



Nationally Determined
Contributions in Asia:
Are governments recognizing
the rights, roles and contributions
of Indigenous Peoples?

Regional summary of 10 country studies from Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam

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Cover photo: Huay Ee Khang villagers and neighbors from nearby villages in Chiang Mai, Thailand are participating in their traditional ritual to inform the guardian spirits before releasing fish into Mae Wang stream. **Photo Credit:** Nakharin Manaboon, Indigenous Media Network (IMN).



Karen leaders performing spiritual ceremony
in Huay Ee Khang village, Thailand.
Photo credit: Lakpa Nuri Sherpa, AIPP.

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Foreword

The Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) is a regional organization founded in 1992 by Indigenous Peoples' movements. AIPP is committed to the cause of promoting and defending Indigenous Peoples' rights and human rights and articulating issues of relevance to Indigenous Peoples.

AIPP in partnership with its member and partner organizations has been carrying out a series of awareness raising and capacity building initiatives on climate change in Asia since 2009. Our policy briefing papers and training manuals on climate change and the rights of Indigenous Peoples have been published in English, and in national and Indigenous languages. We are proud to see that these knowledge products developed for Asian region are being contextualized and used by Indigenous Peoples' organizations in Africa and Latin America.

AIPP partnership on climate change has empowered Indigenous Peoples, resulting in constructive policy engagement and influence at local, national, and regional levels. AIPP has also been active as the focal point of the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) within the UNFCCC processes and has been consistently working to support the international climate movement of representatives of Indigenous Peoples from the seven socio-cultural regions of the World.

With the adoption of the Universal Agreement on Climate Change, popularly known as the Paris Agreement, the establishment of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform and the submissions of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Parties, AIPP and its members and partners felt the need to build and strengthen an evidence-based policy advocacy to amplify the roles and contributions of Indigenous Peoples in the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

In this regard, AIPP in consultation with its members and partners undertook an unprecedented effort for policy research in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam to shed light on how the rights, roles and knowledge of indigenous men, women, youth, and persons with disabilities are addressed in national-level climate policies and plans, such as NDCs, REDD+ strategies, national adaptation plans, and relevant environmental laws in Asia. We have also prepared regional report that synthesizes the findings and recommendations from the country-level studies.

The country reports and this regional report will serve as baseline documents for AIPP and its member and partner organizations working on climate change and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. We encourage our sisters and brothers to utilize the findings of the country and regional reports to advance the recognition and respect of the rights and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples on climate policies. We also call on the UNFCCC Parties, UNFCCC Secretariat, UNFCCC Constituencies, and relevant actors to support and respond to the recommendations highlighted in the reports. We will annually update the country reports and the regional report to monitor the implementation of the NDCs at national level and track regional and international climate-action commitments as they relate to the rights of indigenous men, women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

Kittisak Rattanakrajangsri

Chairperson of Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)

Abbreviations

AIPP	Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination on Discrimination Against Women
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
LCIPP	Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform
NDC	Nationally determined contribution
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Background

For decades, Indigenous Peoples have been advocating for their rights, knowledge, and traditional sustainable practices to be recognized in international climate change negotiations and to be included in related international and national climate mitigation and adaptation plans and agreements. With the continuous improvement in coordination among indigenous rights-holders, their representatives, and allies from around the world, the indigenous movement has become a force to be reckoned with. Important references to Indigenous Peoples' rights, knowledge and roles in climate mitigation and adaptation have been included in decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), notably the Paris Agreement,¹ and a Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) has been established to further enable and strengthen their engagement with the UNFCCC process.²

At this key moment in international efforts to curb climate change, with countries having submitted their latest commitments and actions on climate mitigation and adaptation,³ the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) is partnering with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through the UN-REDD Programme and the Forest Peoples Programme, on a study to shed light on how the rights, roles and knowledge of indigenous men, women, youth, and persons with disabilities are addressed in national-level climate policies and plans, such as nationally determined contributions (NDCs), REDD+ strategies, national adaptation plans, and relevant environmental laws in Asia. The results of the study are documented in 10 country-level reports⁴ incorporating a gender perspective, which also identify Indigenous Peoples' practices that are already contributing to the goals of the Paris Agreement. This regional report synthesizes the findings and recommendations from the country-level studies. Since the synthesis is based on the policies reviewed in each national report it does not claim to exhaustively cover all climate policies in all 10 countries.

¹ The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change that was adopted by 196 parties of the UNFCCC during COP21 in Paris in 2015. Its main goal is to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.

² The LCIPP was established by paragraph 135 of the Paris Agreement and the Facilitative Working Group of the LCIPP was established in 2018 as a constituted body to the UNFCCC to provide advice, technical input and expertise to advance the implementation of the Convention and the Paris Agreement.

³ Most countries updated their Nationally Determined Contribution in the run-up to COP26 in Glasgow. See here for the latest submissions: <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NDCStaging/Pages/All.aspx>

⁴ Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam

The country reports and this regional report will serve as baseline documents for AIPP and its member and partner organizations working on climate change and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. AIPP will annually update the country reports and the regional report to monitor the implementation of the NDCs at national level, and track regional and international climate-action commitments as they relate to the rights of indigenous men, women, youth, and persons with disabilities. The reports will also inform the discussions and plans of the Facilitative Working Group of the UNFCCC Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform.



Mr. Lakpa Nuri Sherpa of AIPP participating in the action of Indigenous Peoples during the COP22 in Marrakech.
Photo Credit: AIPP.

