in the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of the Indigenous People (AIDPI) which, for the first time, provides the people of Guatemala with an instrument under which their multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual character is recognized. The Agreement is based on recognition and respect for the identity and political, economic, social and cultural rights of the *Maya*, *Garífuna* and *Xinca* peoples.
41. **Project Guatemala 2587.01—“Soil conservation and agro-forestry activities in depressed areas”** (1990-1995) - was designed in terms of the policies laid down by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA) to halt the deterioration of natural resources and raise the productivity of the agricultural lands in the eastern and western regions.
42. The immediate objectives of the project were to reduce soil erosion in order to improve water retention in the project areas, and diversify and increase small farmers’ overall production through water and soil conservation measures.
43. The project was in line with current MAGA policies, but was not specifically designed for the indigenous communities. It was geared to production in indigenous areas. As originally designed, it had a variety of objectives and included a number of different activities which during project implementation were focused on production, with economic spin-offs, and was limited to a smaller number of specific areas.



44. The rationale of the project was sound thanks to the methodology used to select beneficiary communities, and the fact that it concentrated on the extremely poor food-insecure degraded areas. The concentrated action approach applied in the context of micro-watershed rehabilitation has made it possible to help the most isolated communities and those most affected by poverty, the majority of whom are indigenous.
45. The beneficiaries are 25,000 small farmers in rural depressed areas in 10 departments (six in the east: Zacapa, Chiquimula, El Progreso, Jutiapa, Jalapa and Santa Rosa and four in the west: Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, San Marcos and Sololá). The project catered for 253 communities and benefited 15,952 households living at subsistence level. Most of these were of *Maya*, *Quiché*, *Mam* and *Pocomam* origin, speaking one of the country's 23 native languages.
46. The project activities were planned taking into account the needs of the beneficiaries, and four activity modules were established: organization and training, technology transfer, encouraging communal initiatives, and soil conservation practices.
47. Support to soil conservation measures, backed by the installation of irrigation systems, has enabled small farmers to double and even treble their yields and diversify production, by introducing such products as vegetables which has allowed them to join the market economy. But the obstacle that still remains to be removed is market access, which is hampered by a shortage of government funding and other financial resources to install mini-irrigation schemes which will help to increase and further diversify the production of staple food.
48. Training was imparted on the technical aspects of production, soil and water conservation, and agro-forestry activities, to 4,300 small farmers, of whom 30 percent were indigenous women farmers. The project has also had a positive impact on the participation of indigenous women in the production and decision-making process, in planning and implementing the project activities, and in small production enterprises.
49. Food aid acts as a development tool for the agriculture sector because it encourages farmers to recognize the need to establish household and community food security by increasing agricultural productivity and diversifying production. It should be noted that the most important incentives provided by the project have been technical assistance and technology transfer, because these open up new practices to the target population.
50. The M&E system was planned from the outset, making it possible to monitor progress with implementation. The existing system was automated, incorporating such indicators as geographic distribution, beneficiary registration, an activity record, and progress made towards achieving the targets. The information does not appear to have been disaggregated by gender, which would have made it easier to monitor the beneficiary population in greater detail.
51. In conclusion, the soil and water management and conservation activities under the project make it possible to attain one of the essential objectives of WFP's mandate: to eradicate hunger and poverty. Soil and water conservation techniques based on micro-watershed concentrated action foster sustainable development, self-sufficiency and do away with food aid, because the marginalized communities stay on their own lands (without needing to emigrate in order to seek supplementary income), and take part in agricultural and community development activities.
52. As this project has shown, sustainability is achieved by motivating the groups created to organize themselves and work together in solidarity. Another contribution to sustainability



is the training of community leaders with the help of technical support to reverse the degradation process through technology transfer and the provision of training in soil and water management, and by raising beneficiaries' awareness of the need for the works to become self-sustaining. It will be necessary to review indigenous techniques and evaluate the possibility of using them in projects of this kind.

