



Allan Lissner | Indigenous Climate Action

# Strategies for Decolonizing Climate Policy



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INDIGENOUS Debates

# **Strategies for Decolonizing Climate Policy**

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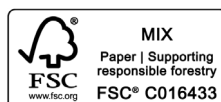


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## A Call to Recognize Indigenous Leadership in the Fight against Climate Change

This special edition of Indigenous Debates highlights the voices, struggles and proposals of Indigenous Peoples in the face of the impact of the climate crisis. Written by Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists, advocates and academics, these articles reflect on the profound inequalities associated with climate change and the need to decolonize discourse and action on the ground. Whilst this existential, multidimensional crisis affects the entire planet, its impacts disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples despite them bearing the least responsibility. Indigenous Peoples are nonetheless often marginalized from response measures that affect their territories.

The knowledges and values of Indigenous Peoples have enabled them to live sustainably for generations. Thanks to this, the biodiversity of their territories is among the richest on Earth. However, centuries of colonialism, appropriation, and marginalisation have weakened their ability to maintain balanced relationships. This instability is accentuated today, not only by the impacts of climate change but also by the consequences of governmental climate policy, which prevent their participation and fail to consider Indigenous knowledge, governance systems, and cultural, economic and social particularities. As a result, many of these measures, in addition to being ineffective, have perpetuated socio-ecological injustice, reinforcing climate vulnerability.

Despite this climate injustice, Indigenous Peoples continue to demonstrate the capability to respond to the crisis, both at territorial and international levels. At the local level, we can observe how diverse communities are deploying strategies based on their ancestral knowledge and worldviews, which conceive of the interdependence of lives. These experiences are crucial, not only for Indigenous communities but for humanity as a whole because, besides reducing the effects of climate change, they provide valuable interpretations of the problem.

The articles also highlight initiatives led by Indigenous Peoples, especially women and youth, that are challenging the reproduction of colonial dynamics and seeking to open up new spaces for participation and to enrich climate discourse. Indigenous Peoples are deploying multiple strategies from local to international levels to make their voices heard. Despite advances in multilateral spaces such as the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the gap remains daunting. The spaces for engagement often do not recognize or respect their collective rights, and Indigenous Peoples' contributions are reduced to a symbolic gesture.

Overcoming these structural barriers and giving Indigenous Peoples the place they deserve in climate governance, requires collaboration among multiple actors. This edition therefore also discusses the need to transform policy processes at national and international levels to ensure the full participation and leadership of Indigenous Peoples as critical actors in the formulation of climate action. This effort to decolonize climate policy involves transforming the structures and paradigms that have perpetuated inequality and, at the same time, precipitated environmental imbalance. Throughout these articles, there resonates a pressing call to recognize and value Indigenous leadership in the fight against climate change, a crucial step towards addressing the interconnected crises facing all living beings.

*Rosario Carmona and Stefan Thorsell*

# The Decolonizing Climate Policy Project

Indigenous Climate Action (ICA)



*Press conference at UNFCCC COP 28, Dubai, 2023. Photo: ICA*

Climate change's roots are deeply entwined with colonialism's legacy. As its devastating effects increasingly target Indigenous communities, we face an urgent imperative: to decolonize climate policy and amplify Indigenous-led solutions. This shift is not just ethical but essential, recognizing that those most affected often possess invaluable knowledge for addressing the crisis. By empowering Indigenous voices and traditional ecological wisdom, we can forge more equitable, effective responses to our shared environmental challenges.

Colonial states still hold a majority of power over Indigenous populations, their lands and territories. As a result, Indigenous rights to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), along with the respect and honoring of existing treaty agreements, are often neglected. Accordingly, Indigenous Peoples continue to be categorized as stakeholders to be consulted within the development of colonial laws, legislation and policies that impact (negatively and positively) the lives and rights of Indigenous Peoples rather than being afforded the resources and capacities to affirm their traditional laws, governance and practices.

In this article, we write from the perspective of Indigenous-led climate policy frameworks in Canada, and we recognize that much of our global representation has to do with our assimilation into Western systems and greater visibility in international arenas. North American colonial states are often regarded as the model for upholding Indigenous rights and environmental stewardship, while research shows a stark contrast between perception and reality. In fact, Canada is failing to protect both the environment and Indigenous rights while simultaneously contributing to the advancement of economic growth and the colonial empire.

By upholding North American Indigenous Peoples as the benchmark, it welcomes the idea that Western imperialism is an acceptable model towards the progress of Indigenous rights. It is not. At Indigenous Climate Action (ICA), we stand in opposition to the narrative that Indigenous Peoples can and should be absorbed into these colonial systems, as opposed to recognizing Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination through the revitalization of their own governance systems. Rather than absorbing Indigenous Peoples into these colonial frameworks, it is critical to uplift Indigenous solutions and governance models.

The Decolonizing Climate Policy research project

responds to this need by investigating the shortcomings and problems associated with Canadian climate policy while supporting and developing Indigenous-led climate strategies – governance approaches created by and for Indigenous Peoples that will raise up and empower Indigenous-led solutions.

## Barriers to participation

Colonialism has severed many Indigenous Peoples from their traditional territories and knowledge systems, making it harder for communities to practice sustainable land stewardship. The report from Phase One of Decolonizing Climate Policy investigated Canada's climate policy and planning frameworks. Our analysis focused on two previous federal climate plans: the Pan Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change (PCF), and A Healthy Environment and Healthy Economy (HEHE). It aimed to determine whether these plans, and climate policy and planning in Canada more broadly, meaningfully include Indigenous rights, knowledge and approaches in addressing the root causes of the climate crisis.

What we found is that both the process by which the plans were developed and the proposed policies and actions contained within them are flawed in their efficacy for driving real action, the ability to drive a just transition, and the relationships between Canada and Indigenous Peoples. While both the PCF and the HEHE plans frequently reference the role of Indigenous Peoples in addressing the climate crisis, there was no indication of meaningful inclusion in the development of these plans. Our findings indicate that Indigenous Peoples were structurally excluded from the process of developing them, violating their rights to self-determination and FPIC, as recognized and affirmed within Canadian and international law.

Furthermore, some of the solutions promoted in these plans ignore the realities faced by Indigenous Peoples and overlook the structural inequalities continuously reproduced through colonial relations and oppressive structures in Canada. The report outlines the barriers to Indigenous-led climate policy, such as forced disconnection from the land, the devaluation of Indigenous knowledge, and systemic exclusion from policy-making processes. To make matters worse, some of the proposed actions and initiatives in these plans risk negative impacts on Indigenous Peoples and violations of Indigenous rights.

This is observed by the Indigenous activist and scholar Tamra Gilbertson in *Decolonizing Climate Policy in Canada* (2021): “Indigenous Peoples were kept off the working group tables deliberately so they would not impact the politics of keeping

fossil fuels coming out of the ground by implementing carbon pricing...Keeping Indigenous Peoples off the working group tables and treating Indigenous Peoples as stakeholders is a violation of national and international law. This gross violation impacts Indigenous sovereignty and blatantly clarifies the intent to reduce Indigenous Peoples to stakeholders in an attempt to coerce and strong-arm participation in order to push through carbon pricing systems and other mechanisms that can violate land rights and sovereignty.”

