



International
Trade
Centre



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Indigenous Peoples and Trade (IPT) Programme

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When Indigenous Peoples receive proper support, they empower themselves, improve livelihoods, preserve culture, and safeguard the Earth— all at once. With a population of approximately 476 million, despite comprising only about 6% of the global population, Indigenous Peoples account for 19% of the world’s extremely poor.¹ On the other hand, Indigenous Peoples overwhelmingly safeguard 80% of the remaining biodiversity on Earth.² Despite their significant role in conserving nature, Indigenous Peoples continue to endure the ramifications of the historical disenfranchisement that has led them to experience limited entrepreneurial activity or employment opportunities to improve their livelihoods.

In response, the **International Trade Center (ITC) has developed an Indigenous Peoples and Trade (IPT) Programme.** The **IPT Programme** aims to provide guidance for ITC’s approach to engage and provide tailored support for Indigenous enterprises and artisans globally. The project is structured around four main goals: (i) promoting sustainable economic growth for Indigenous businesses; (ii) recognizing and preserving Indigenous traditional knowledge in trade; (iii) enhancing the competitiveness of Indigenous enterprises; and (iv) fostering a supportive policy environment for Indigenous trade.

The International Trade Centre's (ITC) Strategic Plan 2022-2025 serves as a guiding framework for the IPT Programme, reflecting a commitment to fostering inclusive trade practices that benefit marginalized groups, including Indigenous enterprises and artisans. Aligned with Impact Area 2: Inclusive Trade, the project actively involves and benefits women, youth, and vulnerable populations, emphasizing inclusivity and sustainability. IPT Programme also contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on Goal 5 on gender equality; Goal 8 on economic growth; Goal 10 on reducing inequalities; Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production practices; Goals 13 on climate management; and Goal 15 on terrestrial ecosystem protection.

This IPT Programme document provides a comprehensive needs assessment in order to identify, analyze, and prioritize the areas for ITC to allocate resources and make effective interventions to support Indigenous enterprises. As a first step, **understanding and respecting the economic challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples requires a nuanced appreciation of their diverse organizational structures and cultural backgrounds.** From the structured governance of Canada’s First Nations to the communal values of Pacific Islands communities and the transnational efforts of groups like COICA in Latin America, each community’s strategy is shaped by its unique history and challenges. To truly partner with Indigenous communities, ITC should aspire to work directly with Indigenous enterprises and associations, honoring their autonomy and cultural nuances. This approach ensures genuine collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and fosters sustainable economic development initiatives that respect and empower Indigenous communities.

The need for tailored programs to support Indigenous enterprises is critical. Indigenous enterprises encounter various hurdles in their economic endeavors, notably in the development and marketing of their

¹ World Bank. n.d. "Indigenous Peoples." World Bank. Accessed February 19, 2024. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples#2>.

² World Bank. n.d. "Empowering Indigenous Peoples to Protect Forests". Accessed February 19, 2024. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/08/09/empowering-indigenous-peoples-to-protect-forests>.

products. While training programs are available, they often fail to meet Indigenous communities' specific needs, leading to low retention rates. Additionally, there is a significant gap in financial and digital literacy among Indigenous Peoples, further impeding their ability to expand their businesses. Identifying and accessing new markets proves challenging, which limits their integration into broader economic networks and hinders their visibility in the marketplace. It is important to note that Indigenous women are actively participating in their communities and local markets, including in leadership positions, suggesting the need for additional support to empower their economic roles. Lastly, safeguarding the traditional knowledge of Indigenous communities when engaging in global trade presents a crucial challenge.

In response to the identified challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples, **a six-pronged strategy was developed to support Indigenous communities in gaining access to global trade, thereby contributing to their capacity for self-determination, improving livelihoods, and promoting sustainable business practices.** The strategies proposed for engaging with Indigenous Peoples underscore a commitment to respecting their unique cultural contexts, promoting economic empowerment, and fostering sustainable development. From supporting Indigenous enterprises and artisans in product development to advancing their inclusion in the digital economy, this strategy prioritizes partnerships, inclusivity, and sustainability, recognizing the invaluable contributions of Indigenous Peoples to sustainable economic growth, preservation of cultural knowledge, and environmental conservation.

IPT Programme Strategic Overview

