



Policy Guide for the ethical and equitable engagement of Indigenous Peoples and their Knowledge Systems within the UNFCCC



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1. Executive Summary



Executive Summary

This policy guide was developed by means of a review of the relevant literature and a series of listening sessions with Indigenous Peoples' representatives from the seven socio-cultural regions. Indigenous Peoples are rights-holders under international law, with political, cultural, and legal authority over their territories, governance systems, and knowledge. Their lands, territories, and resources contain a substantial proportion of the world's remaining biodiversity and critical carbon sinks, and their governance practices have sustained ecological integrity and resilience over generations. Yet within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Indigenous Peoples continue to be treated primarily as observer organisations rather than being recognised as distinct rights-holders with clearly affirmed rights under international law. This misalignment between internationally recognised Indigenous Peoples' rights and climate governance practice undermines both climate justice and the effectiveness of global climate action.

This policy guide addresses that gap. It offers Parties a structured framework to move from symbolic inclusion and project-based engagement towards the systemic recognition of Indigenous Peoples as central actors in climate governance. It identifies the key barriers that currently constrain Indigenous Peoples' participation and the rights-respecting approaches to engaging with Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS); showcases practices that demonstrate rights-based approaches; and sets out concrete, actionable recommendations for Parties, the UNFCCC Secretariat, constituted bodies, and climate finance institutions.

Mutually reinforcing barriers systematically marginalise Indigenous Peoples. Among these, this policy guide highlights:

→ Structural and political barriers:

A state-centric architecture relegates Indigenous Peoples to stakeholder status, limiting their decision-making power and allowing Parties to treat Indigenous Peoples' issues as "state" issues, domestic matters beyond international scrutiny. Rights-based language, including references to self-determination and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), is frequently weakened or removed from negotiated agreements.

→ Procedural and financial barriers:

Restricted access to key meetings and pre-structured negotiation texts constrains Indigenous Peoples' full and effective participation, compounded by logistical barriers such as a lack of timely communication and adequate support for visa applications. Indigenous Peoples' organisations form only a small fraction of accredited organisations, limiting the number, diversity and sustained engagement of Indigenous delegates.

→ **Epistemological barriers:**

Euro-Western scientific paradigms often set the terms of what is considered valid knowledge, marginalising Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Indigenous Knowledge is often treated as extractable “data” to support economic agendas, rather than as integral to Indigenous governance and self-determination.

→ **Language, communication and socio-cultural barriers:**

English-dominant, jargon-heavy negotiations and adversarial formats clash with Indigenous languages, oral traditions and consensus-based decision-making. Indigenous delegates frequently experience racism, stereotyping and expectations of homogeneity that erase diversity, while historical marginalisation and distrust, informed by past experiences, can lead to scepticism and reluctance to engage.

→ **National-level implementation gaps:**

Commitments made internationally rarely translate into robust domestic law and policy, which, in turn, often ignore Indigenous Peoples’ realities on the ground. Climate action measures such as offset schemes, protected areas or transition/“critical” mineral extraction often proceed without meaningful Indigenous participation or FPIC, resulting in land and territory dispossession and erosion of Indigenous governance.

→ **Broader socio-political context:**

Climate-related initiatives often replicate extractive models that drive the climate crisis, while Indigenous environmental and human rights defenders face escalating marginalisation, threats and violence.

Despite these challenges, existing initiatives within the UNFCCC system show that meaningful, ethical, and effective engagement is both possible and beneficial. Insights from the listening sessions highlighted several enabling practices: self-determined spaces; place-based engagement; respectful knowledge engagement; and rights-based frameworks. Building on these insights, this policy guide sets out the following recommendations.

1. Embed a rights-based approach in all aspects and all levels of climate governance

Parties should explicitly recognise and implement the individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples as affirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples across national climate laws, policies and implementation frameworks. Right-based FPIC must be treated as a minimum standard for all climate policies and measures affecting Indigenous Peoples.

2. Support the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples

Parties should establish permanent national mechanisms for engagement with Indigenous Peoples, ensure the direct representation of self-selected Indigenous representatives on national delegations with effective negotiating authority, and provide long-term, flexible funding for Indigenous institutions to participate in designing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing national climate policies.

3. Respect and equitably engage with Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Parties should recognise Indigenous Knowledge Systems as holistic, living systems with their own standards of rigour and authority. This requires co-designed research and policy processes, strong protections for intellectual property and data sovereignty, robust FPIC procedures, and benefit-sharing arrangements.

4. Ensure direct and equitable access to climate finance and capacity-building

Parties and climate finance mechanisms should guarantee eligibility for direct access to climate finance for Indigenous Peoples from all socio-cultural regions, with application processes and eligible cost categories adapted to Indigenous governance realities. Long-term, core funding should support the participation of Indigenous Peoples' Organisations, and Indigenous representatives must be fairly compensated for their contributions.

5. Establish independent grievance and monitoring mechanisms led by Indigenous Peoples

Effective, accessible and culturally-appropriate grievance and redress mechanisms are needed at national and international levels to address violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights linked to climate policies and projects. These mechanisms should be co-designed and co-managed with Indigenous Peoples and supported by legal aid and protection for complainants.

The Path Forward

For Parties, implementing these recommendations entails legal and institutional reform, improved policy coherence across climate and human rights frameworks, and sustained financial and political commitments. For the UNFCCC, it requires consolidating and scaling existing innovations—such as the LCIPP FWG parity model—across the system.

The overarching objective is clear: to align international climate governance with existing human rights obligations and with the demonstrated leadership of Indigenous Peoples in safeguarding biodiversity, carbon stocks and planetary health. Doing so will not only address longstanding inequities but will also materially strengthen the ambition, legitimacy and effectiveness of Parties' responses to the climate crisis.

2. Introduction



Introduction

The full recognition of Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination has yet to be realised within the multilateral process, including in the climate change arena (Barume, 2025). Their meaningful inclusion in global climate governance is both a matter of justice and an essential precondition for effective climate action. Indigenous Peoples are individual and collective rights-holders with political, cultural, and legal authority over their territories, knowledge systems, and futures. This status is grounded in international law, most prominently articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration). This Declaration affirms their rights to self-determination, to govern through their own institutions and according to their customary laws, and to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)¹ over decisions affecting their lands, territories and resources, including climate policy and governance.

Recognising that each Indigenous People holds their own distinct knowledge systems, concepts, and protocols that cannot be reduced to a single universal definition, we build on formulations by the Inuit Circumpolar Council and many other Indigenous scholars and organisations, as an important reference point for this policy guide. In that work, IKS are described as holistic, relational ways of living, knowing and reasoning that are lived and enacted across biological, physical, social, cultural, economic and spiritual dimensions of life, intrinsically connected to Indigenous territories, relationships and responsibilities. In this policy guide, we therefore understand Indigenous Knowledge Systems not as abstract "information" but as inseparable from Indigenous lifeways, governance, languages, territories and more-than-human relations. This understanding resonates strongly with the knowledge traditions of Indigenous Peoples in diverse regions, including in tropical forest regions such as the Amazon basin. In Brazil, the knowledge held by Indigenous Peoples such as the Kayapó, Baniwa, Munduruku, Pataxó, and Krenak is grounded in longstanding relationships with forest territories and living beings, emphasising relationality, ecological interdependence, and responsibility across human and more-than-human worlds.