## The reproduction of colonialism by climate policy

By highlighting the ways in which settler-led climate policy upholds colonial structures and excludes Indigenous governance systems, we established



*COP 27 in Glasgow. Restitution of lands is a critical step in the decolonization of climate policy. Photo: ICA*

the importance of including Indigenous perspectives in climate policy-making – it must prioritize reciprocal relationships with the land and all living beings. These elements of Indigenous relationality are often ignored or overridden by settler policies that prioritize economic gain over environmental and cultural sustainability.

From the report, it becomes clear that colonial policies restrict access to traditional lands, impede cultural practices, and limit the ability to pass down knowledge to future generations. There is a call for decolonizing these systems and reasserting Indigenous governance and protocols as the foundation for climate policy.

It is worth noting that this sentiment of structural exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from the development and advancement of laws, policies and legislation in the Canadian context is mirrored globally. This was stated by the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) in a statement at COP26, Glasgow: “Indigenous Peoples are affected first and worst by climate change and colonial climate action, yet we drive critical climate solutions rooted in our relationships with the living world. In exercising our protection on the frontlines, we face criminalization, human rights violations, and assassination. And in the COPs, we are excluded from decision making on issues that affect us the most.”

The call for colonial bodies to uplift and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the naming of colonialism as a root cause of climate change and Indigenous subjugation are repeated by various groups, among them the IIPFCC: “COP26 and future COPs must ensure the participation of Indigenous Peoples, including those of us with multiple intersections of identity. Colonialism caused climate change. Our Rights and Traditional Knowledge are the solution.”

As the recognition of Indigenous Peoples continues to grow and expand, there is a concerted effort to contextualize what this means beyond words and empty promises and to drive forward a decolonial framework for Indigenous Peoples across the world.

## Indigenous rights are the solution

For many Indigenous Peoples, the impacts of climate change began at first contact. The process of colonization, in which Indigenous lands were stolen and ecosystems disrupted, laid the groundwork for the climate crisis we are seeing today. Yet, it is the inherent rights and ways of life of Indigenous Peoples that offer critical solutions to combating climate change. Despite this, there still remains a heavy reliance on colonial science and governance to drive the strategies for achieving climate stabilization.

In the report *Decolonizing Climate Policy in Canada*, ICA Executive Director, Dēnesųtine, from the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation | Boreal Forest Biome, Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, explains it as follows: “A lot of the colonial policies are very human-centric and about upholding universal human rights and freedoms to the individual. Ultimately, if we don’t have species, and relationships on the land to support thriving communities, and cultures and nations, then those policies are just simply words on paper.”

This truth highlights the necessity of reinvigorating, practicing and sharing the long-held traditions of land stewardship that Indigenous Peoples have maintained since time immemorial. Phase Two of *Decolonizing Climate Policy* was launched to better understand the priorities, needs and visions for the future towards addressing the clima-



te crisis. The responses underscored a key message: Indigenous knowledge and governance must be at the heart of climate action. This sentiment is echoed globally, where Indigenous Peoples have repeatedly called for inclusion to be created in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) processes.

## Impacts on Indigenous communities

Temperature measurements across Canada show that we are experiencing warming at twice the global rate. Between 1948 and 1916, mean temperatures increased by 1.7°C for all of Canada and 2.3°C in the North, with the number of very hot days tripling over this period. During our conversations, many Indigenous Peoples shared how they are experiencing the impacts of climate change first-hand. Twenty-five percent of the people we spoke to reported observing extreme weather events, such as storms and droughts. Others noted that the weather is becoming warmer and drier, and with noticeable shifts in the seasons.

Water quality emerged as a big concern, with one-third of participants expressing worries about reduced snowpack, decreased availability of freshwater, and water contamination (for example, by hydro dams). These disruptions to water systems affect wildlife, generate loss of vegetation, and reduce water life populations, impacting entire ecosystems and food security for communities (especially access to traditional hunting and gathering practices).

As Hanna Paul of the Métis Nation of Alberta (Boreal Forest Biome) shared: “Flooding and fires have devastated my community and climate change has a massive hand in that. It’s impacted trap lines, hunting, and harvesting.” These events not only disrupt day-to-day life but they also make

it harder for people to get out onto the land and hunt, pick berries, and harvest medicines. Climate change is also threatening the health and safety of Indigenous communities in several ways. Changes in water levels are making it harder to travel in and out of island communities, and severe weather is causing the erosion of roadings, posing major safety concerns.

The impacts of climate change on our water, housing, health, and access to food are compounding pre-existing challenges in our communities, including food insecurity, access to healthcare services, and beyond. Overall, this is affecting the mental, physical and spiritual health of many communities.

## Looking forward: an Indigenous-led climate policy

Every day, Indigenous youth embody what it means to decolonize climate policy, exercising their rights and asserting themselves as leaders in climate action. They are hopeful for the future, emphasizing the need to center their voices in climate conversations and the potential they have to challenge current systems. They want to restore their connection to land and water as inherent in climate policy.

Indigenous youth stories contain teachings about our connections to plants, waters and animals. These instructions and responsibilities are not merely cultural customs or views: they are our laws and have never been extinguished. The youth also share what climate policy could look like if it were led by Indigenous Peoples and rooted in our worldviews, laws, governance systems and relationships with the land and its transformative potential for all.

Phase Two concludes with concrete ways to shift

political and economic systems in order to weaken the grasp of colonial control and make space for Indigenous land-based solutions to emerge, take hold and flourish, and build new economic and political systems. A decolonized approach to climate policy must empower communities to draw from their ancestral knowledge to develop laws that support their cultural survival and thrivance. This approach counters the notion of a blanketed “Indigenous policy”, instead recognizing the need for policies that respect the diverse governance systems, knowledge, and contributions of each Nation.

Decolonizing Climate Policy means policy created by and for Indigenous Peoples that works towards the advancement and uplifting of our rights, knowledge and perspectives. It means demanding the inclusion of Indigenous voices in aspects, and all levels, of climate policy-making and suggests that current policies must be reimagined to respect Indigenous sovereignty and prioritize relationships with the land. It is critical to ensuring

that just climate solutions are brought forward to address the legacy of harm caused by colonization and the climate crisis. Decolonization is not a responsibility meant to be held just by Indigenous Peoples, it is an effort that requires joint collaboration.



**Indigenous Climate Action (ICA)** is an Indigenous-led organization guided by a diverse group of knowledge keepers, water protectors and land defenders from communities and regions across the country. We believe Indigenous Peoples’ rights and knowledge systems are essential to developing solutions to the climate crisis and achieving climate justice. To learn more about Indigenous Climate Action, visit <https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/>.

# A Pathway to Climate Resilience for Indigenous Communities in Tanzania

Paine Eulalia Mako



*The Hadzabe community is on the frontline of climate change. Photo: Ujamaa Community Resource Team*

Indigenous communities in Tanzania face a myriad of challenges related to land rights, from land grabbing to environmental degradation. These communities work tirelessly to secure land and natural resources rights, aiming to strengthen their resilience against climate change. In this context, Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT), an Indigenous Peoples-led non-governmental organization, promotes secure land tenure and climate resilience through innovative approaches.



Indigenous communities in Tanzania, including the Maasai, Barabaig, Akie, Sonjo and Hadzabe, rely heavily on access to communal lands for their traditional livelihoods, such as pastoralism and hunting-gathering. However, land conflicts, insufficient legal protections, and the encroachment of development projects pose significant threats to their way of life. In addition, conservation laws often prioritize wildlife and tourism over the rights of Indigenous Peoples, leading to displacement and loss of livelihoods.

The Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT) addresses these challenges by supporting communities to secure Certificates of Village Land (CVLs) and communal Certificates of Customary Right of Occupancy (CCROs), which are crucial steps in land

tenure security. CVLs are obtained once neighbouring villages have reached agreement on their respective outer boundaries and sometimes require the resolution of existing conflicts. After completing a land-use plan, areas for common use, such as grazing, hunting, and gathering, are titled with a CCRO.

These legal tools provide Indigenous communities with the means to control and manage their lands sustainably. By promoting connectivity and traditional land-use practices, such as rotational grazing, the Ujamaa Community Resource Team helps communities adapt to climate change impacts such as severe droughts, which are increasingly common in northern Tanzania's arid regions.



*By preserving native grass species, communities maintain healthy and climate-resilient grazing lands. Photo: Ujamaa Community Resource Team*

## Strengthening governance for sustainable resource management

Securing land rights is just the beginning. Effective resource management requires accountable governance institutions that integrate customary practices with formal legal frameworks. The Ujamaa Community Resource Team advocates for transparent and equitable governance structures that empower communities to make collective decisions about their land and resources. This approach not only ensures sustainable management of natural resources but also supports the preservation of cultural practices and traditional knowledge.

UCRT's efforts include facilitating Participatory Village Land-Use Plans (PVLUPs) and Joint Village Land-Use Plans (JVLUPs) in order to promote coordinated management of shared resources. These plans enhance the connectivity of rangelands,

enabling both livestock and wildlife to move freely across the landscape. This is crucial for maintaining ecological balance and resilience against climate impacts.

Furthermore, one of the Ujamaa Community Resource Team's core objectives is to build community capacity for responsible environmental stewardship. By promoting practices such as sustainable rangeland management and integrating scientific knowledge with traditional approaches, UCRT helps communities create healthier ecosystems that are more resilient to climate change. For instance, in the Longido district, they are working with communities to improve the management of over 400,000 hectares of rangelands, benefiting both the environment and local livelihoods.

Through these initiatives, UCRT empowers communities to take proactive steps in adapting to climate variability, such as developing strategies for water conservation and soil erosion control.



*Community members point to their CCRO area. Since 2011, UCRT has secured over 1,700,000 hectares of communal land in northern Tanzania. Photo: Ujamaa Community Resource Team*

This capacity-building approach not only enhances climate resilience but also improves food security and reduces poverty by diversifying income sources through nature-based enterprises such as eco-tourism and carbon projects, which are developed in alliance with external actors.

## Promoting inclusive governance and social equity

Equitable resource management is crucial for sustainable development. Accordingly, UCRT places a strong emphasis on empowering marginalized groups, women, and youth. Through the Women's Rights and Leadership Forums (WRLFs), UCRT's inclusive approach fosters social influence, economic empowerment, skills development opportunities, strengthened community institutions and fair governance of resources.

By ensuring that all community members have a voice in decision-making processes, UCRT aims to create governance systems that are not only effective but also just. This inclusive model supports the broader goal of achieving equitable land rights and resource management, which are essential for building resilient communities capable of withstanding the impacts of climate change.

UCRT's work in securing land rights and promoting sustainable resource management is vital for the resilience of Indigenous communities in Tanzania. By linking land tenure security with climate resilience, UCRT provides a model of how Indigenous-led conservation can support both human and environmental well-being. As the challenges of climate change and land alienation intensify, the need for such community-driven approaches becomes ever more critical.

UCRT's advocacy efforts are amplified at the national level through its collaboration with national organizations such as PINGOs Forum and Tanzania Land Alliance. They also extend beyond Tanzania's borders: its members are engaged in international platforms such as the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These engagements aim to share best practices on community-based Indigenous climate resilience strategies, influence policy at multiple levels and ensure that Indigenous perspectives are included in global climate governance discussions.



*Paine Eulalia Mako* is a Maasai Indigenous woman and the current Executive Director of the Ujamaa Community Resource Team. She has worked with them for over ten years serving in different capacities.



# A School to Train Indigenous Women to Influence the Climate Struggle

Rocío Yon, Hortencia Hidalgo and Francisca Carril



*2nd School for Training and Advocacy with Indigenous Women on Climate Change, Metropolitan Region, 2023. Photo: Rosario Carmona*

Institutional responses to the climate crisis, guided by negotiations at the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), have perpetuated gender, ethnic and territorial inequalities. This situation can clearly be seen in the barriers facing Indigenous women's effective participation in decision-making. Given this failure, Indigenous movements and, Indigenous women in particular, are organizing to develop their own strategies for confronting the crisis, resisting extractivism and demanding environmental justice. These initiatives include training spaces in which to strengthen their struggles.



The climate crisis has had unequal environmental impacts on the population in a Latin American context. Institutional responses have tended to reproduce inequalities in terms of gender, ethnicity and territoriality. Indigenous and Afro-descendant women are among some of the worst affected. Despite being gradually considered in institutional spaces for participation at the global and national levels, their impact on spaces of power and decision-making is still low. The main barriers they face are a lack of information and a lack of validation of their knowledge. Such barriers coexist alongside scenarios of violence and inequalities of varying kinds.

Our region's experience nevertheless also offers responses that have arisen outside the frame of action of the States. The history of peoples and communities confronting environmental transformations is a long one and, since the 1990s, political organization has become especially relevant with

the intensification of extractivism in the region. A number of translocalized organizations have stood up for environmental justice by demanding self-determination, a struggle that has today also taken on the name of climate justice.

In this scenario, Indigenous women of different territorial origins have been the protagonists in promoting grassroots organizations. Through their collective organization and deep knowledge of their environments, they have managed to preserve ways of life that are interdependent with nature and threatened by the climate crisis. In addition, their contributions and careers transcend their territories: they are notable professionals in the environmental, legal and social sciences, and occupy roles as academics, public officials and community leaders. This plurality of experiences has allowed them to coordinate politically and to weave collaborative networks with other actors.



*Indigenous women are the driving force behind climate struggles in their communities. IV Training and Advocacy School with Indigenous Women on Climate Change, Tiltil, 2024. Photo: Francisca Carril*

## Capacity building for advocacy

One of Indigenous women's main strategies for advocacy has been training. Long-standing organizations such as the Organization of Indigenous and Amazonian Women of Peru (ONAMIAP) the Indigenous Women's Network on Biodiversity and the National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women in Chile have established initiatives by which to strengthen their leadership and actions, and build their capacities.

Through their own experiences in different local, national and global decision-making spaces, Indigenous women are exchanging knowledge and tools and publicizing the barriers they face. Based on the collective history of their peoples, they have thus improved their participation at the territorial, community and public policy levels, and have succeeded in establishing discussions in legislative debates, Indigenous consultations, international meetings and in the communities themselves.

Capacity building from their own worldview generates a recognition of their knowledge as valid, both in its heterogeneity and in its dynamism. This process allows for a collective and dialogical construction based on an exchange between different epistememes, with emphasis on those they consider their own (such as traditional and Indigenous knowledge). This dialogue is possible because of the collaboration between actors, and it enables the forging of networks between Indigenous women and communities, institutions, multilateral agencies, research centres and different organizations.

This collaboration has nurtured their advocacy strategies and allowed them to position their thematic priorities and ways of working in order to address climate justice. At the same time, it provides

them with tools that make it possible to reduce the gender gaps in their dialogue with institutions (as well as in the territories), and which strengthen actions at the community level.