Summary of findings

- **Status of Indigenous Peoples:** The legal recognition of Indigenous Peoples' collective rights varies between the countries included in this study. While almost all of the countries supported the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and have ratified the International Bill of Human Rights, only a few of the national legal frameworks contain clear commitments to customary land and resource rights. Further, regardless of the legal recognition, Indigenous Peoples in all 10 countries regularly experience social, political, cultural and economic discrimination and threats to their traditional lands, forests and waters. They also often face being criminalized for carrying out their traditional activities, particularly shifting cultivation,⁵ or for protecting their territories.
- **Indigenous Peoples and climate change impacts:** Being mostly directly dependent on the natural resources around them, Indigenous Peoples in all 10 countries are increasingly at the forefront of the impacts of higher temperatures and unpredictable weather patterns. Floods, soil erosion, wildfires, landslides and destruction of arable land are threatening their food and water security, access to medicine, mental health and family relations, often putting a disproportionately heavy weight on the shoulders of indigenous women.
- **Indigenous Peoples and NDCs:** With a few exceptions, Indigenous Peoples are invisible as rights-holders, knowledge-holders and agents of positive change in national climate policies.⁶ Instead, they are usually featured as victims of climate change, or participants and/or beneficiaries of climate change plans, projects and funds. None of the NDCs acknowledge that the land on which many of the policy efforts will be undertaken⁷ is under the customary landownership of Indigenous Peoples. And while a very few make a general reference to human rights obligations, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples, women, and persons with disabilities, none provide any detail on how protection of rights will be enforced.

⁵ Shifting cultivation is also referred to as swidden cultivation or rotational farming.

⁶ In this publication, 'rights-holders', 'knowledge-holders' and 'agents of positive change' refer to the following: Rights-holders: Indigenous Peoples who hold internationally protected human rights – including to customary lands; to self-determination; to free, prior and informed consent and others – that may be affected by activities or measures proposed by NDCs and other climate policies. Rights-holders, who have legally recognized human rights, should be distinguished for stakeholders, who may have interests (including, in some cases, legal interests), but whose human rights will not be affected by decisions concerning proposed activities or measures. Knowledge-holders: Indigenous Peoples hold deep-rooted knowledge about and maintain strong connections with their natural surroundings, which is crucial for mitigating and adapting to climate change. Agents of positive change: They hold the power, capacity and knowledge to mobilise and lead actions towards climate-change mitigation and adaptation for the good of the planet as a whole.

⁷ E.g. Forest-protection measures and renewable energy projects

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- **Indigenous Peoples and REDD+ policies and plans:** Among the climate-related policies reviewed, the national REDD+ strategies and plans most consistently contain language on and provisions for Indigenous Peoples and their rights – this is likely due to the Cancun safeguards, which countries must commit to implement as part of their REDD+ implementation. The importance of Indigenous Peoples’ participation—in some cases, with reference to free, prior and informed consent—is the most frequent reference. This is because for most of the countries studied, Indigenous Peoples have been part of the national REDD+ policy processes during the REDD+ readiness phase. Land tenure is also referenced in a number of the strategies in relation to the need for tenure reform to clarify ownership; however, in most instances it is not expressly stated whether foreseen tenure reform will formally recognize the customary land rights of Indigenous Peoples.
 - **Indigenous women, youth and persons with disabilities:** These groups, including their key role in helping to protect forests and combat climate change, receive very little attention in the climate policies reviewed for this study. Indigenous women and youth are mentioned in policies in two countries, and Indigenous Peoples with disabilities are not mentioned at all. However, the broader categories of women, youth and other “marginalized groups” feature more regularly—often in the context of their vulnerability to climate change, their need for capacity building, and as beneficiaries of climate programs.
 - **Indigenous Peoples’ concerns:** The country studies highlight that climate policies almost exclusively fail to address land tenure insecurity—caused by a lack of legal recognition of customary land rights—and the related threats to traditional livelihoods faced by Indigenous Peoples. In several instances, the policies even contribute to the criminalization of traditional sustainable practices by defining them as drivers of deforestation. Concerns around the lack of broad and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, especially of indigenous women, youth and persons with disabilities, are also raised.
 - **Negative impacts of climate policies and projects:** While most of the climate policies reviewed are yet to be implemented, it is likely that impacts experienced with previous environment and climate projects will be repeated unless underlying issues are addressed. These impacts include supposedly climate- and forest-friendly projects that are being implemented on Indigenous Peoples’ land without their free, prior and informed consent, and the fining and imprisonment of indigenous men and women for carrying out their traditional activities on their own lands.

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- **Opportunities and benefits:** In a few countries, international climate and environmental policies have brought more attention to Indigenous Peoples’ and women’s issues at the national level, including through greater opportunities for their participation in policymaking processes. In some situations, finance linked to climate and environmental processes has also successfully reached Indigenous Peoples and helped improve their livelihoods and increase their food security.
 - **Indigenous Peoples’ contributions to climate change mitigation and adaptation:** The 10 country studies highlight a series of ways that indigenous men, women, youth and persons with disabilities contribute to the goals of the Paris Agreement. They do this, for example, by protecting forests and biodiversity, which increases the amount of carbon dioxide sequestered; by adhering to their customary rules, practices and traditional livelihood activities; by maintaining and transferring their knowledge and wisdom on how to adapt to harsh climatic conditions; and by providing inspiring examples of food system resilience.



□ Noraeri Thungmueangthong, the first woman chief of Huay Ee Khang Village , Thailand. She is piloting 60 rai (9.6 hectares) of community forests to become an “Indigenous Women’s Forest” to create a natural classroom for Indigenous Knowledge transmission amongst Pgakenyaw girls and women and to generate supplementary income in the future.
Photo Credit: Lakpa Nuri Sherpa, AIPP.