As documented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its Sixth Assessment Report, IKS have made substantive contributions to ecological science by shaping approaches to biodiversity governance, forest stewardship, and climate adaptation, and are associated with strong outcomes across forest integrity, resilience, climate mitigation, sustainable livelihoods, food systems, health, environmental justice, and transformative change. Indigenous Peoples steward territories that contain the majority of the world's remaining biodiversity and function as critical carbon sinks (Fa *et al.*, 2020; Alejo *et al.*, 2021; Beattie *et*

1. FPIC is a collective right of Indigenous Peoples under international law, as affirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (including Articles 10, 11, 19, 28, 29 and 32). FPIC requires that engagement and decision-making processes are conducted in accordance with Indigenous Peoples' own institutions, governance systems, and decision-making practices. It includes the right to give or withhold consent and must be understood as an ongoing process of dialogue and agreement throughout the design, implementation, and evaluation of any measure or activity that may affect Indigenous Peoples.

al., 2023). Their practices of collective responsibility and collective care are what sustain ecological integrity and resilience over countless generations, making their governance models inherently long-term and non-extractive rather than driven by short-term profit. Indigenous Peoples, and their IKS, also contribute to planetary health, including human health and wellbeing (Redvers *et al.*, 2022).

Nevertheless, the full contribution of Indigenous Knowledge Systems is systematically constrained by epistemic injustices. Non-Indigenous, Euro-Western scientific paradigms dominate validation processes within climate institutions and science-policy processes, structurally excluding oral traditions, embodied practices, land-based observations, and relational worldviews. This imposed hierarchy of knowledge reflects deeper colonial legacies and structural inequities that continue to limit Indigenous Peoples' ability to influence climate policy, including in the UNFCCC system.

Recognition of Indigenous Peoples within global climate governance has advanced through key moments and institutional innovations. Central to this progress has been the historical and ongoing Indigenous-led advocacy for the respect of IKS, cultural protocols, meaningful diversity, and Indigenous data sovereignty, ensuring that engagement takes place on Indigenous terms and aligns with Indigenous own protocols. A crucial actor in this work is the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC), also known as the Indigenous Peoples Caucus and/or Constituency, which serves as the primary channel for Indigenous Peoples' engagement in UNFCCC processes at the global level. The IIPFCC is composed of representatives from the seven socio-cultural regions of Indigenous Peoples recognised by the UN: Africa; the Arctic; Asia; Central and South America and the Caribbean; Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; North America; and the Pacific.

Since 2008, the IIPFCC has played a central role in amplifying the voices and demands of Indigenous Peoples throughout Climate Change Conferences and securing Indigenous Peoples' participation and leadership within the UNFCCC process. Accordingly, COP decisions reaffirming the importance of Indigenous Peoples' participation in decision-making or the need to respect their rights in implementing climate policies have increased consistently (CIEL and IIPFCC, 2025). In addition to the growing number of references, one of its key achievements is the leveraging of Indigenous Peoples' rights in the Paris Agreement to establish the Facilitative Working Group (FWG) under the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples' Platform (LCIPP), the only constituted body within the UNFCCC that ensures equal participation of Indigenous Peoples and state representatives. Currently, the LCIPP Baku Work Plan aims to operationalise these advances through six collective areas of action.²

2. See <https://lcipp.unfccc.int/about-lcipp/workplan-activities>

Finally, although important advances have been made in recognising Indigenous Peoples within the UNFCCC, they remain far from achieving full and effective participation in decision-making. Closing this gap requires moving beyond symbolic inclusion towards structural transformation at global, regional and national levels, grounded in Indigenous Peoples' rights, including self-determination and FPIC. It also entails recognising Indigenous Knowledge Systems, governance institutions and territorial relationships not as complementary inputs but as equitable foundations for climate solutions. In this context, strengthening Indigenous Peoples' participation is not simply a matter of inclusion but of climate justice, effectiveness and legitimacy across all dimensions of climate governance and action.

2.1 Methodology and foundations of this policy guide

This policy guide builds directly on Indigenous-led work, including the CARE (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics) Principles of the Global Indigenous Data Alliance,³ First Nation principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP Principles),⁴ the protocols for equitable and ethical engagement advanced by the Inuit Circumpolar Council,⁵ the Te Mana Raraunga: Māori Data Sovereignty Principles articulated by Te Mana Raraunga – Māori Data Sovereignty Network,⁶ and guidelines developed by Indigenous Peoples in Canada in the context of the National Climate Assessment.⁷

The analysis presented in this policy guide is informed by a comprehensive literature review and four listening sessions involving Indigenous representatives from the seven socio-cultural regions. Each listening session was designed to prioritise culturally safe, participatory processes that honoured Indigenous protocols and decision-making practices. The insights generated through these listening sessions were complemented by a literature review to better ensure accuracy, integrity, and relevance. This methodology reflects a commitment to centring Indigenous voices and perspectives throughout the research process, recognising that Indigenous Peoples are the primary authorities on their own knowledge systems, governance structures, and experiences of climate governance.

This policy guide stands as both a critique of systems that continue to marginalise and extract, and an invitation to build a climate governance architecture founded on justice, reciprocity, and shared responsibility for our common future. It is structured to provide an analysis of current realities and

3. See <https://www.gida-global.org/care>

4. See <https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>

5. See <https://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/project/circumpolar-inuit-protocols-for-equitable-and-ethical-engagement/>

6. See <https://www.temanararaunga.maori.nz/>

7. See https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2025/rncan-nrcan/M34-96-2024-eng.pdf

pathways forward. Following this introduction, Section 3 examines the deeply entrenched barriers—structural, procedural, financial, epistemological, and socio-cultural—that systematically undermine the participation and equitable inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and their knowledge systems. Section 4 presents practices that demonstrate that meaningful, ethical, and effective engagement is both possible and transformative. Section 5 presents recommendations to the UNFCCC Secretariat, Parties, constituted bodies, and all actors engaged in climate governance, offering a comprehensive framework for systemic transformation. Section 6 concludes with reflections on the path forward and the collective responsibilities required to realise genuine co-governance within UNFCCC processes.

3. Barriers to engagement



Barriers to engagement

Indigenous Peoples face a deeply entrenched and mutually reinforcing web of barriers that systematically undermine their meaningful participation in climate governance and the equitable inclusion of their knowledge systems. These obstacles are not accidental or discrete; they are embedded in the colonial foundations, operational norms, and epistemic hierarchies of both global and national policy-making institutions. Understanding these barriers is essential to dismantling them and creating the conditions for genuine partnership and co-governance with Indigenous Peoples. Below, we present a synthesis of the main barriers identified in the literature and discussed in the listening sessions.

3.1

Structural and political barriers

The structure of global climate governance reflects a state-centric logic that perpetuates the marginalisation of Indigenous Peoples. The UNFCCC and related institutions are fundamentally designed for nation-states, with Indigenous Peoples classified as “Non-Party Stakeholders” alongside NGOs and other constituencies. This structural exclusion denies them formal decision-making power, disregards their distinct status as Peoples under international law, and confines them to peripheral roles in processes that directly affect their territories, resources, and futures.

Nation-states act as gatekeepers, frequently asserting sovereignty to restrict the representation of Indigenous Peoples and to frame Indigenous issues as “domestic matters” beyond international scrutiny. Furthermore, States often refuse to even acknowledge the existence of their Indigenous Peoples, preferring the term “local communities” or minorities. These tactics enable governments to avoid accountability and to systematically remove rights-based language—such as self-determination and FPIC—from negotiation texts, or preface all requirements on the basis of “nationally determined circumstances” or contingent on “domestic circumstances”. This is further exacerbated through the ongoing practice of conflating the terms “Indigenous Peoples” and “local communities” without proper distinction. As a consequence, Indigenous Peoples are spoken for rather than representing themselves, perpetuating a colonial dynamic of paternalism and erasure.