## A climate change training and advocacy school with Indigenous women

In Chile, responses to the climate crisis have followed the broad outlines of international negotiations. However, the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in climate governance, as recommended by the COP, still encounters a number of barriers: a detailed analysis of national climate change policy reveals only marginal participation on the part of Indigenous Peoples. Firstly, they are presented as a homogeneous group and the gender dimension is therefore ignored. Secondly, the participatory State bodies relevant to them have been hurriedly improvised, without providing their members with the necessary skills for effective participation.

The scenario is consequently an alarming one given that climate policies in Chile are reproducing Indigenous women's situation of exclusion. As if this were not enough, they ignore the role that, through their local knowledge, these women could play in managing climate change. Failing to take concrete measures for their inclusion runs the risk of increasing their climate vulnerability.

The School for Training and Advocacy with Indigenous Women on Climate Change seeks to respond to this context of unequal participation. It is an initiative created collaboratively by the National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women and the Inter-thematic Working Group on Climate Change, Public Policies and Indigenous Peoples of the Center for Intercultural and Indigenous Re-

search (CIIR). Its origin dates back to 2021 in the context of advocacy work on the draft Framework Law on Climate Change in Chile, a law that completed its legislative process without Indigenous consultation or differentiated participation for Indigenous Peoples.

The objective of the School is for Indigenous women to influence climate governance from an understanding that this is not the exclusive task of State institutions. It is also to promote the construction of and dialogue on situated knowledge, emphasizing the experiences of Indigenous women, the effects of the climate crisis on their territories and the lessons learned from this. Ultimately, the School hopes to contribute to the political

coordination and networking of different actors committed to climate and social justice.

## Overcoming gaps from their own experiences

In its four virtual and in-person versions, this training space has connected almost 100 individuals, organizations and institutions. Among the topics addressed have been climate and ecological justice, impacts on bodies and territories, intercultural dialogue of knowledge, institutional climate governance at national and global levels, and territorial leadership actions as concrete contributions to climate change adaptation.



*The Training and Advocacy School with Indigenous Women on Climate Change has connected around 100 people, organizations and institutions. Santiago de Chile, second edition. Photo: Francisca Carril*



The School's outcomes have been key to building a more realistic concept of climate justice. Through workshops featuring critical and participatory methodologies, the historical circumstances of the climate crisis have been reconstructed, giving name to the systems of patriarchal, colonialist and global capitalist oppression that gave rise to it. From this situated perspective, it has been possible to look at and analyse the present, and to put forward shared notions of justice (how to live with the world) and of the future.

The training has had a significant impact on the formation of translocalised and multidisciplinary networks. The Schools have connected people from different territorialities and socio-cultural realities. Through listening and dialogue, Indigenous women share and learn from other experiences. Space has thus been given to a diverse range of

knowledge from a logic of horizontality, providing meaning and the possibility of action with which to face the crisis as a complex problem, challenging the vulnerable position in which climate policy has pigeonholed Indigenous women.

In addition, the knowledge shared and constructed at the School provides women with tools to participate in dialogues from which they are often excluded. Understanding climate policy and environmental institutions at different levels has been one of the most interesting and challenging topics. The women are seeking to reduce the information gap and overcome the high technical complexity of the subject. In addition, the women leaders aspire to receive training in all areas necessary to be able to dialogue effectively with the State and thus position their demands.



*In international spaces, the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples presents difficulties and the gender dimension is not considered. II Training and Advocacy School with Indigenous Women on Climate Change, Santiago, 2023. Photos: Francisca Carril*

## Training as a political strategy

The training spaces promoted by Indigenous women are providing concrete possibilities through which to build knowledge and put it into practise collaboratively. They are also contributing to positioning their working methods and methodologies, and to taking on different roles in training. This learning also enables Indigenous women to locate their own boundaries and timeframe given that these do not always coincide with the institutional framework or with external agents.

The contributions of women in these spaces are concrete: they have generated situated diagnoses of vulnerability based on an analysis of the life paths of both themselves and their communities. In addition, they have identified actions that contribute to addressing the crisis, together with the knowledge necessary for this work. Furthermore, from a strategic viewpoint, Indigenous women have analysed their possibilities for advocacy at the institutional level and with different actors, increasing their collaborative networks in this area.

Capacity building in these terms promotes personal experiences from a community perspective, deeply connected to the territories and expressed collectively. Through the meeting and exchange of these experiences, specific tools and strategies are generated with which to create influence in the territories, giving value to the feelings and actions of Indigenous women from their bodies-territories. At the same time, capacity building collaborates with institutional relations and promotes multilevel public policy advocacy, generating new alliances and collaborations with the different actors involved in environmental and climate issues.



**Rocío Yon** is a doctoral researcher at the Freie Universität Berlin and a member of the permanent team of the School for Training and Advocacy with Indigenous Women on Climate Crisis.



**Hortencia Hidalgo** is a member of the Focal Point of the Indigenous Women's Network on Biodiversity and a workshop leader of the School for Training and Advocacy with Indigenous Women on Climate Crisis.



**Francisca Carril** is a researcher at the Centre for Intercultural and Indigenous Studies (CIIR) and is a member of the permanent team of the School for Training and Advocacy with Indigenous Women on Climate Crisis.



# Indigenous Peoples Fighting Climate Change in Brazil. The Gap between the National Adaptation Plan and Autonomous Strategies

Martha Fellows and Sineia do Vale



*The opening session of the National Adaptation Plan was attended by APIB and the Indigenous Women's Organization. Photo: MPI*

Brazil is experiencing unprecedented extreme climate events, such as severe droughts and wildfires. Meanwhile, the federal government is reviewing its National Adaptation Plan, which represents an opportunity to include Indigenous perspectives in climate policy and change the future scenario. It took more than 500 years for Indigenous Peoples in Brazil to have their own Ministry. The question is: how many more will be needed to decolonize climate policies?

In its latest report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) flagged up that, even though climate change is a global phenomenon, some groups are more affected than others by its impacts. The climate justice debate raises the concern that the groups suffering an uneven burden are often those who have contributed the least to the climate crisis. Although countries from the Global North are historically responsible for the current scenario, Brazil currently ranks in the top ten biggest emitters.

Focusing on a national and regional context, Indigenous communities play an essential role in the efforts to combat the climate crisis. Well-known for their intrinsic relationship with the environment and their territories, Indigenous ancient knowledge systems and science have contributed to keeping the natural cycles and the climate balanced. In the Amazon, Indigenous Lands have low deforestation rates (>2%), making these areas fundamental to halting forest loss and keeping carbon in the soil. The average temperature of the Indigenous territories of the Brazilian Amazon is also two degrees lower, and evapotranspiration can be three times higher than that of pastures and monocultures in the surrounding areas.

Although Indigenous Peoples are crucial to mitigating the climate crisis, they are more exposed to its impacts because of their interdependence on natural resources. With the change in rain pattern, the risk of losing their crops increases, resulting in food insecurity. In previous years, whole communities were isolated due to the severe drought in the Amazon, which limited their access to essential goods and resources. Additionally, structural racism adds another barrier that excludes Indigenous communities from the decision-making processes where climate solutions are defined, such as the drafting of the National Adaptation Plans (NAP).