Recommendations

National climate policies must clearly recognize indigenous men, women, youth and persons with disabilities as rights-holders, knowledge-holders and equal partners in efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

In the short-term (now – 2 years), states must:

- ensure the **full and effective participation** of indigenous men, women, youth and persons with disabilities in the **implementation** of existing NDCs and other climate policies
- **build the capacity** of regional and local government bodies, and other actors responsible for overseeing climate policy implementation, to ensure that the rights and roles of Indigenous Peoples recognized on paper are also respected in reality
- **promote the important role** that indigenous men, women, youth and persons with disabilities already play in addressing climate change and ensure the **protection of their knowledge and customary sustainable use of resources**, including by ensuring direct access to financial and technical resources to support the continuation of these important roles
- establish **local- and national-level mechanisms** to allow indigenous men, women, youth and persons with disabilities to actively participate in climate policy processes and to ensure that they have enough information and capacity to meaningfully engage
- ensure that, **in line with the functions of the LCIPP**, such local- and national-level mechanisms promote “the exchange of experiences and best practices with a view to applying, strengthening, protecting and preserving traditional knowledge” of Indigenous Peoples and “build the capacity of indigenous peoples and local communities to enable their engagement in the UNFCCC process as well as the capacity of Parties [...] to engage with indigenous peoples”.^{8,9}

⁸ <https://unfccc.int/LCIPP#eq-2>

⁹ Of the 10 NDCs reviewed, only that of Myanmar mentions the LCIPP, saying that lessons learnt from the traditional and indigenous knowledge and technologies that are developed in Myanmar will be shared through the platform.

In the medium-term (2–5 years), states must:

- initiate fully participative processes, with dedicated budgets, for the revision of national-level climate policies, **including the NDCs**, to ensure that they:
 - explicitly **recognize and reward Indigenous Peoples’ historical and ongoing defence** and maintenance of nature and climate, including through the full recognition of customary land tenures
 - include **indigenous tenure security, traditional knowledge, and traditional livelihoods** (e.g. shifting cultivation) as **climate solutions** necessary to reach the goal of the Paris Agreement
 - set out **timebound plans for how to monitor and report** on the implementation of these solutions in partnership with Indigenous Peoples’ organizations
 - clearly acknowledge that the lands on which many mitigation and adaptation projects are planned are under the customary ownership of Indigenous Peoples and that any development affecting these lands must **respect the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples**, including through obtaining and maintaining their free, prior and informed consent
- initiate law reform processes with the full and effective participation of indigenous men, women, youth and persons with disabilities with the aim of **securing customary land and resource rights in national law**. Safeguards contained in climate policies are unlikely to be successfully implemented if based on national legislation that is more regressive than the policies.



Dao Indigenous Women of Vietnam are sharing the medicinal plants.

Photo Credit: Centre for Sustainable Development in the Mountainous Areas (CSDM).

01

01

General status of Indigenous Peoples in focus countries

All but one¹⁰ of the countries studied voted in favour of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) when it was adopted in 2007. Most of the countries have also ratified key United Nations human rights treaties that contain protections important for Indigenous Peoples, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention on the Elimination on Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).¹¹ The extent to which these international commitments and obligations have been translated into recognition, respect and protections of key rights for Indigenous Peoples in the national legal frameworks varies significantly between countries.

In a few countries, rights feature quite clearly in national laws. This is the case in the Philippines, for example, where the Constitution (1987) declares that the State “shall protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to their ancestral lands to ensure their economic, social, and cultural well-being”, and that it shall “*recognize, respect and protect their rights to preserve and develop their cultures, traditions and institutions*”. In line with these provisions, the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act 1997 clearly expresses that the State shall recognize and promote all the rights of indigenous cultural communities/Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines, including their rights to ancestral domain, self-governance and cultural integrity. Another example to note is Indonesia, where the third amendment of the Constitution (1999) contains provisions for the recognition of the traditional rights of Indigenous Peoples.¹²

¹⁰ Bangladesh

¹¹ Myanmar and Malaysia are the only two countries that have not ratified all these conventions. Myanmar has ratified ICESCR, CRC, CRPD, CEDAW and Malaysia has ratified CEDAW, CRC and CRPD.

¹² Note that this recognition is conditioned by the following language: “[...] to the extent they still exist and are in accordance with the development of the society and the principle of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, which shall be regulated by laws”.

The Constitutional Court confirmed in 2013 that this includes the rights of Indigenous Peoples over their lands and territories, including their collective rights over traditional forests.¹³

In other countries, the status of Indigenous Peoples' legal rights is less clear because their national legal frameworks contain internal contradictions. In Cambodia, for example, the Land Law 2001 (articles 23 to 28) recognizes the right of indigenous communities to collective ownership of their lands, which also includes a right to access interim measures for protection of indigenous lands until formal land titling can occur. It also recognizes the practice of shifting cultivation. The Forestry Law 2002, on the other hand, does not recognize collective land ownership. Rather, it contains provisions for use rights in forests. Given that most Indigenous Peoples' lands are forested, this substantially limits the ability of Indigenous Peoples to control their lands.

Finally, some countries provide very weak protections for Indigenous Peoples' rights. In Nepal, the Constitution (2015) merely recognizes the multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious and multicultural characteristics of the country, and the Bangladesh Constitution refers only to the protection of culture (not related land and resource rights).



Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. **Photo Credit:** Marcus Colchester, FPP.

¹³ See ruling: https://www.aman.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/putusan_sidang_35-PUU-2012-Kehutanan-telah-ucap-16-Mei-2013.pdf

Despite international commitments to UNDRIP, which clearly refers to “Indigenous Peoples”, several countries do not recognize this term¹⁴—often with the justification that all people present in the geographical area before colonization are indigenous. In such cases, alternative terms are used in national laws and policy documents, such as “hill tribes”, “ethnic minorities”, “scheduled tribes”, “tribal peoples”, “*upajati*”, “minor races” and “national races”. For the remainder of this report, “Indigenous Peoples” will be used to refer to all these groups who go by a different designation nationally, but who often self-identify as indigenous¹⁵ and whose rights are arguably protected by UNDRIP.

In all the countries, regardless of the level of legal protection, the reality is that indigenous men, women, youth, and persons with disabilities are facing social, political, cultural and economic discrimination. Even where rights are protected on paper, there are no detailed requirements or guidelines for their enforcement. As a result, indigenous men, women, youth and persons with disabilities regularly experience threats to their traditional lands, forests and waters—from energy, extraction, conservation and infrastructure projects—and are often criminalized for carrying out their traditional livelihood activities.

As described in the next section, for many indigenous communities, these challenges are compounded by the effects of climate change.