3.2 Procedural and institutional barriers

The operational and bureaucratic obstacles embedded in the daily functioning of the UNFCCC prevent Indigenous Peoples from influencing decisions in meaningful, timely, and sustained ways. The intersessional processes are mostly exclusive, and access to key meetings and drafting sessions is frequently restricted, with observer status limiting opportunities for intervention. Negotiation texts are often pre-structured before Indigenous Peoples' inputs are invited, with success measured using state-centred metrics such as emissions reductions rather than Indigenous criteria such as relational balance, cultural integrity, or community wellbeing. This pre-structuring of outcomes reflects deeper power asymmetries and prevents Indigenous Peoples from meaningfully contributing to reshape priorities and frameworks in international climate policy.

Furthermore, accredited Indigenous Peoples' organisations represent only a small fraction of the total number of organisations accredited to the UNFCCC (approximately 115 out of nearly 4,000), limiting Indigenous Peoples' access to badges and restricting the size and diversity of their delegations. The comparatively limited participation of Indigenous Peoples, relative to environmental NGOs, research institutions and academia—often from the Global North—results in unequal influence over decision-making processes and ultimately creates structural disadvantages. This concern is distinct from the influence of private sector actors, where issues of conflict of interest may arise, alongside the potential for disproportionate influence over decision-making outcomes.

3.3 Financial, material, and logistical barriers

Indigenous Peoples' organisations face chronic and severe underfunding, lacking predictable resources for travel, accommodation, interpretation and technical preparation. This prevents sustained engagement and strategic planning, forcing organisations to operate reactively rather than proactively shaping agendas. The lack of core funding means participation often depends on short-term project grants or ad hoc support, limiting long-term capacity development. Compared to other organisations participating in the UNFCCC, Indigenous Peoples and their organisations rarely have the capacity to designate dedicated staff to engage full-time in the process.

Eligibility criteria for climate funds—typically based on the developed/developing country dichotomy—exclude Indigenous Peoples from regions classified as part of the "Global North". When financing is available, it is usually channelled through states or large intermediary organisations, which undermines Indigenous autonomy and control over resources. This structural dependency reinforces existing power imbalances and can lead to resources being diverted toward priorities that do not align with Indigenous-defined needs, or to the instrumentalisation of Indigenous Peoples within agendas that are not set by them.

3.4 Epistemological barriers

Conflicts between non-Indigenous, Euro-Western scientific paradigms and IKS produce epistemic injustice. The current climate governance regime legitimises knowledge primarily through Euro-Western science—peer-reviewed journals, quantitative models, and technocratic validation processes. This hierarchy systematically excludes oral histories, embodied practices, land-based observations, and relational epistemologies, rendering them secondary, supplementary, or merely “anecdotal”.

Racist and colonial ideologies dictate that IKS should be deemed credible only when corroborated by scientific evidence. This validation bias reinforces a colonial hierarchy of knowledge and delegitimises millennia-old Indigenous observation, adaptation, science, and governance.

Academic and research institutions, as well as businesses, routinely extract IKS for technical solutions to biodiversity conservation or adaptation challenges, stripping it of its relational, ethical, territorial, and spiritual dimensions and treating it as “data”. This commodification treats IKS as a resource to be harvested rather than as an integral component of Indigenous Peoples’ relationship with their lands, and their living cultures and governance systems. Intellectual property protections and data sovereignty remain weak, and knowledge is often used without proper consent, ownership, attribution, or benefit-sharing arrangements.

3.5 Language and communication barriers

Linguistic and communicative inequalities profoundly affect the accessibility and equity of participation. English has become the de facto language of climate negotiations, and interpretation services rarely extend beyond the Plenary room in the six official UN languages, leaving the vast majority of Indigenous Peoples unable to participate. Furthermore, interpreters may lack familiarity with Indigenous concepts or cultural contexts. The result is frequent oversimplification that distorts meaning and undermines effective communication. Cultural interpretation—the translation not just of words but of concepts, values, and worldviews—is even rarer, yet essential for genuine mutual understanding.

The proliferation of technical and policy jargon creates an additional layer of exclusion, privileging insiders while alienating newcomers and reinforcing epistemic hierarchies. Technical and policy jargon is also weaponised to avoid engaging with root-cause analysis, hindering Indigenous Peoples' potential to contribute to the process. Cultural mismatches in communication styles create further barriers. The adversarial, rapid-fire dynamics of UN negotiations—characterised by strategic positioning, tactical (and empty) interventions, and competitive rhetoric—contrast sharply with Indigenous models of consensus-building, relational dialogue, and reflective deliberation. Indigenous decision-making often requires extended time for consultation, collective reflection, and achieving consensus through respectful dialogue.

The documentation of agreements in written form—predominantly in English—is essential to the negotiation process; however, how inputs are solicited and incorporated tends to privilege written over oral forms of communication. Negotiation outcomes are largely shaped through the drafting, review and amendment of dense written texts, meaning that influence often depends on the ability to engage in text-based processes. This can disadvantage Indigenous Peoples whose knowledge systems are primarily transmitted orally, and whose contributions are not always effectively accommodated within written formats. As a result, existing practices can be alienating, exclusionary, and insufficiently responsive to Indigenous modes of knowledge sharing and expression.

3.6 Socio-cultural and representation barriers

Power imbalances and discrimination create additional layers of constraint. Indigenous Peoples' delegates frequently face racism, condescension, or outright dismissal in policy spaces. Their contributions may be ignored, interrupted, or trivialised, and their presence treated as symbolic rather than substantive. This pervasive disrespect leads to emotional exhaustion, psychological harm, and eventual disengagement. The cumulative effect of microaggressions and overt discrimination creates hostile environments that deter participation.

The structure of UNFCCC plenaries and negotiations pressures Indigenous Peoples to present a single, unified voice in 2-3-minute statements, erasing the ability to express the vast diversity of Indigenous Peoples and their cultures, governance systems, and priorities. Furthermore, Indigenous Peoples are allotted 2-3 seats in the intersessional convenings and key meetings, limiting the meaningful participation of all seven socio-cultural regions. This expectation of homogeneity masks legitimate internal discussions, regional distinctions, and differing strategic approaches, and enforces self-selection.

Geographic and ecosystem biases in global attention and funding, such as a focus on tropical forest contexts, sideline Indigenous Peoples in other ecosystems, such as the Arctic, deserts, drylands, mountains, or small island states. This uneven attention reflects donor priorities and media narratives rather than the actual distribution of Indigenous Peoples or the relative importance of different ecosystems to climate mitigation. In particular, the prioritisation of mitigation-focused agendas—often driven by developed countries—tends to overshadow urgent adaptation needs, which are central for many Indigenous Peoples whose territories are already experiencing severe climate impacts. This imbalance reinforces funding and policy approaches that are misaligned with Indigenous Peoples' own priorities, limiting support for locally-grounded adaptation strategies and resilience.

3.7

National-level implementation barriers

Even when progress is achieved in international forums, the translation of commitments into domestic policy remains inconsistent and often regressive. These gaps are also evident in climate commitments under the UNFCCC, including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and other mitigation and adaptation strategies, which frequently fail to meaningfully include Indigenous Peoples or to guarantee respect for their rights. Many countries fail to integrate international obligations regarding Indigenous rights into national climate policies, resulting in rhetorical recognition without substantive implementation.⁸ National climate strategies, adaptation plans, and mitigation programmes frequently proceed without meaningful Indigenous participation and FPIC.