Peru

53. The indigenous population of Peru numbers around 9.2 million, which represents more than 40 percent of the total population. Peru is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual country, with 72 indigenous ethnic groups and 14 language families. In the Andean zone there are two main language families, *Quechua* and *Aymará*, and seven ethnic groups, while in Amazonia there are 12 language families and 65 different ethnic groups. The indigenous population of the Andean zone is officially recognized as peasant communities, while the indigenous people in Amazonia are grouped into "native communities".
54. Sixty-nine percent of the indigenous population live in poverty, and 45 percent of the non-indigenous population are poor. According to an official survey carried out in 1991, 45 percent of the people lived in rural mountainous areas, where the largest indigenous population of Peru is concentrated. Out of approximately 1,245,000 households in these areas, two thirds possess less than one hectare of arable land which does not normally enable them to meet minimum nutritional requirements. The men generally emigrate to the Andes valleys in search of paid farm work, leaving many of the households headed by women.
55. The Peruvian Institute for Indigenous Peoples (Instituto Indigenista Peruano) is the government agency responsible for establishing the Peruvian Government's policy regarding indigenous peoples, and for directing its implementation. This Institute has produced a poverty map based on a survey classifying the peasant and native communities in terms of four levels of living standards, using socio-economic indicators: dire poverty, extreme poverty, poverty, and subsistence level.
56. **Project Peru 5162—“Ecological rehabilitation of Andean micro-watersheds”** - (1995-1999) was designed in accordance with the Government's strategy for the agricultural sector, aimed at productive farmer communities living in rural mountainous areas, whose households are affected by a high level of food insecurity.
57. The project objectives are to: a) rehabilitate and enhance the production capacity of the water and soil resources in 65 micro-watersheds in the Andean area; b) set up a network of seed farms for the main Andean crops as a basis for reactivating food production in these areas; c) set up revolving credit funds, to be managed by the farmer communities and NGOs, to harvest and produce Andean foodstuffs; and d) train the farmer communities to apply improved practices for the management of Andean crops and to rehabilitate micro-watersheds. The design is ideally suited to the indigenous communities, even though it was not specifically formulated for them.
58. The target population has been appropriately selected. It focuses on small farmers in the upper Andean Sierra at altitudes ranging from 2,800 to 4,200 metres. The project strategy is based on the concentrated action methodology, according to which the environmentally degraded zones are first selected, and the beneficiary selection criteria are applied subsequently. From the point of view of the indigenous communities, the project is correctly targeted because if the sub-regions covered by it (Cajamarca, Puno, Mosquegua and Tacna) are superimposed upon the geographic poverty map drawn up by the Peruvian



Institute for Indigenous Peoples, the indigenous communities classified as living in dire or extreme poverty are mainly found in those regions.

59. The criteria for selecting beneficiaries have been carefully drafted. They are based on the assumption that small subsistence farmers, whose production units are at a high risk of food insecurity and acute poverty, live in environmentally degraded mountainous areas. Appropriate criteria have been used for each group of beneficiaries, drawing a distinction between the beneficiaries taking part in watershed management and conservation, those setting up seed farms, the beneficiaries of the revolving fund, and those taking part in training activities. A total of 56,600 peasant households living around the micro-watersheds have been the direct beneficiaries.
60. The project activities have been implemented according to a decentralized participatory approach which has made it possible to define clearly the function of the participating committees at the national, regional and local levels. The participation of women in project activities was not taken into account in the project design. The gender approach was introduced later, and an attempt made to sensitize the technicians and managers in gender-related aspects. However, the results of this are not easy to see. Training has focused on participatory planning with a gender focus, but it is not clear which methodology has been used. It is important to know whether the process was bottom-up, namely beginning with the peasant women, in order to continue setting up groups and eventually constitute mixed farmers' organizations or ones headed by women.
61. The M&E systems were initially inadequate despite the fact that they were well designed. Subsequently these systems were improved after interviews with the beneficiaries in order to ascertain the benefits of the project. An annual evaluation system using surveys based on representative samples of the beneficiaries has also been introduced. The results of the latest survey have shown a number of benefits, such as increased production, incomes, improved food intake and a decline in migration.
62. When designing soil and water management and conservation projects (based on the concentrated action methodology) pride of place should be given to activities designed to improve food self-sufficiency and the incorporation into the local markets of the output of the isolated indigenous populations. Emphasis should also be placed on a reappraisal of the indigenous culture by applying techniques used by the *Incas*, such as the use of *andenes* terracing, which have given positive results under the project. In this connection, greater attention must be given to the possible use of native techniques.
63. Beneficiary participation should always be in the form of groups, adopting a gender approach. Women should be encouraged to participate in the management of projects, respecting traditions, because this would help to increase household food security, reduce male out-migration, and generate income.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