## Brazilian National Adaptation Plan

In 2016, Brazil launched its first version of the NAPE. At the time, the recently constituted Indigenous Committee on Climate Change (Comitê Indígena de Mudanças Climáticas – CIMC) participated in several meetings to present its input to this new public policy. Nonetheless, the format of the Brazilian NAP allocated Indigenous Peoples to the “Vulnerable Population and Peoples” sector. CIMC, the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI), and other civil society organizations such as the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (IPAM) contributed to the design of the “Vulnerable Population and Peoples” sub-chapter, following the limitations imposed at the time.

The current political momentum has shown more eagerness to embrace Indigenous Peoples at the same level as other sectors in reviewing the Brazilian NAP. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples (MPI) is among the 25 ministries redesigning the NAP process. Under the leadership of the minister, Sonia Guajajara, an internationally-renowned Indigenous leader, MPI brought together Indigenous organizations and representatives to shape the Indigenous Peoples sector.

However, even with the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) involved in the process, some Indigenous representatives found it challenging to contribute because the NAP had a rigid schedule and its methodology restricted the participation of many.

Expected to be released by the end of 2024, the new Brazilian NAP has advanced considerably in content and engagement. And yet the Indigenous organizations’ expectations may not be met due to the participation format afforded them. Fewer than 30 Indigenous representatives were able to

attend the workshop aimed at aggregating their perspectives on this climate policy. While those who could not be present had a chance to deliver their contribution through an open platform, most communities lack connectivity, restricting their participation in the process.

## Indigenous Peoples' autonomous strategies

Long before the Brazilian government or the international bodies had established the need to build national adaptation strategies, Indigenous Peoples were organizing themselves in various ways to fight the impacts of climate change. The Indigenous Council of Roraima (CIR) is a model of how Indigenous Peoples excel at combining their ancestral knowledge with non-Indigenous science.

Located in the north-east part of the Brazilian Amazon, the ethnic region of Serra da Lua covers three Indigenous territories and has served as a

case study for climate change actions. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, three extreme weather events hit these communities hard. First, a severe drought, followed by wildfires, devastated a significant proportion of the native vegetation within the Indigenous villages. Then, in 2011, the most important river of Roraima overflowed, breaking historical records.

Faced with these situations, CIR developed a case study on how Indigenous Peoples perceive climate change and what mechanisms they have to fight it. After three years of intensive work, the publication “Amazad Pana’Adinhan” presents the socio-environmental context of these territories and their calendar according to the natural cycles. The study closes with a chapter dedicated to presenting their plans to fight the consequences of climate change. It maps the most frequent impacts, how and when they will promote specific climate actions, and, finally, shares the responsibilities out among the community and its partners.



*Workshop promoted by MPI to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the Brazilian National Adaptation Plan. Photo: Ministry of Indigenous Peoples*

Because of its importance, this experience was mentioned in the first Brazilian NAP as an example of how Indigenous Peoples can promote adaptation actions. In 2023, during the 58th session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, this study re-emerged as a key model.

## Closing remarks

The current Brazilian NAP shows significant advancement compared to its previous version. It includes Indigenous Peoples at the same level as other sectors and invites Indigenous representative organizations to be a part of the process. Its lifespan, foreseen to be active until 2035, also demonstrates the political will to incorporate its goals as a pivotal State policy.

Nevertheless, it still carries old vices on how to build a public policy, which limits full engagement. Climate issues are complex themes that few are acquainted with. In this sense, if there is to be effective public participation from civil society, it is fundamental to create a robust baseline with which to harvest fruitful collaboration. Although

the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples legitimately led the process, Indigenous grassroots organizations had little room to contribute directly with their on-the-ground initiatives like the one presented by the Indigenous Council of Roraima.

The current political cycle is proving supportive of a progressive agenda; however, actual changes in public policies are a long journey. It took more than 500 years for Indigenous Peoples in Brazil to have their own Ministry. The question is: how many more will be needed to decolonize climate policies?



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**Sineia do Vale** is the coordinator of the environment department of the Indigenous Council of Roraima (CIR) and she was recently nominated as the Latin America and Caribbean co-chair of the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC), well-known as the Indigenous Caucus.



# Global Climate Policy and Indigenous Participation: Why Pay Attention to the United Nations Climate Conference of the Parties?

Beatriz Lima Ribeiro



*Latin American Indigenous leaders at COP25. Photo: Rosario Carmona*

Despite decades of meetings, the effects of climate change are worsening year on year. Temperatures continue to rise, droughts are more severe, and extreme and unpredictable weather events are occurring more frequently. These impacts disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples who, paradoxically, contribute the least to this phenomenon. We must insist on the importance of climate justice and the central role of Indigenous knowledge in global climate policy discussions.

International meetings have been happening for over three decades and yet there is still a feeling that we have not moved forward. Just this year, as one of the meetings under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was happening, a flood of catastrophic proportions devastated the state of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, leaving 85% of the state affected, including the state's capital. Simultaneously, Kenya suffered consequences from floods, affecting the capital Nairobi as well as the National Park and Maasai land, the Maasai Mara.

The mismanagement of responses and policies in each country exacerbated the situation. The capital of Kenya sits on top of the Nairobi River's floodplain and, although the Meteorological Department expected worse flooding in 2024 than previous years, not development of infrastructure followed. And the federal government failed to alert citizens, a situation that was exacerbated by the continued dismantling of environmental laws.

Similarly, the volume of water that fell in the south of Brazil was abnormal but expected in predictions. Nevertheless, since 2019, the state government of Rio Grande do Sul has disassembled environmental laws, proposed a "modernized Environmental Code", and facilitated the deforestation of previous protected areas for the expansion of cattle rearing. Because of this, there was no possible outflow for the Rio Guaíba, which crosses the whole state.

## Who is responsible for climate change?

As these events happen and the effects of climate change scale up, the idea of a climate catastrophe and the end of the world is building up in the media and international spaces, led by the United Nations. The destruction of life as we know it strengthens the sense of urgency to act that is demanded by Indigenous Peoples, environmental activists, and scientists. And yet, the bureaucracy of international environmental forums runs slow.



*Floods in the Maasai Mara. Like other Indigenous Peoples, Maasai pastoralists are particularly affected by changes in rainfall patterns. Photo: Maasai Mara*



In 1988, a conference entitled “The Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security” gathered atmospheric scientists from around the world together to bring awareness of changes in climate patterns and, more importantly, showcase predictions of how these changes would affect life on a global scale. The meeting was considered the “first global consensus” that this will be an era of unprecedented climate change, and that this is caused by human action.

So when we talk about urgency and environmental catastrophe caused by human action, who exactly is responsible? Climate justice questions how climate change has affected different people in different ways and on different timescales. It also challenges the notion of “human action” as a vague cause of climate change, instead pinpointing specific practices and histories. One key example is the situation of Indigenous Peoples, who have

continuously suffered the destruction of their territories, the dispossession of their lands, and relocation. Meanwhile, colonialism sustained the development of industrialization in the Global North and the expansion of fossil fuels. Paradoxically, without having contributed significantly to climate change, Indigenous Peoples are now suffering the most from its impacts.

The varying degrees of urgency and framing of the causes of climate change are present within the UNFCCC and the multiple groups of people engaging in these spaces. Over the years, international activism has succeeded in opening the COP up to civil society and the presence of Indigenous Peoples has increased. However, the influence of the oil industry has also been strengthened. In fact, the last Conference of the Parties (COP 28), which had the largest number of attendees, was held in one of the world’s main oil capitals: Dubai.