Mitigation and adaptation projects—including protected area expansion, carbon offset schemes, afforestation programmes, and critical mineral extraction for renewable energy technologies—have led to forced displacement of Indigenous Peoples, criminalisation of customary land use, violence towards Indigenous environmental and human rights defenders, and erosion of Indigenous governance. These false solutions prioritise technocratic interventions and market mechanisms over rights-based, community-led approaches, often generating profits for external actors while imposing costs on Indigenous Peoples and their communities.

8. For a more detailed analysis of the extent to which Indigenous Peoples' rights and priorities are reflected in Nationally Determined Contributions, see International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) 2022, 2025.

3.8 Broader socio-political and environmental context

The barriers to Indigenous participation in climate governance cannot be separated from the wider context of colonialism, violence, extractivism, and structural inequity. Indigenous land and water defenders face escalating threats, criminalisation, and violence for protecting their territories. The fear and repression undermine safe participation for Indigenous Peoples. When Indigenous leaders risk assassination for defending forests, rivers or lands, their ability to engage in international policy processes is severely constrained.

Climate initiatives framed as solutions—including carbon trading, offsetting schemes, and transition/“critical” mineral extraction for renewable energy—often replicate extractive models that are driving the climate crisis. These market-based and technology-centred approaches prioritise state and corporate interests over rights-based, community-led solutions, entrenching inequality and dependency. They also frequently reduce Indigenous Peoples’ lands, waters and territories to their carbon value alone, obscuring the wider ecological, cultural and spiritual significance of these places and erasing the Indigenous Knowledge Systems that have sustained their integrity and resilience over generations.

A further barrier arises from media biases and the systematic under-representation of Indigenous struggles, leadership, and proposals in national and international media coverage. Indigenous Peoples’ perspectives on climate change receive far less sustained attention than state positions, corporate announcements, or technological initiatives, even when Indigenous territories are central to climate mitigation and adaptation. When the media do cover Indigenous issues, they often focus narrowly on vulnerability or conflict rather than on innovations, successful stewardship practices, or Indigenous-led policy proposals.

The dominance of capitalist and technocratic paradigms, combined with the limited visibility of Indigenous-led climate solutions, creates structural biases that constrain the range of responses capable of genuinely addressing the root causes of the climate crisis, reinforce misconceptions that undermine public and political support for rights-based approaches, and contribute to the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from decision-making spaces.

4. Meaningful, ethical, and effective engagement with Indigenous Peoples and their Knowledge Systems



Meaningful, ethical, and effective engagement with Indigenous Peoples and their Knowledge Systems

Numerous examples from the regional listening sessions demonstrate that meaningful, ethical, and effective engagement with Indigenous Peoples and their Knowledge Systems is both possible and transformative. Lessons from these examples teach us concrete ways to address existing barriers to Indigenous Peoples and their knowledge systems within the UNFCCC.

4.1

Self-determined spaces, equal representation and equitable participation

Key message: UNFCCC processes must ensure Indigenous Peoples' self-determined spaces, equal representation, and equitable participation, by providing resources and political space without directing or speaking for them.

Within the UNFCCC, meaningful participation begins with spaces that Indigenous Peoples define and control. The International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) exemplifies this approach by providing a secure environment where Indigenous Peoples can develop unified positions, select spokespeople for key interventions, and reach consensus through processes that respect consultation time and ceremony. States, funding agencies, and allies have a responsibility to resource and respect these self-determined spaces without attempting to inappropriately influence them. This has been essential for coordinating strategy, building solidarity, and ensuring that interventions reflect the collective priorities of Indigenous Peoples globally.⁹

The IIPFCC also convenes preparatory meetings before and during COPs, including at the June intersessionals. These sessions serve as vital coordination opportunities within the UNFCCC process, enabling delegates to develop culturally-appropriate positions and agree coordinated strategies before attending, as observers, formal negotiation rooms. In doing so, they work to counter the structural limits of observer status by creating a strong, organised presence. When the voices of Indigenous Peoples are not heard directly in negotiation rooms, members of the IIPFCC work together to organise bilateral discussions with Party negotiators or even with the COP presidency to pursue their vocal support.

Complementing this, the IIPFCC facilitates Indigenous-to-Indigenous learning networks that strengthen capacities and enable communities to adapt strategies to their own contexts. Multilingual online workshops, peer-to-peer exchanges, and thematic "leads" (e.g., on carbon markets, finance, adaptation) support new

⁹ See, for example, the IIPFCC statement during COP30, available here: <https://www.iipfcc.org/blog/cop30/opening-statement>

negotiators over multiple COP cycles. For instance, experienced negotiators from the Arctic and Amazon regions have mentored youth delegates, sharing technical expertise alongside cultural protocols and political strategies. These relationships continue between COPs through regular IIPFCC calls and shared briefing materials.

Furthermore, the Indigenous Pavilion hosted by the IIPFCC during the last six COPs provides a unique Indigenous-led space where Indigenous Knowledge, ceremony, and storytelling are presented on Indigenous terms. Hosting over 400 events over the past six years, it functions as a visible hub that attracts media attention, facilitates dialogue with diverse stakeholders, and asserts Indigenous presence and authority within global climate spaces. However, the Pavilion's influence on the actual negotiations remains limited. While it is an essential space for visibility and dialogue, it is often treated by Parties either as evidence of adequate participation, reinforcing a separation between presence and decision-making, or completely ignored. Strengthening direct links between Pavilion discussions and negotiation rooms is therefore necessary to ensure that its contributions inform, rather than sit apart from, the formal UNFCCC process.

Achieving parity for Indigenous Peoples requires embedding equality into the rules, bodies, and procedures of the UNFCCC. Important advances under the UNFCCC show that more inclusive and equitable governance models are not only possible but effective. Mechanisms such as the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP)¹⁰ and its Facilitative Working Group (FWG)¹¹—which brings together an equal number of Indigenous Peoples and government representatives in a joint space, operating by consensus—provide a concrete example of shared governance within the UNFCCC. These experiences demonstrate that institutional arrangements based on co-leadership, dialogue and consensus can strengthen both legitimacy and outcomes, and can be adapted and replicated at the national level, as illustrated by the Indigenous Peoples' Platform to Address Climate Change in Peru.¹²

However, challenges remain in ensuring the effective influence of these mechanisms over decision-making. In the case of the FWG, parity remains limited to the FWG's technical mandate and does not extend to the broader negotiating table. At the same time, the largely formal and bureaucratic configuration of the FWG has constrained and slowed its ability to influence other constituted bodies and negotiation agendas, limiting the extent to which its work

10. The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) was established in 2017 under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) through Decision 2/CP.23. It aims to strengthen the role of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, technologies, practices and contributions in climate action, with three core functions: enhancing these contributions, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and best practices, and promoting participation in UNFCCC processes.

11. The Facilitative Working Group (FWG), was established in 2018 and is composed of equal representation from Indigenous Peoples and Parties. It includes seven Indigenous representatives—selected through their own processes and reflecting the seven socio-cultural regions—and seven Party representatives. The FWG operates by consensus to implement multi-year workplans aligned with the LCIPP's mandate.