¹⁴ For example, Thailand, Vietnam, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Indonesia

¹⁵ And who portray characteristics associated with the concept of Indigenous Peoples in international policy and legal frameworks, e.g. distinct cultural, social, political and economic institutions; close relationships with ancestral lands; and historical and continued marginalization



Karen community leader preparing for their traditional ceremony in Northern Thailand.
Photo credit: Lakpa Nuri Sherpa, AIPP.

02

Main impacts of climate change on Indigenous Peoples

All of the countries studied feature high up in indices that measure recent impacts of extreme weather events believed to be related to climate change.¹⁶ Natural phenomena and disasters experienced by the countries are generally very similar and include higher temperatures and unpredictable weather patterns with increased rainfall and longer and more frequent droughts. This leads to more floods, soil erosion, wildfires, landslides and destruction of arable land. With rising sea levels, in coastal areas saltwater is intruding into agricultural lands. As an example, the average temperature in Vietnam has risen by 0.5–0.7°C and the sea level has risen by 20 cm in the past 50 years. El Niño and La Niña phenomena have also occurred more frequently.¹⁷

Indigenous Peoples, most of whom live in remote geographical areas—such as mountains, coastal lands, and forests—and rely directly on the natural resources around them for their survival, are feeling the effects of changes in the environment particularly strongly. The lack of water is damaging their farms and reducing the yields of subsistence plants (grown both for food and medicinal use); it also requires them to walk further in search of water for daily consumption. The unpredictable weather is also harming other food collection practices: wild fruits are becoming less abundant, and traditional knowledge passed down for generations about when to hunt and fish is proving to no longer be fully applicable.¹⁸

The effects of climate-related change in Indigenous Peoples' environments are also posing significant threats to human health. The haze associated with wildfires has been linked to a significant increase in respiratory illness,¹⁹ floods cause drownings, poor water quality related to natural disasters is associated with waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, cholera, dysentery and typhoid, and higher temperatures increase the incidence of malaria, dengue fever and diarrheal diseases.²⁰

¹⁶ Such as the Global Climate Risk Index (<https://germanwatch.org/en/19777>) and Inform Risk (<https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk/Country-Profile>)

¹⁷ El Niño and La Niña describe opposite phases of a natural climate pattern where changes occur due to alterations in the winds and ocean temperatures in the Pacific. El Niño and La Niña are associated with intense storms in some places in the world and droughts in others.

¹⁸ This was reported particularly in the Philippines and Myanmar.

¹⁹ Particularly reported in Malaysia.

²⁰ ADB (2020). Climate risk country profile: Viet Nam

Indigenous women, youth, children, and persons with disabilities: For all of the countries studied, there is a lack of disaggregated data on the impacts of climate change on these groups. However, the country studies do highlight information showing that impacts are felt differently by men, women and youth/children. When it comes to particular impacts on persons with disabilities, the reports are silent, most likely due to a lack of data.

The impacts of climate change disrupt family relations and often place a disproportionately heavy weight on the shoulders of women, youth and persons with disabilities, who face double discrimination; this, in turn, creates more barriers for them in overcoming these impacts. With the loss of agricultural land and high fluctuations in agricultural production caused by extreme weather, men often leave their families to seek an income away from the home. Women are left to care for children, older family members and animals, and to provide food, water and shelter on a daily basis. If disaster hits, the women are responsible for safeguarding the family, and cleaning up and repairing damage to homes and other important structures. As women are often forced to venture further in search of food and water, they are increasingly exposed to dangerous animals and insects, as well as violence and sexual abuse. Often, girls take part in these tasks and are exposed to the same threats.

In some cases, poverty, induced by climate change, forces youth to leave home, taking a job in a city or industrial zone to help the family earn money. Not only does this disrupt the transmission of traditional knowledge in the home and village, and strip youth of the possibility of a formal education, but it often makes them victims of exploitation and bonded labour. In some cases, even young children need to leave school to help relieve the financial burdens their families face.



Indigenous Peoples from Nepal, Philippines and Thailand learning about the various usage of medicinal plants and seeds in Pak-kia village in Northern Thailand.
Photo credit: Lakpa Nuri Sherpa, AIPP.

03

Climate policies: NDCs, REDD+ strategies, national adaptation plans and other policy responses

The Paris Agreement was adopted by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC in December 2015 and came into effect in November 2016. Article 4 (paragraph 2) of the Agreement, requires each Party to “prepare, communicate, and maintain successive nationally determined contributions (NDCs)” setting out how they intend to contribute to global emissions reductions. Article 5 encourages states to conserve and enhance forests through the implementation of frameworks and decisions already agreed by the COP in relation to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. Article 7 is devoted to adaptation and obliges the parties to “engage in adaptation planning processes and the implementation of actions, including the development or enhancement of relevant plans, policies and/or contributions, which may include” the formulation and implementation of national adaptation plans (NAPs).

The following section identifies whether and how Indigenous Peoples feature in relation to NDCs, REDD+ strategies and NAPs in the international climate framework.

3.1 Recognition of rights in climate policies

3.1.1 Indigenous Peoples in the international climate framework

Due to persistent advocacy over many years by the global indigenous movement, often through the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change, both inside and at the margins of international climate negotiations, the COP21 Decisions²¹ and the Paris Agreement²² contain some important provisions on Indigenous Peoples’ rights, knowledge, and role in climate action.²³ For example, the preamble of the Paris Agreement acknowledges that:

²¹ See: <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/10a01.pdf>

²² See: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

²³ It should be noted that while Indigenous Peoples consider that the text included in the Paris Agreement represents an important step forward, they stress their disappointment that no reference to Indigenous Peoples’ rights was included in the operative part of the agreement, rather only in the preamble. See e.g. <https://coyotegulch.blog/2015/12/27/cop21-the-paris-agreement-an-incremental-advance-for-international-recognition-of-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples-international-indian-treaty-council/>

“...Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, **respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.**”

The COP21 Decision (1/CP.21, paragraph 135) further states that the COP:

“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.”