*Plenary space at COP 28 in Dubai. Although the COP was opened up to civil society, it also increased the influence of the companies that contribute most to climate change. Photo: Beatriz Lima Ribeiro*

## Thinking international climate governance

The purpose of UNFCCC meetings revolves around the construction and negotiation of documents by signatory countries, referred to as “Parties”. This is a state-focused process, whereby Parties have to reach a consensus on mitigation and adaptation actions. The signatory countries are the only ones that have the power to approve or reject the final wording in the negotiated documents and have the most access to the negotiation rooms. Most Indigenous delegates participating in these events have “observer status” similar to civil society organizations.

Indigenous Peoples have a differentiated set of rights guaranteed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous international activism has fought and guaranteed protection and respect for Indigenous rights since, historically, nation-states have committed acts of genocide, exploitation, and dispossession of Indigenous lands. Through the international arena, Indigenous Peoples have gained space to not only raise and denounce nation-states’ actions against Indigenous lives, practices and territories but also to actively advocate for the equitable inclusion of Indigenous voices and Indigenous knowledge in global discussions about climate change.

Indigenous Peoples have a distinct categorization within the UNFCCC as a “rights-based” constituency, along with two others: “youth” and “women and gender”. The important role of Indigenous Peoples in combating climate change has slowly been recognized in international climate discussions. Indigenous knowledge and practices must be considered within a process of their free, prior and informed consent, and Indigenous participation at this global level is essential to monitor how Parties will enact climate policy at national and regional levels.

In 2008, the UNFCCC recognized the International Indigenous Peoples’ Forum on Climate Change, a body that acts as the caucus for Indigenous Peoples with a mandate to agree on what Indigenous Peoples will be negotiating. In 2015, the Paris Agreement came into force, recognizing for the first time in a UNFCCC document the need to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and that the Parties must consider how adaptation action affects them. Furthermore, the Paris Agreement indicates that adaptation “[...] should be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems.”

## A Platform for Indigenous Peoples’ participation

Aligned with the Paris Agreement, in 2015, the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) was created to address the specific needs of Indigenous Peoples and propose mandated events in dialogue with the Parties. Concretely, the COP decided that it:

“Recognizes the need to strengthen knowledge, technologies, practices and efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples related to addressing and responding to climate change, and establishes a platform for the exchange of experiences and sharing of best practices on mitigation and adaptation in a holistic and integrated manner.”

Between 2016 and 2018, negotiations mediated between the International Indigenous People’s Forum on Climate Change, the UN, and the Parties continued to establish the purpose, content, and structure of the LCIPP. The establishment of the Facilitative Working Group (FWG), as a constitutive body under the UNFCCC in order to further operationalize the LCIPP, was decided in 2018 during COP 24. Its goal is to facilitate the implementation of three functions: knowledge, capacity for enga-

gement, and climate change policies and actions. The FWG collaborates with other bodies within and outside the UNFCCC to enhance the actions of the LCIPP under the UNFCCC.

The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform is currently implementing its second three-year workplan. It holds regional gatherings and an annual meeting in conjunction with the COP, develops Indigenous curricula and materials, promotes annual training workshops, and facilitates multi-stakeholder dialogues. The Facilitative Working Group therefore works as a liaison implementing the LCIPP and promoting a better institutional inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the UNFCCC negotiations.

Despite these advances, Indigenous Peoples still encounter many barriers to their effective participation, and few Parties are committed to supporting them. For example, one of the activities carried out by the FWG during COP 28 in Dubai was a meeting between Indigenous knowledge holders and the Parties. It aimed to construct a space in which Indigenous knowledge holders from around the world could share their practices, knowledge, and challenges in relationship to water and then share a report with the Parties to showcase Indigenous voices in matters related to climate change. While the dialogue was rich, diverse and substantial, the subsequent meeting was sparsely attended by Party delegates who were already known allies or had had some level of dialogue with the LCIPP.



*Flooding in Rio Grande do Sul during 2024. The devastation was such that Brazilian authorities predict that it will take decades for the region to recover what was lost. Photo: Universidad de Rio Grande do Sul*



## Challenges to addressing climate change

Scientific work, considered a reliable measure for predictions, mostly comes from atmospheric and natural scientists. The global scale of climate change combined with the nature of scientific predictions has abstracted the problem in a way that is difficult to align with the lived experience of its impacts. Knowledge construction over climate change has been limited to the natural and atmospheric sciences although, just recently, after more than 30 years, social scientists did contribute to the last IPCC report.

However, Indigenous and traditional knowledge remains excluded from global assessments on climate change due to the very nature of global climate policy and knowledge building. IPCC reports can only consider peer-reviewed journals, i.e., papers reviewed and accepted by the scientific community. The wide and profound knowledge shared by Indigenous communities around the world is accordingly excluded from international discussions on climate change. Indigenous knowledge should nevertheless be treated with the same authority as non-Indigenous scientific production.

Although institutional changes have occurred, they are still limited. The nature of such conferences de-

pends on the willingness of the Parties to address climate problems with the seriousness and urgency that is felt on the ground by Indigenous Peoples. The slowness of the process, the need to rely on the Parties' willingness to listen, and structural challenges to participation are barriers against the full participation of Indigenous Peoples.

So why continue to engage with the UNFCCC? The short answer is that the Parties and fossil fuel businesses will continue to engage in the process with a substantial amount of influence and means. If we are not there, as Indigenous Peoples, environmental activists, women, and youth, they will continue to exert influence over the COP and, through it, over the territories. The actions taken at the level of the UNFCCC have a direct impact on multiple levels. In other words, and rephrasing a sentence I heard in the hallways of COP: "If you are not at the table, you are on the menu."



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# Regeneration for Action: Indigenous Youth's Message in Climate Change Debates

Camila Romero Peiret



*Indigenous youth making placards in Bonn (Germany). Photo: Latin American Climate Youth Scholarship*

Every year, Indigenous youth's participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is becoming ever more visible. And yet, although the international community recognizes their voices and the key role they are playing in defending their rights, young people continue to face multiple barriers to their full and effective participation. Such barriers are pushing new generations to pioneer collective proposals that seek to remind the world of the urgency of regenerating the fabric in climate action and of the importance of adopting a comprehensive rights-based approach.

“Indigenous youth, both women and men, are leading the global movement for climate action,” said United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the commemoration of the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples in 2023. This statement marked a milestone in highlighting the leadership that young people exercise when defending their rights, despite the multiple problems they face on a day-to-day basis in their communities. Pondering the strength of these young people in organizational processes and multilateral bodies, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Francisco Cali Tzay, urged States to take measures to guarantee their participation in decision-making and to take account of the problems affecting them.

This recognition is the result of the struggles and efforts of young people who, from the countryside, the city, the forest and the mountains, have transcended their borders and their daily constraints to raise their voices against injustice. Their deteriorating livelihoods, the threats posed by extractive projects and the impacts of climate change on their territories are just some of the many reasons that are pushing a new generation of Indigenous individuals to take a stand and emerge from their communities. Many of them are thus arriving at negotiating spaces in which issues fundamental to the future of life and humanity are being decided, and they are reminding the world of the urgency of much needed change.

## Heirs to a major historical struggle

As the bearers of their ancestors’ legacy, increasing numbers of Indigenous youth are arriving at the UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COP), overcoming many difficulties along the way. The structural deficiencies they experience in their relations with States are reproduced in these multilateral negotiations and their full and effective participa-

tion is hindered by their observer status in the process. It is therefore urgent that States reverse the unequal conditions to which they have relegated Indigenous Peoples, despite being rights holders, and that they recognize their agency as political actors.