12. At the national level, Peru established the Indigenous Peoples' Platform to Address Climate Change (PPICC) in 2020 under the Framework Law on Climate Change. The PPICC serves as an institutional mechanism for dialogue and coordination between Indigenous Peoples and the State, marking an important step towards their participation in national climate governance.

can reshape the wider UNFCCC architecture. Furthermore, there is an unresolved discussion about whether to add “local community” representatives to the FWG. If this is done without clear differentiation, it could blur the important legal and political distinction between Indigenous Peoples—who hold specific collective rights under international law—and other groups, and therefore risk undermining the hard-won recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ distinct status and parity in the FWG. Lessons from the FWG should inform reforms across constituted and subsidiary bodies and negotiation tracks, embedding structural equality and self-selection of Indigenous representatives throughout the system.

At the same time, while FWG members are self-selected by Indigenous Peoples’ organisations, and expected to disseminate information and gather input from their regions, FWG members do not claim to speak for all Indigenous Peoples. This raises a critical point: parity at the FWG level is a significant step forward from decades of exclusion, yet structural issues remain in ensuring full accountability, diversity, and reach.

4.2 Place-based engagement

Key message: UNFCCC processes should pursue sustained, place-based engagement in Indigenous territories so that decision-makers can learn directly from Indigenous Knowledge Systems, governance, and stewardship practices.

Transformative learning happens through direct exposure to Indigenous lifeways, landscapes, and stewardship practices. Multi-day immersion visits—where officials eat, sleep, and work alongside communities—expose decision-makers to real-world applications of IKS. These visits convert abstract concepts into lived realities and frequently result in champions within ministries or legislatures who carry Indigenous perspectives into negotiating rooms with a more genuine understanding. The creation of ethical spaces of engagement, where Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous actors meet under shared principles of respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationality, can further deepen this place-based learning and help sustain it beyond individual visits.

The LCIPP regional gatherings offer a concrete illustration of both the potential and the limitations of place-based engagement under current arrangements. For example, the LCIPP Arctic Regional Gathering, as well as the Africa-Asia bi-regional gathering, brought together Indigenous Knowledge holders, community representatives, and Party delegates in Inuit and Mbororo territory, respectively, to share observations of climate change, experience community-led adaptation and stewardship practices first-hand, and engage in dialogue grounded in local protocols and ceremony. These gatherings enabled officials to witness sea-ice changes, coastal erosion, and ocean ecosystem shifts alongside Arctic

communities, and to hear directly how Indigenous governance and knowledge systems guide climate responses.¹³

Long-term relationship-building ensures engagement does not end with a single visit. Ongoing contact through shared events, technical briefings, and invitations for Indigenous experts to co-present at national and regional forums builds trust and prevents engagement from becoming extractive. Relational mentorship between experienced and emerging Indigenous negotiators, designed to last across policy cycles, stabilises representation and builds institutional memory, not only transferring technical knowledge but also ensuring intergenerationality, strategic wisdom, cultural protocols, and emotional support. When combined with structural reforms to participation and decision-making, these practices can help shift place-based engagement from making the best of current constraints to underpinning a more just and durable co-governance architecture.

4.3 Knowledge engagement

Key message: UNFCCC processes must respect Indigenous Knowledge sovereignty and support Indigenous-led knowledge production, assessments, and submissions.

Treating IKS as a whole (knowledge, practices, values, worldviews), place-based systems rather than extractable data points, requires fundamental shifts in the UNFCCC's approach. Respecting Indigenous Knowledge sovereignty means ensuring IKS are valued and operationalised through their own epistemic foundation, and refusing conditional validation that requires alignment with Euro-Western scientific frameworks. IKS have their own standards of rigour, validation, and authority. This understanding has been further elaborated through the FWG training webinar series on Indigenous Knowledge, which explores (1) the contours of trust and respect in relation to Indigenous Knowledge, (2) what ethical and equitable engagement looks like in the context of climate change, (3) the utilisation of Indigenous Knowledge in knowledge synthesis and co-production, and (4) substantive and procedural measures to ensure ethical engagement of Indigenous Knowledge holders and the use of Indigenous Knowledge in climate policy and action.¹⁴

Systematically involving Indigenous experts and organisations in scoping, authorship, review and leadership roles and supporting standalone Indigenous reports, officially recognised submissions, and Indigenous-led assessments institutionalises Indigenous Knowledge production and prevents its assimilation into state-controlled narratives. One example of this in the context of science-

13. See the LCIPP Arctic Regional Gathering informal summary report, available here: https://lcipp.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/2025-04/LCIPP_ARG_informal_summary_report_draft_version_for_web.pdf

14. Training webinar #1 here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBcZ22cUY9RJ5r1M06DliiKuNjzntWbyh>
Training webinar #2 here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SulcxEga9ok>
Training webinar #3 here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TINMcBTB4o>
Training webinar #4 here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfRhmCaV2Mw>

policy processes is the “For our Future: Indigenous Resilience Report”, the first standalone climate-change assessment in Canada explicitly led by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.¹⁵

During the IPCC AR6 cycle, the “Compendium of Indigenous Knowledge and Local Knowledge”,¹⁶ compiling freely authored oral histories and Indigenous Knowledge from around the world, was edited by a team of Coordinating Lead Authors and Lead Authors. Tactically framed as citable “grey literature”, this report allowed for the bypass of restrictive evidentiary rules. This innovation opened a precedent for broader methodological inclusivity in future assessment cycles, setting an important standard for broader methodological inclusivity in future assessment cycles. The IPCC has also taken steps in the AR7 cycle, including convening its workshop on Engaging Diverse Knowledge Systems, which provided a platform to advance the engagement of IKS within the main assessment reports.¹⁷

4.4

Rights-based frameworks, benefit-sharing and data sovereignty

Key message: UNFCCC processes must embed all Indigenous rights—including governance; Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC); equitable benefit-sharing; and data sovereignty—to ensure climate action supports Indigenous self-determination.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems cannot be disentangled from Indigenous Peoples, their rights, relationships and self-determination, underscoring the need for alignment with the UN Declaration. The Declaration includes rights to lands, territories and resources, as well as the rights to maintain, control and protect IKS, cultural and spiritual heritage, and intellectual property. In this context, the IIPFCC applies UNDRIP’s minimum standards in COP negotiations, building on the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Paris Agreement to advocate for the fulfilment of state obligations, resist harmful market-based mechanisms, and secure recognition of all rights—including governance and decision-making—in adaptation and mitigation planning. At COP 30, Indigenous Peoples secured explicit recognition of their rights in the decision on the Just Transition Work Programme.¹⁸

15. Access the report here: <https://changingclimate.ca/indigenous-resilience/>

16. Access the compendium here: https://www.snowchange.org/pages/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Raportti_150ppi.pdf

17. Find more information about the IPCC workshop here: <https://www.ipcc.ch/event/ipcc-workshop-on-engaging-diverse-knowledge-systems-and-ipcc-workshop-on-methods-of-assessment/>

18. The decision calls for all just transition pathways to “respect and promote the internationally recognized collective and individual rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the rights to self-determination, and acknowledge the rights and protections for Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation and initial contact.” Access the decision here: <https://unfccc.int/cop30/auvs>

The specific intersection of land rights and climate action is discussed widely in the advocacy of Indigenous Peoples. Territorial and governance safeguards ensure climate projects assess impacts on land tenure, customary law, and livelihood systems. Upholding the territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples in climate policy and practice reduces the risks of dispossession in the context of climate mitigation and adaptation, as secure land tenure is foundational to both Indigenous wellbeing and effective climate action. The Inuit Circumpolar Council's Protocols for equitable and ethical engagement,¹⁹ for instance, require explicit territorial impact assessments before endorsing any carbon offset or afforestation project, preventing false solutions that undermine sovereignty. This is similar to calls from the IIPFCC, urging that "all climate action must be carried out with full respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including our right to self-determination, Free, Prior and Informed Consent, and the protection of lands, waters, and territories."