The above provisions suggest that the rights of indigenous men, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities should be respected and promoted in all climate actions, including those put forward in NDCs, NAPs and REDD+ plans, and that Indigenous Peoples are agents with valuable contributions to global efforts to address climate change.

In addition to these general provisions, UNFCCC parties have explicitly acknowledged that:

“**adaptation** action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach [...] and **should be based on** and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, **traditional knowledge, knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local knowledge systems**”.²⁴

Further, when it comes to REDD+, the parties have called for “*respect for the knowledge and rights*” as well as the “*full and effective participation of [...] indigenous peoples and local communities*” and that REDD+ actions are “*consistent with [...] relevant international conventions and agreements.*”^{25 26}

²⁴ Paris Agreement, Article 7, para 5

²⁵ UNFCCC, ‘Report of the Conference of the Parties on its sixteenth session, held in Cancun from 29 November to 10 December 2010, Addendum’ (15 March 2011) FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add.1, Appendix 1, para 2.

²⁶ UN-REDD considers “relevant international conventions and agreements” may include UNDRIP, ICERD, ICCPR, ICESCR and ILO 169 (see <https://www.unredd.net/documents/global-programme-191/redd-academy-3509/redd-academy-asia-pacific-2014-october-27-november-7-yogyakarta-indonesia-3607/redd-academy-asia-pacific-presentations-3616/13625-5-safeguards-and-safeguards-information-systems-judith-walcott-13625.html?path=global-programme-191/redd-academy-3509/redd-academy-asia-pacific-2014-october-27-november-7-yogyakarta-indonesia-3607/redd-academy-asia-pacific-presentations-3616>)

They have also agreed that countries should develop safeguard information systems to provide information on how the so-called Cancun safeguards are addressed and respected at a country level.²⁷ It should further be noted that bilateral and multilateral donors of REDD+ processes have specific requirements and guidance for how the rights and participation of Indigenous Peoples is to be ensured.²⁸ An example to highlight is the UN-REDD Programme’s guidelines on free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), which recognize that “*states have a duty and obligation not only to seek FPIC, but where the circumstances warrant, to actually secure it.*”²⁹

With these international-level commitments as a background, the next section looks at how the rights of indigenous men, women, youth and persons with disabilities are addressed in national-level climate plans and policies.

3.1.2 Indigenous Peoples and national climate change policies

NDCs and other national policies relevant to climate change and environmental protection (excluding REDD+ policies)³⁰

A general takeaway from the analysis of NDCs and other climate change policies from the 10 countries is that Indigenous Peoples are often invisible as agents, rights-holders and knowledge-bearers. There are exceptions, which are highlighted below; however, most of the policies are written in a general language of “fairness”, “inclusion” and “equality” without specific mention of Indigenous Peoples or elaboration on how these aspirations will be achieved in relation to them. Where Indigenous Peoples are specifically named, it is most often about their being victims of climate change; about their participation in the implementation of climate-change plans and processes, in which case their traditional knowledge is sometimes acknowledged as valuable to mitigation and adaptation efforts³¹; or about their being beneficiaries of climate-change plans, projects and funds.

²⁷ See Decision 12/CP.17: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf#page=16>

²⁸ For example, the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, UN-REDD Programme, Forest Investment Programme

²⁹ UN-REDD Programme: Guidelines on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (2013): <https://www.unclearn.org/wp-content/uploads/library/un-redd05.pdf>, page 9

³⁰ There is little detailed analysis of the NAPs in the country reports, which suggests that there is limited attention to Indigenous Peoples in these policies. We will explore this in more detail in future updates to this study.

³¹ For example in the Myanmar, Philippines and Indonesia NDCs. It should be noted that, currently, only the Myanmar NDC mentions the LCIPP, saying that lessons learnt from the traditional and indigenous knowledge and technologies that are developed in Myanmar will be shared through the platform.

Despite the fact that a number of the policy efforts will be undertaken on land that is under the customary landownership of Indigenous Peoples,³² there is no acknowledgement of this—all the policies are silent. Not one policy acknowledges the fundamental right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination. That said, a few of the NDCs do refer more broadly to human rights obligations, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples, women and persons with disabilities. See, for example, these excerpts from the NDCs of Indonesia and the Philippines, respectively:

“In line with the Paris Agreement, Indonesia **respects, promotes and considers its obligation** on human rights, **the right to health, the right of adat communities (Indonesia: Masyarakat Hukum Adat)**, local communities, migrants, children, **persons with different abilities**, and people in vulnerable situations, and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity [...].³³

“The NDC upholds the importance of ensuring ecosystems integrity and promoting the country’s obligations on human rights and the rights of its indigenous peoples.”³⁴

Another example is the Cambodia NDC, which explicitly states the government’s aims to promote the land rights of Indigenous Peoples:

“During the NDC implementation and particularly for mitigation measures in the FOLU [forestry and other land use], the RGC [government] will seek to promote the rights of indigenous people, specifically concerning land ownership.”³⁵

Finally, only one NDC—that of Nepal³⁶—aims to ensure FPIC as part of its implementation of social safeguards:

“By 2030, institutional mechanisms and structures in place and adequate provision of budget to ensure social and environmental safeguards including Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC); forest tenure and access to finance and technology for Local Communities, women and Indigenous People.”³⁷

32 E.g. Forest-protection measures and renewable energy projects.

33 Indonesia NDC (2021) page 2: <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Indonesia%20First/Updated%20NDC%20Indonesia%202021%20-%20corrected%20version.pdf>. The previous version of the NDC contained a clarification in this paragraph, which has subsequently been removed, that adat communities (in Indonesia referred to as Masyarakat Hukum Adat), are internationally known as Indigenous People.

34 Philippines NDC (2021), page 2: <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Philippines%20First/Philippines%20-%20NDC.pdf>

35 Cambodia NDC (2020), page 6: https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Cambodia%20First/20201231_NDC_Update_Cambodia.pdf

36 The Myanmar NDC (page 3) also mentions that climate actions must ensure FPIC; however, not from Indigenous Peoples as a specific rights-holder group. The principle is used in a context where it seems to be applicable to all Myanmar citizens.