64. For historical and social reasons indigenous communities are the poorest sections of the poor population of Latin America. Generally speaking, these groups are highly concentrated on smallholdings (with a degraded production base) and live at subsistence levels with little or no capacity to generate surpluses to complement their incomes.
65. National policy for the indigenous peoples reflects the particular concentration of these groups in each country. In countries where the native peoples account for at least one half



of the total population, there is a long-standing tradition of incorporating ethnic and cultural considerations into national policy formulation. In countries with a lower concentration of indigenous groups, the presence of these groups does not have particular effect on general national policies.

66. The statutory benefits available to indigenous people in the countries of Latin America are rudimentary because national minorities have not had a large part to play in the formulation of national legislation. This is a decisive aspect when defining the role of the indigenous communities and determining the types of development activities geared to them. In Colombia, for example, the indigenous communities have recorded several major achievements, despite being a national minority, mainly in terms of the way they relate to the central government authorities to have their needs met.
67. In line with its mandate, WFP aims to design programmes or projects to help the most needy groups, who invest most of their household budget in food. In view of the levels of poverty of the communities concerned, food aid is of vital importance to backstop production activities, help to raise incomes and boost food production which, in the short term, will improve the food security of the low-income groups and enable the communities to manage themselves. Food for work in production activities has a great comparative advantage, given that the provision of food in exchange for group activities prevents the individualism that arises with cash payment for work.
68. The principles guiding WFP's activities regarding indigenous communities should be based on the need for indigenous communities assisted to be consulted and allowed to participate in the identification, planning, implementation and evaluation phases of the project; furthermore, the representatives of indigenous communities must be recognized as partners. In this way, the rights of the indigenous people to determine their own priorities and control their own economic, cultural and social development will be acknowledged. The case of Colombia is a good example of this because thanks to a high level of indigenous community participation at the decentralized level, the communities themselves coordinate the institutional work around development activities that are more closely compatible with their own culture and aspirations.
69. WFP should ensure the full participation of indigenous women in production. The aim is to give women direct benefits; these range from food management to membership in credit committees and full membership in cooperatives. Moreover, women should be provided with technical training when project activities are organized and implemented. The participation of indigenous women will ensure that the strategy adopted is more compatible with the culture and aspirations of the local community.
70. It is a known fact that the indigenous farmers' working methods are well organized (as a feature of ancestral custom and tradition), characterized by intense group work, and based on mutual aid; this has beneficial repercussions and generates a greater multiplier effect. This is why WFP should support the strengthening of associations of indigenous groups.
71. WFP should select the areas and communities with a view to benefiting them in terms of their own perspective, rather than trying to fit in with existing structures which tend to scatter activities and increase the number of areas of action, as has occurred with the Mexico project. The process of selecting the activities to be supported by WFP assistance must be carried out more systematically and rigorously, and the communities themselves, in a participatory context, should be the ones who identify their own basic needs. More technical assistance should also be provided in order to promote sustainable development.