The ethical and equitable engagement of Indigenous Knowledge Systems requires clear recognition of who controls knowledge and how it is used. Robust FPIC protocols enable Indigenous Peoples and their communities to establish their own procedures governing research, documentation and dissemination, as well as the protection of cultural and spiritual property rights, benefit-sharing, and redress for misuse—frameworks that are developed by communities themselves and reflect their values and governance structures. The explicit inclusion of FPIC in UNFCCC-linked programmes, such as Green Climate Fund project approval processes, further enables Indigenous Peoples to ensure that climate action does not reproduce extractive patterns in research and engagement.

A more concrete example of this at the local and regional level is benefit-sharing agreements. Such agreements articulate tangible returns—capacity support, co-ownership of outputs, revenue sharing where appropriate—that Indigenous Peoples will receive for participating in a specific project. The IIPFCC's "Principles & Guidelines for Direct Access Funding for Indigenous Peoples' Climate Action, Biodiversity Conservation and Fighting Desertification for a Sustainable Planet" calls for financing to flow directly to Indigenous Peoples and their representative institutions. This rights-based framework prioritises self-determined access to climate and biodiversity funding through Indigenous-led initiatives, long-term territorial stewardship, and community-defined indicators of wellbeing and ecosystem health. It proposes an Indigenous-governed global funding mechanism guided by key principles: respect for FPIC, cultural integrity, traditional governance systems, and equitable, predictable funding flows that strengthen autonomy rather than reinforce dependency on intermediaries. In a recent decision at COP 30, Parties invited the Global Environmental Facility to "ensure safeguards for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and to consider Indigenous Peoples' perspectives and diverse knowledge systems in its decision-making".²⁰

19. Access the ICC Protocols here: <https://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/project/circumpolar-inuit-protocols-for-equitable-and-ethical-engagement/>

20. COP 30 decisions (advance unedited versions) are available here: <https://unfccc.int/cop30/auvs>

Indigenous data sovereignty practices—including community-managed archives, metadata that reflect Indigenous categories, and local gatekeeping protocols—ensure that communities retain control over access to and use of their knowledge. The Inuit Circumpolar Council has developed community-controlled digital repositories for climate and environmental knowledge, cataloguing materials using Inuit metadata categories rather than Euro-Western taxonomies. This safeguards epistemic integrity while ensuring that future UNFCCC negotiators can access past positions and evidence. Similarly, Indigenous Peoples' communities such as the Ogiek in Kenya are increasingly developing Biocultural Community Protocols (BCPs) to assert their customary rights over lands, natural resources and traditional knowledge. These protocols document community identity, culture and relationships with biodiversity, and set out procedures for external stakeholders—including governments, researchers and companies—to engage with them on the basis of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

4.5 Communication, monitoring and institutional memory

Key message: UNFCCC processes should ensure inclusive communication and Indigenous-led monitoring to strengthen participation, accountability, and institutional memory across negotiations.

Effective communication practices determine who can participate and how meaning is transmitted in climate policy spaces. Multilingual facilitation and translation increase accessibility and respect linguistic rights, requiring skilled professionals familiar with both technical content and cultural contexts. The IIPFCC, for example, ensures all meetings include interpretation in at least five languages—English, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, and French—to better reflect the linguistic diversity of Indigenous participants.

Diverse communication formats also make knowledge accessible to wider audiences and accommodate oral traditions. At the Indigenous Pavilion during UNFCCC COPs, Indigenous Peoples have shared knowledge through short films, participatory maps, and live storytelling alongside technical briefings, enabling different forms of expression and engagement.

A commitment to continuous learning and adaptation of guidelines in response to Indigenous feedback and evolving practice is equally essential. Indigenous-led monitoring and evaluation allow communities to define success using culturally-relevant indicators rather than solely externally-defined metrics. For instance, the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus at UNFCCC COPs conducts end-of-session evaluations to identify achievements, unmet objectives, and procedural barriers. These reflections are documented and archived, strengthening institutional memory and informing strategies for future negotiation cycles.

5. Recommendations to the UNFCCC, Parties, and other key actors in climate governance



Systemic transformation in climate governance is urgently needed—a fundamental reorientation from tokenistic Indigenous consultation and extractive research towards genuine co-governance founded on rights, reparative justice, and mutual respect. These recommendations, grouped into five broad categories, are addressed to four actors within the international climate governance regime: Parties; the UNFCCC, including its Secretariat and constituted bodies; climate funding agencies—e.g. the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), the Adaptation Fund (AF)—and other stakeholders including research institutions.

5.1 **Embed a rights-based approach into all aspects and all levels of climate governance**

The individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples, as affirmed by the minimum standards of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, must be the foundation of all aspects of climate governance. This foundation brings to light the structural drivers of the climate crisis, capitalism, inequity/exclusion, and colonialism, shifting the narrative towards strengths-based and reparative approaches that position Indigenous Peoples as climate leaders, not passive recipients of climate impacts.

To embed a rights-based approach, we propose the following recommendations:

For Parties

- Embed direct recognition of the individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples, as affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in all national climate laws and policies.
- Treat free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) as a minimum standard in all climate policy and governance, ensuring Indigenous data sovereignty in all policy design, research protocols, finance mechanisms, project implementation, and evaluation and monitoring activities.
- Provide long-term, flexible funding directly to Indigenous representatives, institutions, and organisations in order to participate in the design of national climate laws and policies, including the development of NDCs and NAPs, and to define their priorities and strategies in the development of their lands and territories.
- Embed strengths-based narratives related to Indigenous Peoples in all national climate laws and policies, countering stereotypes and misconceptions that undermine recognition of Indigenous expertise and authority.

- Critically assess any current or proposed market-based mechanisms, such as carbon trading, offsetting, and storage, as well as critical mineral projects, through the lens of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in order to prevent the reproduction of colonial dynamics and harm.

For the UNFCCC

- Embed direct recognition of the individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples, as affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in all international climate laws and policies.
- End the conflation of Indigenous Peoples with other groups, such as local communities, in all UNFCCC texts.
- Support Indigenous Peoples to develop an ethical protocol for the protection and use of their Indigenous Knowledge Systems, following the practice of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, and support its mainstreaming across all workstreams of the UNFCCC.
- Develop, in full partnership with Indigenous Peoples, clear guidelines for implementing FPIC in all aspects of climate policy, reflecting the diversity of Indigenous governance systems.
- Develop standardised text to reference Indigenous Peoples, including their capitalisation, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems.
- Initiate a process, in full partnership with Indigenous Peoples, to develop a differentiated participatory status for Indigenous Peoples in the UNFCCC and climate funding agencies by COP 32. This includes concrete mechanisms to ensure the diversity of Indigenous Peoples is recognised, and they can express themselves.

5.2 Support the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples, as collectives, hold distinct rights articulated in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the right to self-determination. This unique status differentiates Indigenous Peoples from stakeholders, local communities, and other organisations and individuals that participate within the UNFCCC, including the eight other constituencies. Full and effective participation extends into shared decision-making.