In this context, Indigenous youth are reclaiming the legacy of their elders’ leaders to get their rights respected, both in their own countries and in the United Nations and, specifically, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In this space, young people find an opportunity to meet with leaders from around the world, joining in current processes that will define the struggles of the future. A future in which the leadership of the new generations is already critical.

At its 23rd session, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues emphasized the barriers they face: “Indigenous youth face significant barriers, including discrimination and marginalization, which severely undermine their ability to practise and maintain their culture, traditions, language and identity.” The body recommended that Member States and the United Nations system develop educational and leadership programmes tailored to the needs of Indigenous Peoples. The Forum believes it is essential that young Indigenous women are enabled to realize their potential as leaders and guardians of their culture and territory.

In a scenario rife with colonial overtones, the voices of youth should not go unheard. Their message is a call to humanity to recover an integral and transgenerational vision of life: one focused on the regeneration of society, its human and natural bonds, one that envisages a future life on earth and the right of the next generations to exist. Regeneration for action, in the context of the climate crisis, is the example set by Indigenous youth in demanding to be heard and included in decision-

king. This is also an opportunity to rebuild a damaged fabric in need of repair, and in which the values and wisdom of our ancestors are necessary now more than ever.

## A future for Indigenous Youth

One year on from the founding of the International Indigenous Youth Forum on Climate Change (II-YFCC), formally recognized under the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change (IIP-FCC), Indigenous youth from the seven socio-cultural regions are now putting forward their proposals to move from symbolic to substantive recognition of their rights and agency. They are calling for the inclusion of a trans- and intergenerational perspective in the search for solutions, allowing for regeneration of the fabric. They are also calling for a transformation of the colonial logic of the current development model, thus ensuring that age-old wisdom of incalculable value to climate action is passed down.

With their proposals, Indigenous youth are seeking to remove the barriers to participation in climate negotiations and thus ensure a future in which their realities are present and their voices represented in both formal and informal negotiating spaces. In the last consultation with the Youth Champion for COP 29, Leyla Hasanova, representatives of the International Indigenous Youth Forum on Climate Change expressed their concern at the colonial logic being perpetuated in the UNFCCC, including a lack of recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity, world-views and spirituality. They requested culturally safe spaces for Indigenous youth who participate in the meetings to perform their ceremonies.



*Fringe event of the International Indigenous Youth Forum on Climate Change in the Indigenous Pavilion at COP 28.  
Photo: Camila Romero*

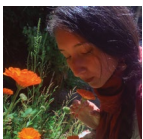




*Meeting of the International Indigenous Youth Forum on Climate Change (IIYFCC) in Dubai, during COP28. Photo: IIYFCC*

The young people also demanded the provision of effective interpreting as this is a crucial aspect that limits the involvement of Indigenous leaders who do not speak the official UN languages, particularly English. In addition, they requested that Indigenous communities and organizations be provided with direct, simplified and equitable access to climate funds. They thus added their voice to the complaints made by Indigenous Peoples' organizations regarding the diversion and mismanagement of funds, which is preventing resources from reaching the communities. It is hoped that this discussion will be further developed in future meetings. The IIYFCC stated as follows: "Reaffirming a com-

mitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is crucial and necessary in the development of all national policies and the UN-FCCC. Indigenous youth cannot participate meaningfully if we are fighting for basic human rights, including the right to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent."



*Camila Romero Peiret* is a Quechua from the Chilean Andes. She is also an anthropologist, Indigenous rights advocate and socio-environmental activist.



# Honouring Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives of Climate Change Impacts: Research and Policy Implications

Victoria Reyes-García and LICCI Consortium



*The Betsileo village of Namoly Valey (Madagascar). Photo: Vincent Pocher*

As key actors in climate knowledge and impacts, Indigenous Peoples should have a more significant role in how the international community addresses climate change. Especially when Indigenous Peoples suffer most from forest fires, droughts affecting their food sovereignty, melting Arctic ice and rising sea levels on islands. At this point, the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making and scientific research needs to be improved.

Indigenous Peoples, who have contributed the least to climate change, are suffering the most from its effects. Their ways of life, which depend heavily on nature, are being disrupted, particularly in places like the Arctic, small islands, and mountain regions. Because Indigenous Peoples live so closely with the land, they notice and describe these changes through their unique cultural and environmental perspectives.

Indigenous ancestral knowledge gives humanity valuable insights into how to deal with climate change. However, despite their deep understanding, their knowledge is often overlooked in climate change reports and policies, even when other information is limited or adaptation strategies are

needed in their territories. As key knowledge holders on the climate and its effects, Indigenous Peoples should have a bigger role in shaping how we address climate change, both locally and globally.

In response to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) call to governments for more inclusive and rights-based climate strategies, a network of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers teamed up in a global project focusing on Indigenous knowledge of climate change: Local Indicators of Climate Change Impacts (LICCI). Below, we present LICCI's key findings and policy recommendations.



*Koryak reindeer herders in Siberia explain that climate change increases 'rain-on-snow' events, making it difficult for reindeer to reach food and forcing them to migrate in search of better pastures. Photo: Drew Gerkey / LICCI*



## Climate change impacts on Indigenous territories

Research from many parts of the world clearly shows that Indigenous Peoples are noticing ongoing, real changes in the environments they have lived in and managed for generations. For example, the Gurung People in Laprak (Nepal) report that frequent extreme rainfall events, flash floods, landslides, and cold waves are disrupting traditional agricultural calendars and livestock productivity, impacting food security and the local economy. For the Collagua People in the Colca Valley (Peru), or Maya in Timucuy (Mexico), unpredictable weather is making farming more difficult and stressful, while for the Inuit on Baffin Island (Canada), hunting on sea ice is becoming much more dangerous due to changing ice conditions.

Indigenous Peoples' reports on climate change do not always match up with scientific instrumental records, thus offering fresh insights for humanity. Their knowledge can reveal climate change impacts in areas that global weather stations often miss, such as parts of the Arctic, mountains, deserts, or rainforests. For instance, Twa farmers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have noticed changes in fog patterns, a detail not captured by weather stations, thus helping to better understand the climate impacts in that region.

In many Indigenous communities, the impacts of climate change are not seen in isolation but as part of a bigger picture of environmental and social transformations. Indigenous Peoples often recognize climate change as just one factor contributing to environmental damage, alongside things like overuse of natural resources (such as logging or overfishing), poorly planned development projects, new infrastructure, and government policies. These other factors are often seen as more immediate and serious threats than climate change.

The Daasanach People in Northern Kenya say that water infrastructure projects and conservation policies have been major causes of environmental changes in their area.

In Argentina's Dry Puna region, Kolla-Atacameño pastoral communities have noticed less rainfall. Nevertheless, they also point to the degradation of wetlands—important for water and grazing—due to road construction and lithium mining. In many places, climate change increases the vulnerability of Indigenous Peoples. Koryak reindeer herders in Siberia say that climate change is intensifying the problems left behind by the social and economic upheavals of the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.

Moreover, Indigenous Peoples often interpret environmental changes in cosmological and/or spiritual terms. The Tsimane' People in the Bolivian Amazon believe that the use of inappropriate, abusive, or culturally disrespectful hunting, fishing, and gathering techniques awakens the anger of the guardian spirits of nature, who punish the Tsimane' with resource scarcity. Tsimane' cosmovision and spiritual beliefs play a prominent role in their understanding of how and why the world changes, and should thus be acknowledged in any attempt to bridge knowledge systems.