37 Nepal second NDC (2020), page 5: [https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Nepal%20Second/Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20\(NDC\)%20-%202020.pdf](https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Nepal%20Second/Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20(NDC)%20-%202020.pdf)

Indigenous women, youth, and persons with disabilities: Indigenous women are specifically mentioned in only two of the NDCs reviewed. Vietnam recognizes that “women, especially ethnic minority women, are highly vulnerable” to climate change because they have “limited access to education and fewer opportunities to participate in non-farm employment”.³⁸ And the NDC of Cambodia includes an action to enable NDC implementation: “*Enhance coordination and implementing accountability mechanisms to reduce climate change vulnerabilities of disadvantaged women and other marginalized groups such as ethnic minority women and men, People with Disabilities (PWD), youth, and the elderly.*”³⁹

In the other NDCs, women (as a homogeneous group) are, in many cases, listed together with children, youth, elderly and persons with a disability as groups particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Cambodia has responded by establishing a Gender and Climate Change Committee, which gathers information on gender and climate change, including the impacts on women and girls. Often, the acknowledgement of vulnerability is accompanied by goals of ensuring these groups participate in climate policy development and in actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Nepal, for example, has a target for 50 per cent of the key posts in community-forest management committees to be held by women, and that women get an equitable share of benefits from sustainable management of forests and water. The Nepal NDC also highlights as a key priority that all 753 local governments prepare and implement gender-responsive adaptation plans by 2030, and that these plans “*prioritize adaptation and disaster risk reduction and management measures focusing on women, differently-abled, children, senior citizens, youth, indigenous peoples, economically deprived communities and people residing in climate-vulnerable geographical areas.*”⁴⁰

In relation to the importance of women’s participation in climate-change policies, some of the NDCs aim to strengthen the capacity of women in areas such as leadership and negotiation (e.g. Indonesia, Myanmar and Cambodia). Some also specifically mention the importance of engaging and educating youth on climate change and conservation.

Indigenous youth and indigenous persons with disabilities are not explicitly mentioned in any of the NDCs.

38 Vietnam NDC (2020), page 13: https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Viet%20Nam%20First/Viet%20Nam_NDC_2020_Eng.pdf

39 Cambodia NDC (2020), page 38: https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Cambodia%20First/20201231_NDC_Update_Cambodia.pdf

40 Nepal NDC (2020), page 18: [https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Nepal%20Second/Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20\(NDC\)%20-%202020.pdf](https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Nepal%20Second/Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20(NDC)%20-%202020.pdf)

REDD+ policies and activities

Among all the climate-related policies reviewed, the national REDD+ strategies and plans most consistently contain language on Indigenous Peoples and their rights. This is likely due to the requirements of the Cancun safeguards and of donor bodies (e.g. UN-REDD and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility) as well as the often-collaborative work between international agencies⁴¹ and REDD+ countries in developing the plans and policies.

Though the content and depth of the language on Indigenous Peoples varies, the reference that features most frequently in the policies reviewed is the importance of effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in processes related to REDD+ . A number of countries have extended the topic of participation to include requirements⁴² and guidance on FPIC, with some committing to follow the UN-REDD FPIC guidelines⁴³ and others including national FPIC guidelines in their policies.⁴⁴ The FPIC guidelines attached to the Summary of Information of Malaysia, for example, state:

“If the proposed REDD+ activity is intended to take place on land to which one or more indigenous and local communities has a right as established by law, the proponent of the REDD+ activity shall be required to obtain the FPIC of, and enter into a benefit-sharing agreement with, the relevant indigenous and local community or communities”.⁴⁵

The problem with such a requirement is that it fails to protect the right to FPIC of peoples whose customary lands have not been formally recognized and titled, which is the case for many indigenous communities in Malaysia and in the other nine countries reviewed.

41 Such as UNDP and the UN-REDD Programme

42 See, for example, Nepal REDD+ Strategy, Philippines REDD+ Strategy, Bangladesh REDD+ Strategy and Indonesia SIS document. As an example, the latter states that “Applicable at the site level, REDD+ preparation activities shall include a process to obtain the free, prior, informed consent of affected Indigenous Peoples and local communities before REDD+ activities commence.” See https://www.forclimate.org/documents/Books/Safeguards%20Information%20System%20for%20REDD+%20in%20Indonesia_Engl_Full_med%20res.pdf

43 <https://www.unredd.net/documents/un-redd-partner-countries-181/templates-forms-and-guidance-89/un-redd-fpic-guidelines-2648/8717-un-redd-fpic-guidelines-working-final-8717.html?path=un-redd-partner-countries-181/templates-forms-and-guidance-89/un-redd-fpic-guidelines-2648>

44 E.g. Indonesia REDD+ Strategy, see https://redd.unfccc.int/files/reddnationalstrategyidn_english.pdf; “Myanmar Guidelines for an approach to ensure FPIC in implementation of Myanmar’s National REDD+ Strategy and other initiatives affecting forests” see <http://www.myanmar-redd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/DO-National-FPIC-Guideline-Dec-2019-English.pdf>; Malaysia SOI, appendix 1, see https://redd.unfccc.int/files/malaysia_redd_sis.pdf

45 Malaysia SOI, appendix 1, see https://redd.unfccc.int/files/malaysia_redd_sis.pdf

Table 1. Are governments recognizing the rights, roles and contributions of Indigenous Peoples in their NDCs?