This requires moving beyond observer or token roles to shared decision-making power for Indigenous Peoples, including co-chairing constituted bodies, co-leading initiatives, and holding negotiating status across all stages of climate governance, from agenda-setting and scoping through implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

To support the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, we propose the following recommendations:

For Parties

- Establish permanent, institutionalised engagement mechanisms with Indigenous Peoples nationally.
- Encourage the direct representation of Indigenous Peoples, as selected by Indigenous representative institutions, on national delegations, with full funding and authority to negotiate and influence national positions.
- Mandate the direct participation of Indigenous Peoples in designing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing national climate policies, upholding their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.
- Recognise Indigenous Peoples' institutions and coordination mechanisms as official interlocutors in national climate policy development, providing long-term, flexible funding for their participation.

For the UNFCCC and climate finance mechanisms

- Simplify and provide accelerated accreditation processes for Indigenous Peoples.
- Provide long-term, stable funding for Indigenous Peoples to attend and contribute to all meetings of the subsidiary bodies and the Conference of the Parties.

- Provide dedicated, long-term, stable funding and logistical support (travel, translation, preparatory meetings, digital access) for Indigenous Peoples to attend and contribute to all intersessional work, including constituted bodies and other relevant meetings.
- Strengthen the influence of the Facilitative Working Group (FWG) of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) by providing sufficient funding to complete the Baku Workplan.
- Institutionalise self-selected representatives of Indigenous Peoples as full members across all climate bodies and funding mechanisms, including in working groups, technical panels, and funding boards like the GCF and Adaptation Fund, including modalities such as co-chairing, co-facilitating, or co-leading work programmes.
- Provide long-term, flexible funding for Indigenous Peoples and their representatives to participate in climate funding mechanisms.
- Create institutional mechanisms to ensure policy coherence across UNFCCC, CBD, human rights instruments, and other relevant frameworks, with the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples.

5.3

Respecting and equitably engaging with Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous Knowledge Systems are whole, living knowledge systems encompassing cosmologies, governance, customary law, language, ritual, spirituality, and land and water stewardship, inseparable from the Peoples, territories, and relational responsibilities that sustain them. As such, they constitute knowledge systems—and sciences—in their own right, with distinct epistemologies, methodologies, and validation processes. International and national climate policy must reflect this holistic ontological status by treating Indigenous knowledges not as data to be integrated into Euro-Western scientific frameworks but as equally valid systems with their own standards of rigour, validation, and authority, grounded in collective rights, self-determination, and knowledge sovereignty.

To ensure the ethical and equitable engagement of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, we propose the following recommendations:

For Parties

- Ensure any process involving Indigenous Peoples and their knowledge systems upholds Indigenous Peoples' rights as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the standard of FPIC.
- Co-develop or adapt existing methodologies that are appropriate to, and grounded in, Indigenous Peoples' own knowledge systems, worldviews, and governance structures, and that allow Indigenous Peoples to co-design research questions, methodologies, ethical protocols, data governance, interpretation, validation, and dissemination on climate policies and assessments, recognising them as equal partners or leaders.
- Create strong legislative protections for the intellectual property of Indigenous Peoples, protecting their intellectual sovereignty and preventing misappropriation.
- Implement contractual clauses, Indigenous data sovereignty agreements, and legal safeguards in national procurement, preventing commodification or unauthorised use of Indigenous Knowledge Systems.
- Establish and enforce concrete benefit-sharing mechanisms, co-designed with Indigenous Peoples, to ensure that they retain ownership, control, and direct material and non-material benefits arising from the use of their knowledge systems, including in climate policies, projects, and research.
- Recognise existing, or establish new, protocols for benefit-sharing and control over derived products or datasets.
- Provide legal support to Indigenous communities for negotiating and enforcing these protections.

For the UNFCCC

- Co-develop processes and innovative modalities, including evaluation, to engage diverse forms of knowledge equitably, including in negotiations, constituted bodies, and decision-making.
- Expand scientific evidentiary standards to include Indigenous oral histories, storytelling, art, ceremony, experiential knowledge, and land-based observation.
- Provide interpretation into Indigenous languages, schedule sessions to respect customary decision-making timelines, enable ceremony, and create spaces for women, Elders, and youth to speak.

- Replace short, high-pressure negotiation cycles with processes allowing deliberative, consensus-based decision-making consistent with Indigenous protocols.
- Provide Indigenous Peoples with long-term support to train new Indigenous Peoples on negotiating processes, technical climate science, and finance literacy.
- Provide Indigenous Peoples with long-term financial support to provide mandatory intercultural and cultural safety training for state negotiators, scientists, and fund managers.

For climate organisations and researchers

- Ensure any process involving Indigenous Peoples and their knowledge systems upholds the standard of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.
- Co-develop or adapt existing methodologies that allow Indigenous Peoples to co-design research questions, methodologies, ethical protocols, data governance, interpretation, and dissemination on climate policies and assessments, ensuring that all such methodologies are grounded in, and appropriate to, the specific Indigenous Knowledge Systems, governance structures, and cultural protocols of the Peoples involved.
- Standardise practices of consensual co-authorship and shared intellectual property, ensuring Indigenous Peoples are recognised as equal partners in knowledge production or practice.
- Ensure research serves priorities defined by Indigenous Peoples by establishing sustained relationship mechanisms.
- Invest in long-term training and capacity-building for Indigenous Peoples, including fellowships and mentoring programmes for Indigenous scholars, co-designed with Indigenous representative institutions, to strengthen self-determined engagement in climate research, policy and practice.

5.4 Direct and equitable access to climate finance and capacity-building for Indigenous Peoples

Direct and equitable access to climate finance has been a longstanding priority for Indigenous Peoples. Despite the increased commitments announced at UNFCCC COPs, very little climate finance reaches Indigenous Peoples and their organisations. Addressing this gap requires removing the structural barriers that systematically exclude Indigenous organisations from accessing finance, in both currently eligible and ineligible regions. Indigenous Peoples from all seven UN socio-cultural regions must be recognised as eligible recipients of climate finance.

Climate finance should be long-term, flexible, and adapted to Indigenous governance systems, cultural cycles, and collective decision-making processes rather than forcing communities to conform to short grant timelines or rigid project frameworks. Such financing must recognise that Indigenous climate action is inseparable from land defence, cultural continuity, and self-determination, and therefore support these as integral outcomes.

In addition, Indigenous Peoples must be fairly compensated for their contributions in non-Indigenous processes, with Elders, knowledge holders, negotiators, and community members remunerated for their time, expertise, and intellectual labour.

We propose the following recommendations:

For Parties

- Provide long-term, stable and scalable funding for Indigenous Peoples' organisations to participate in national and international climate action, covering operational costs, coordination, and participation.
- Establish clear procedures for Indigenous Peoples to partner on any proposals for international climate finance, upholding their rights-based engagement.
- Develop compensation frameworks for Indigenous Peoples, in consultation with Indigenous Peoples, reflecting local standards of recognition.
- Fund Indigenous Peoples' community monitoring, legal advice, and documentation supporting the defence of Indigenous Peoples' rights and their participation in technical processes.