## Indigenous climate change adaptation strategies

Indigenous Peoples deal with the impacts of climate change in different ways, depending on their situation. Many of their responses involve local solutions, such as iTaukei communities in Fiji sharing food to support each other or making small changes to their farming practices. The Bassari People (Senegal) and the Betsileo People (Madagascar) use a variety of crops and landscapes to endure droughts and unpredictable weather.



Climate change also pushes Indigenous Peoples to make significant changes, such as relocating or shifting to activities that rely less on nature. For example, the Inughuit (Greenland), a community traditionally involved in fishing and hunting, have transitioned to wage labour occupations. However, while allowing them to cope with climate change impacts in the short-term, these responses can have drawbacks, such as decreased traditional activities, lower food production, and a greater need to rely on markets, becoming maladaptive in the long-term. For example, by adopting a more market-oriented agriculture, Collagua farming communities in Peru's Colca Valley have become less food resilient as they produce fewer traditional crops such as quinoa and fava beans.

Indigenous knowledge offers valuable adaptation solutions that are specific to their local context. Because of their long connection with the land, Indigenous Peoples' responses to climate change often reflect their unique way of life and cultural values. Their strategies can inspire more sustainable, diverse, and locally-driven action plans. For example, the resources shared by iTaukei communities (Fiji) ensure food security after climate disasters, prioritizing the community over individual gain—an approach not often seen in national plans.



*iTaukei women are leading the way in climate change adaptation. They rehabilitate mangroves and plant trees on the riverbank to increase their adaptive capacity. Photo: Na Teci Roaroa / LICCI*

## Barriers to adaptation and cooperation with science

Indigenous Peoples face social, political, and cultural obstacles that hinder their adaptation capacity. Factors such as limited political influence, poverty, unequal access to resources, and other challenges tied to colonialism and racism continue to hold them back. The Mapuche-Pehuenche People in Southern Chile say their vulnerability comes from the ongoing damage to their land caused by logging and their long-standing exclusion from important decision-making processes.

Within every Indigenous People, certain groups may face additional challenges. One case that is repeated across most regions is that of Indigenous women in patriarchal cultures, who may not benefit equally from adaptation strategies. In the Bassari

community (Senegal), the shift to growing cash crops such as cotton has reduced women's control over household money and could negatively affect family nutrition as farming becomes less diverse.

Combining Indigenous knowledge with new opportunities can help to overcome these barriers, lead to new solutions for adapting, and reduce the effects of climate change, both locally and globally. For example, Inuit fishers in Arctic Canada are working with scientists, using technology to manage the risks of changing sea ice. Together, they are co-managing the fisheries, which helps to improve food security, encourages learning, and creates shared knowledge. Tibetans from Shangri-La County have adjusted to the widespread lack of water caused by climate change by blending their traditional livelihoods with the new opportunities brought about by tourism.



*In Senegal, the Bassari People have started to grow cash crops such as cotton. This shift could negatively affect family nutrition as agriculture becomes less diverse. Photo: Benjamin Klappoth*



## Towards a better inclusion of Indigenous Peoples

The current crisis demands that climate change decision-makers, both locally and globally, recognize Indigenous Peoples as legitimate custodians of knowledge on climate change and its impacts and honour their rights to participate in climate change decision-making in a just, equitable, and effective manner. Based on the findings from the LICCI project, the team has developed specific recommendations for decision-makers and research institutions working with Indigenous communities and climate change.

### Recommendations for decision-makers:

1. Enhance decision-makers' ability to engage with Indigenous knowledge: strengthen the skills and capacity of both individuals and institutions to understand, appreciate, and integrate Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and insights, ensuring fair treatment in climate-related discussions.
2. Adopt a rights-based approach to climate policy: uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples as outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This includes thorough and ongoing consultation, as well as ensuring Free, Prior, and Informed Consent before any climate policies—whether for mitigation, adaptation, or reparation—are implemented in their territories.



*Indigenous village on a hillside in Darjeeling (Himalayas). Because of their interdependence with nature, mountain peoples suffer most from climate change. Photo: Reinmar Seidler*



3. Ensure Indigenous representation at all decision-making levels: Indigenous Peoples must be included in every stage of climate decision-making, from assessing needs and distributing funding to planning, monitoring, and evaluating adaptation programs. Their participation in national and global processes should be permanent, meaningful, and effective, including having voting rights.

4. Guarantee fair climate finance: governments must cover the costs Indigenous Peoples face as they adapt to climate changes they did not cause. Indigenous communities should have a lead role in deciding where funds for climate mitigation and adaptation are directed and should be part of climate accountability bodies, such as those overseeing loss, damage, and redress (e.g., UN-REDD or the Green Climate Fund).

5. Promote locally-led, inclusive solutions: governments and climate adaptation programs should move away from technology-focused solutions that exclude Indigenous Peoples and may create dependence. Instead, the focus should be on locally-driven, integrated solutions that address the root causes of environmental change and the needs of vulnerable groups.

6. Foster coherence across climate adaptation policies: ensure that policies are coordinated across sectors and scales to comprehensively tackle the diverse and simultaneous challenges Indigenous Peoples face in adapting to climate change.

### **Recommendations for research institutions and funding agencies:**

1. Promote local leadership: ensure Indigenous Peoples are represented in scientific, advisory, and decision-making bodies that shape climate and environmental research. Encourage Indigenous lead

authorship in key publications to elevate their voices in global discussions.

2. Support collaborative research: create opportunities to co-develop inclusive, context-specific, and fully participatory research proposals with Indigenous partners.

3. Adopt a rights-based research approach: research involving Indigenous Peoples should follow strict protocols that respect Indigenous data sovereignty and governance. This includes Indigenous representation on research ethics boards, in data regulation bodies, and throughout the research process.

4. Build communities of practice: establish national and international networks that enable Indigenous communities to share experiences and knowledge of climate change impacts.

5. Broaden research evaluation criteria: shift the focus away from traditional academic metrics. Evaluate research based on the time and resources needed for collaborative projects, the relationships established with communities, and the tangible benefits the research brings to those communities.

6. Reduce the environmental impacts of research: climate research should minimize its carbon footprint by reconsidering travel and reducing the digital footprint of projects. Promote a transparent discussion on reducing environmental impacts while balancing researcher well-being and research quality.



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**LICCI Consortium** is a research network that includes people of different nationalities, disciplinary backgrounds and positions, who recognise the need to increase the transferability, integration and scalability of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' information in climate research. A full list of members of the LICCI Consortium can be found here <https://www.licci.eu/consortium/>

Indigenous Debates is a monthly digital magazine that aims to address the struggles, achievements and challenges of Indigenous Peoples from the perspective of the territories and communities, academic knowledge and activist commitment.

This special edition of Indigenous Debates presents articles that address climate policy from a decolonizing perspective, focusing on the voices and proposals of Indigenous Peoples. The articles, written by Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists, advocates and academics, explore initiatives led by different Indigenous collectives to address climate challenges. The leading role of Indigenous women and youth in the development of local solutions and the search for spaces for international participation is noteworthy. The edition emphasizes the need to transform climate governance structures in order to ensure Indigenous leadership, recognizing their contributions as fundamental to addressing the interconnected crises we face.



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