72. Indicators should be drawn up to take into consideration the opinions of beneficiaries, and to facilitate the establishment of an effective system to monitor and evaluate activities so that benefits can be evaluated, and the effects of food aid assessed. This will prevent the problems of the kind that arose in the Mexico project, where shortcomings in the M&E system hampered the process of assessing the project's sustainability.
73. In order to improve community-level training, inter-agency technology transfer must be intensified and technical training guaranteed in such aspects as the production of native crops, soil and water conservation, silviculture, agro-forestry activities, rural management, the use of appropriate technology, and the use of technologies and methodologies appropriate for both men and women, to be disseminated throughout the community, and the implementation of strategies to boost technology transfer.
74. Monetization has facilitated access by the indigenous communities to resources which were not obtainable in any other way, as evidenced by the creation of indigenous credit facilities in Colombia. In the same way, monetization has helped to set up micro-irrigation systems in Guatemala with spin-offs in terms of both production and income generation. WFP should establish cost-effective funding procedures to facilitate the self-management of funds and ensure that the procedures are properly followed.
75. WFP should support soil and water management activities using concentrated action in micro-watersheds, in order to protect natural resources and raise the productivity of staple crops. It should also help to finance micro-irrigation systems which will make it possible to implement short- and medium-term income-generating activities, and diversify production, with the aim of joining the market economy.
76. Greater effort should be made to undertake marketing activities. In this connection, it is important to carry out pre-investment surveys which will give some degree of certainty regarding which profitable activities are appropriate under the production conditions of the indigenous territories and which meet their needs without negatively affecting their cultures.
77. If the indigenous groups are to achieve self-sufficiency, in other words to achieve development which is tailored to their specific conditions, WFP must focus its efforts on eradicating the root causes of poverty and enhance the role of the aboriginal population. The challenge that must be met in order to bring this about is the need to help the communities that truly represent the isolated tribal groups or the semi-isolated indigenous groups which have always been sidelined from the political and social structures of the country, by strengthening their institutional capacity through training, and by establishing permanent contacts with the indigenous communities in question.
78. In order to enhance benefits to indigenous groups, WFP could cooperate by providing food aid jointly with other international and bilateral, local and non-governmental organizations that assist indigenous populations in other ways, in accordance with their specific terms of reference. Rigorously defined criteria should be applied to select and coordinate inter-agency activities in order to avoid adopting approaches that are not in line with the objectives for which WFP assistance is provided, namely to serve the indigenous populations.
79. In order to attract more funding from donors to support WFP projects for the indigenous groups, it must be shown that they cater for the most isolated groups with profitable activities that consolidate the economies of the indigenous groups and encourage a decentralization and participation-based policy. This participation is of fundamental



importance if the projects are to continue locally and remain sustainable after external assistance ends.



ANNEX

**ESTIMATES OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION
OF LATIN AMERICA IN THE EIGHTIES**

Country	(1) Estimated indigenous population (thousands)	Percentage of total population	(2) Estimated indigenous population (thousands)	Percentage of total population	(3) Estimated indigenous population (thousands)	Percentage of total population
Argentina	360	1.1	350	1.2	-	
Belize	27	14.7	29	19.3	-	
Bolivia	4 150	56.8	4 900	71.0	2 642	51.3
Brazil	225	0.2	300	0.2	-	
Chile	550	4.2	1 000	8.3	-	
Colombia	300	0.9	600	2.0	238	0.8
Costa Rica	26	0.9	35	1.3	-	
Ecuador	3 100	29.5	4 100	43.2	-	
El Salvador	1	0.0	400	7.3	-	
Guatemala	3 900	43.8	5 300	66.3	2 536	41.8
Honduras	110	2.1	700	14.6	49	1.3
Mexico	12 000	14.2	12 000	14.1	5 282	7.4
Nicaragua	48	1.2	160	4.6	-	
Panama	99	4.1	140	6.4	194	8.3
Paraguay	80	1.9	100	2.9	39	1.2
Peru	9 100	40.8	9 300	46.5	3 627	24.8
Venezuela	150	0.8	400	2.2	141	0.9
TOTAL	34 226	9.3	39 814	10.4	14 748	9.7

Source: (1) Gnerre (1990); (2) Jordan Pando (1990); (3) CELADE (1992)

Note: Not available. The CELADE data are taken from official surveys and censuses.