For the UNFCCC and Climate Finance Mechanisms

- Establish dedicated funding mechanisms within multilateral climate funds for Indigenous-led projects and capacity-building, with streamlined direct access modalities for all seven UN socio-cultural regions. This requires the transformation of fiduciary norms and risk frameworks that currently privilege speed, scale, and donor control.
- Formally embed Indigenous governance, including through voting power, co-ownership of funds, and Indigenous-led investment committees rather than relying on consultative or advisory roles that can be easily overridden.
- Widen accessible costs to explicitly cover the costs of place-based engagement, including community hosting, local coordination, translation, cultural protocols, adequate time on the ground for meaningful immersion, and unrestricted funds to support the institutional needs of Indigenous Peoples to implement their self-defined climate priorities.
- Adopt simplified and streamlined application procedures for Indigenous Peoples that accommodate customary governance structures and lived realities, while still enabling Indigenous Peoples, and their organisations and communities, to comply with fiduciary and accountability requirements, and provide technical assistance for proposal development led by Indigenous applicants.
- Co-design monitoring, reporting, and evaluation requirements for climate finance with Indigenous Peoples so that they reflect Indigenous evaluation processes and Indigenous-defined metrics of success, including qualitative, relational, cultural, and land-based indicators.
- Avoid imposing external evaluation frameworks that undermine Indigenous governance and recognise Indigenous-led evaluations as valid evidence of impact.
- Provide long-term funding for the Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Group of the GCF, and dedicated independent audits and third-party monitoring of climate policies and measures.
- Develop enforceable grievance mechanisms, with limited barriers to Indigenous Peoples' participation, to monitor funding commitments and ensure safeguards have been implemented in order to detect and address co-optation or rights violations.
- Strengthen the capacity of Indigenous Peoples' Organisations to manage climate finance directly by funding their administrative, legal, and fiduciary development. This includes large-grant management.

- Support the development of thematic experts through mentorship programmes, community archives, and rotational leadership structures that ensure knowledge transfer across generations and the prevention of burnout.
- Develop benefit-sharing models, community trust funds, and safeguards directing revenue from climate actions—including results-based payments—to rights-holders, including Indigenous-led funds rather than third-party, non-Indigenous, intermediaries.
- Develop procedures to ensure transparency of funding and partnerships, including a formal disclosure mechanism for all financial flows, partners, and contractual terms linked to projects claiming Indigenous participation.
- Prioritise trust, relationships and accountability to the community above extractive reporting to external actors.

5.5

Establish Independent Grievance and Monitoring Mechanisms led by Indigenous Peoples and their organisations

Indigenous Peoples require independent and effective grievance and monitoring mechanisms to protect against violations of their rights.

We propose the following recommendations:

For Parties

- Integrate reporting prepared by Indigenous Peoples and their representative institutions, including their assessments of climate impacts, contributions to mitigation and adaptation, exercise of rights (such as land tenure and FPIC), access to and impacts of climate finance, and the status and use of their knowledge systems, into national climate policy and communications, including NDCs, NAPs, and BTRs.

For the UNFCCC and Finance Institutions

- Develop culturally-appropriate indicators and best practices for ethical case studies, in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, in NDCs, NAPs, BTRs, and other relevant national communications, recognising that these system-wide indicators are distinct from Indigenous-led evaluation processes attached to specific climate finance programmes.

- Develop indicators with Indigenous Peoples that measure actual access to or benefits from climate finance, quality of engagement, influence over policy outcomes, protection of rights, and integrity of knowledge use. Indicators should be both quantitative and qualitative, including documented FPIC processes, case studies of co-production, and assessments of power-sharing.
- Establish accessible grievance and redress mechanisms, designed in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, for all actions under the UNFCCC.
- Co-design, with Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous-led culturally-informed risk assessments, and transparent monitoring, reporting, and evaluation frameworks before project approval, as well as indicators that measure quality of engagement, influence over policy outcomes, protection of rights, and integrity of knowledge use. Indicators should be both quantitative and qualitative, including documented FPIC processes, case studies of co-production, and assessments of power-sharing.
- Create culturally-appropriate, accessible complaint mechanisms at local, national, and international levels with independent adjudication, remedies, and enforcement powers. Ensure legal aid and protection for complainants. Develop timelines for response and resolution, with consequences for non-compliance.
- Create compliance and accountability mechanisms for institutions and donors. Implement sanctions, conditionality, and compliance measures for institutions or projects breaching FPIC, misappropriating knowledge, or co-opting Indigenous participation. Ensure that accountability extends to all actors—states, multilateral institutions, NGOs, and private sector entities.

6. Conclusion



6. Conclusion

The path forward is clear: climate policy and governance must reorient from state-centric, technocratic models towards co-governance arrangements that recognise Indigenous Peoples as rights-holders with the political, legal, and cultural authority essential for effective climate action. The implementation of these recommendations will require sustained commitment, adequate resources, and fundamental shifts in institutional culture and power relations.

Parties must move beyond consultation towards genuine co-governance, embedding Indigenous participation and knowledge in all aspects of climate policy—from NDC development through implementation to monitoring and finance. This requires legal reforms, institutional restructuring, and sustained political will.

UNFCCC bodies must offer pathways to operationalise Indigenous participation beyond symbolic inclusion. The parity model of the Facilitative Working Group demonstrates that structural equality is both achievable and effective. This model should be replicated and strengthened across all relevant bodies, with adequate resources and clear mandates to influence core decisions on finance, mitigation, adaptation, and technology.

Allies must recognise their role as facilitators rather than representatives, providing technical support and advocacy while deferring to Indigenous leadership. Research partnerships must be genuinely collaborative, with Indigenous Peoples as co-owners of knowledge production.

Measuring progress requires indicators that capture both process and outcomes, and which are attuned to Indigenous Peoples' realities. Regular reporting against these indicators—integrated into NDCs, national communications, fund reports, and UNFCCC processes—will enable tracking of progress and identification of gaps. Transparency is essential: findings must be publicly accessible, and communities must have opportunities to provide feedback and contest official assessments.

Implementation will require political courage, sustained resources, and a willingness to cede control. It will demand that institutions confront their colonial legacies and dismantle the structures that perpetuate epistemic injustice and political exclusion. Indigenous Peoples, including the IIPFCC and the FWG, are central to advancing this agenda, providing strategic direction, building solidarity across regions, and holding institutions accountable. What remains outstanding is the collective will to act.

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8. Biographies

Graeme Reed, PhD, has mixed Anishinaabe (Great Lakes), English, German, and Scottish ancestry. He works at the Assembly of First Nations, leading its engagement in federal and international climate policy, including as the former Indigenous North American Representative to the Facilitative Working Group of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform. He holds a PhD from the University of Guelph.

Pasang Yangjee Sherpa, PhD, is a Sharwa woman from Pharak (commonly known as the Mount Everest region) in north-eastern Nepal. Her research examines the human dimensions of climate change in the high Himalaya from an Indigenous perspective, and she approaches plural epistemologies as a necessity rather than a choice in addressing contemporary challenges. She is an Assistant Professor of Lifeways in Indigenous Asia at the University of British Columbia.

Rosario Carmona, PhD, is a painter and anthropologist working at the intersection of Indigenous Peoples' rights, climate governance, and environmental justice. She is a Programme Consultant on Climate Change with the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and focuses on Indigenous knowledges and international climate policy processes, including the UNFCCC and the IPCC. She holds a PhD in Anthropology and a diploma in Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Ritodhi Chakraborty, PhD, focuses his research and teaching on critical and feminist approaches to nature–society relations, with particular attention to rural and migrant masculinities in the Himalaya. His work draws on critical environmental justice and studies of global environmental change. His current research explores Indigenous cartography in landscape redesign in Aotearoa and the politics of climate adaptation across the Himalaya, using boundary-crossing and co-produced approaches with Indigenous communities.

Policy Guide for the ethical and equitable engagement of Indigenous Peoples and their Knowledge Systems within the UNFCCC.

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