Country	Indigenous Peoples (IPs) ⁱ	Human rights	FPIC	Land tenure rights ²	Traditional/Indigenous knowledge	Participation and capacity building ³	Indigenous women ⁴	Indigenous youth ⁵	Indigenous persons with disability
Bangladeshⁱ	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Cambodiaⁱⁱ	Yes (the term IPs is mentioned 15 times) ³	No	No	Yes (promotes rights of IPs to land ownership)	Yes (respect for IPs' traditional knowledge is essential to safeguarding IPs' rights)	Yes (IP participation in NDC revision process and in the implementation of the NDC)	Yes (vulnerability of ethnic minority women to climate change is mentioned twice)	No	No (but it mentions persons with disabilities)
Indiaⁱⁱⁱ	No (it mentions Indigenous knowledge but not IPs)	No	No	No	Yes (role of indigenous knowledge in adaptation)	No	No	No	No
Indonesia^{iv}	Partially (rights of adat communities are mentioned 6 times) ⁷	Yes	No	No	Yes (importance of "indigenous knowledge" and "traditional wisdom")	Yes (participation of adat communities in social forestry and development of community capacity and participation in local planning processes)	No	No	No (but it mentions rights of "persons with different abilities")
Malaysia^v	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Myanmar^{vi}	Yes (mentioned 6 times, in the context of engagement with "indigenous/ethnic groups" and "indigenous people" as stewards of biodiversity)	Partially (although the main body of the NDC does not contain specific reference to "human rights", the annex lists a project with a "human rights-based approach")	Yes (FPIC to promote the rights of all Myanmar citizens)	No	Yes ("traditional and indigenous knowledge and technologies" to be shared through the LCIPP)	Yes (engagement with "indigenous/ethnic groups" and "indigenous people")	No	No	No (but it mentions climate risks for "disabled")

1 This column records where the term 'Indigenous Peoples' (IPs), or other nationally equivalent terminology) is mentioned. The nature/context of the reference to IPs is added in brackets.

2 While two of the NDCs mention land/forest tenure of IPs, none of the NDCs acknowledge IPs' customary land rights.

3 This column records where participation or capacity building of IPs is mentioned in the NDCs, either as a goal/plan or as something that has happened during the development of the NDC.

4 Although only two NDCs refer specifically to Indigenous women, all NDCs contain at least one mention of women (or gender equality) in reference to participation, vulnerability to impacts of climate change, and efforts to build their resilience. Cambodia and Nepal NDCs contain the most detailed elaboration on gender equality.

5 Although none of the NDCs refer specifically to Indigenous youth, all except Bangladesh refer to participation of youth or children and their particular vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

6 During the implementation of the Cambodia NDC, and particularly for mitigation measures in the 'forestry and other land use' sector, the government will seek to promote the rights of IPs, specifically concerning land ownership.

7 The NDC mentions that Indonesia respects, promotes and considers the rights of Masyarakat Hukum Adat (adat communities). The previous NDC stated that Masyarakat Hukum Adat is internationally known as IPs, but this statement has been removed.

Country	Indigenous Peoples (IPs) ⁱ	Human rights	FPIC	Land tenure rights ²	Traditional/Indigenous knowledge	Participation and capacity building ³	Indigenous women ⁴	Indigenous youth ⁵	Indigenous persons with disability
Nepal ^{vi}	Yes (the term IPs is mentioned 12 times regarding participation, representation, consultation, capacity building, FPIC, access to finance and technology and communication)	No	Yes	Yes ("forest tenure" as social safeguard)	No	Yes (full, equal and meaningful participation of indigenous peoples in policy development + fair and equitable benefits + promote leadership and negotiation capacity)	No	No	No (but it mentions "differently abled" in relation to vulnerability and adaptation)
Philippines ^{viii}	Yes (the term IPs is mentioned twice, in relation to the Philippines promoting its obligation on the rights of IPs)	Yes (obligations)	No	No	Yes (the Philippines recognizes the importance of traditional knowledge)	Yes (upholds meaningful participation of IPs in implementing climate actions)	No	No	No (but it mentions "differently abled" in relation to participation)
Thailand ^x	No	Yes (a key principle in formulating the NDC)	No	No	Partially ("local wisdom" part of formulating the NDC)	No ⁸	No	No	No
Vietnam ^x	Yes (the term "ethnic minorities" is mentioned 3 times in the context of vulnerability and poverty reduction measures)	No	No	No	Yes (acknowledging loss of "local knowledge")	No	Yes (one mention of the vulnerability of ethnic minority women to climate change)	No	No (but it mentions the particular vulnerability of "people with disability" and "children with disabilities")

⁸ The Thailand NDC mentions that the NDC sectoral action plans and the NDC Supportive Action Plan were carried out with a wide range of stakeholders consulted and the publication of participation processes at national and local levels. However, it does not explicitly mention the participation of Indigenous Peoples.

Table endnotes

- i Bangladesh NDC (updated August 2021): https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Bangladesh%20First/NDC_submission_20210826revised.pdf
- ii Cambodia NDC (updated 2020): https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Cambodia%20First/20201231_NDC_Update_Cambodia.pdf
- iii India NDC (first, not yet updated): <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/India%20First/INDIA%20INDC%20TO%20UNFCCC.pdf>
- iv Indonesia NDC (updated 2021): <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Indonesia%20First/Updated%20INDC%20Indonesia%202021%20-%20corrected%20version.pdf>
- v Malaysia NDC (updated 2021): <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Malaysia%20First/Malaysia%20Updated%20Submission%20to%20UNFCCC%20July%202021%20final.pdf>
- vi Myanmar NDC (July 2021) <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Myanmar%20First/Myanmar%20Updated%20%20INDC%20July%202021.pdf>
- vii Nepal second NDC (2020) [https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Nepal%20Second/Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20\(NDC\)%20-%202020.pdf](https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Nepal%20Second/Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20(NDC)%20-%202020.pdf)
- viii Philippines NDC (2021): <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Philippines%20First/Philippines%20-%20NDC.pdf>
- ix Thailand NDC (updated 2020): <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Thailand%20First/Thailand%20Updated%20NDC.pdf>
- x Vietnam NDC (updated 2020): https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Viet%20Nam%20First/Viet%20Nam_NDC_2020_Eng.pdf

When it comes to customary rights, few of the policies contain any general acknowledgement that the land on which a large proportion of REDD+ activities will take place are under the ownership—often customary and not recognized by statutory law—of Indigenous Peoples. A number of the policies identify the lack of clear land tenure as a hindrance for the successful implementation of REDD+ and contain aspirations for land tenure reform to clarify forest tenure.⁴⁶ However, few make explicit links between this reference to land tenure and Indigenous Peoples.⁴⁷ One exception is the Summary of Information of Malaysia, which explicitly states that Malaysia intends to acknowledge and respect the *customary land rights* and traditional knowledge of indigenous people and local communities. Another possible exception is the Bangladesh REDD+ strategy, which has a policy/measure on clarifying forest land ownership and securing tenure rights of forest villagers.⁴⁸

The traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples is mentioned in about half of the REDD+ strategies reviewed. In some cases, the reference is a restatement of the Cancun safeguards and only in a few instances do the policies elaborate on the importance of traditional knowledge for climate actions.⁴⁹ The draft Myanmar REDD+ strategy, for example, acknowledges the need to recognize “[T]he potential value of traditional knowledge in design of Policies and Measures to address drivers of deforestation and forest degradation”.⁵⁰ The Nepal strategy also highlights the loss of traditional knowledge and practices as a possible negative impact of REDD+ actions unless proper safeguards are put in place.

Indigenous women, youth, and persons with disabilities: These groups of Indigenous Peoples rarely receive attention in the REDD+ strategies. There are exceptions (see also section 3.3 on participation), including the REDD+ strategy of Myanmar, which contains a goal to raise awareness on REDD+ among indigenous youth. This strategy also emphasizes the Convention on the Elimination on Discrimination Against Women as a tool to ensure REDD+ activities are in line with international law. Apart from this, similar to the NDCs and other climate policies, the general category of women, and sometimes youth, features often in relation to participation.

⁴⁶ E.g. Indonesia REDD+ Strategy, Nepal REDD+ Strategy and Cambodia REDD+ Strategy. Also note the Philippines REDD+ Strategy referring to the need for specific REDD+ legal framework: “While the Philippines has a comprehensive policy and institutional framework on natural resources management there is not yet a specific national legal framework on REDD-plus. Such a legal framework, beyond existing regulations, is essential to guiding REDD-plus, including related to tenure issues, settling disputes, payment systems, rule enforcement, and project implementation on the ground.”

⁴⁷ The Nepal REDD+ Strategy does make a direct link but makes it clear that the tenure rights in question amount to access and use, not ownership. See page 11: <https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/system/files/documents/REDD%2B%20Strategy%20Nepal%202018.pdf>

⁴⁸ Note that the reference is to the tenure rights of “forest villagers”, which if read literally does not translate to collective land rights of indigenous communities.

⁴⁹ See REDD+ strategies of Philippines, Myanmar and Nepal.

⁵⁰ Draft Myanmar REDD+ strategy: <http://www.myanmar-redd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Draft-1-National-REDD-Strategy-Feb-2018.pdf>

The India REDD+ strategy contains a section on a Green Development Programme aimed at training youth in forestry skills to address unemployment among young people. Only one REDD+ strategy mentions persons with disabilities—Myanmar, again, includes disabled persons in the list of REDD+ stakeholders.

3.2 Issues and concerns of Indigenous Peoples about national climate policies

The 10 country reports record a set of concerns of Indigenous Peoples that the climate policies fail to address, or inadequately address. These concerns can be categorized under two recurring themes, which, to a great extent, are interlinked—land tenure insecurity and threats to traditional livelihoods. The reports also identify additional process-related concerns—inadequate participation and political and administrative challenges.

Land tenure insecurity: As mentioned in the previous section, most of the policies fail to explicitly recognize customary land rights of Indigenous Peoples. Even with the few that do, there is low probability that the implementation will entail protecting these rights in practice. This is because, ultimately, the national climate policies are implemented in line with national-level laws and systems, which, as seen in section 1, rarely contain protections for these rights.⁵¹ With increasing amounts and sources of international finance (from both state and private sector) associated with schemes set up to reward and compensate the storage of carbon in forests (such as REDD+), there is a risk that states will move to take control over untitled lands as well as the associated financial benefits.⁵²

Threats to traditional livelihoods and occupations: By not explicitly improving land tenure security, the climate policies are also failing to address the issues underlying the threats that Indigenous Peoples are facing in relation to their traditional knowledge and livelihoods (such as farming, hunting, and gathering food). With the growing interest in land for green energy and so-called natural climate solutions (including REDD+ and nature conservation initiatives), there is a risk that these initiatives could exacerbate the threats Indigenous Peoples are already experiencing, such as the infringement of their rights to use, control and manage their own lands and natural resources. This threat becomes even more real when climate policies define traditional livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples, such as shifting cultivation, as drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, which several of the climate policies reviewed do.

⁵¹ For example, 320,000 ha of forest land is under dispute in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

⁵² It should be noted that many REDD+ policies do refer to “benefit sharing”. However, a) this generally applies only where Indigenous Peoples land rights are recognized, and b) a continued focus on benefit sharing without recognising that the land (and the related stored carbon) from which benefits derive belong to Indigenous Peoples, perpetuates the picture of Indigenous Peoples as mere beneficiaries of “charity”.

Inadequate participation: Though, in general, the climate policies may have brought more attention to the need for civil society to participate in policy dialogues and decision-making,⁵³ Indigenous Peoples have raised concerns about the actual benefit of such attention. Many fear that, in reality, participation merely equates to information sharing and superficial consultation, and that the policies consolidate an official state view of Indigenous Peoples as mere beneficiaries as opposed to important agents of change. In cases where Indigenous Peoples were asked to participate more actively, they felt that they lacked substantial information, understanding and capacity to do so effectively.

Limited attention to indigenous women, youth and persons with disabilities: Even though climate change often has a disproportionately serious impact on these groups, efforts to include Indigenous Peoples in policy processes normally focus on men. While this contributes to maintaining the near-invisibility of these groups in policy spaces, it also fails to draw on specific knowledge and experiences they may have that could strengthen the responses to climate change. For example, in many cases indigenous women are the primary users and managers of forests, and play a key role in protecting watersheds, fish, animals and important medicinal herbs.⁵⁴

Political and administrative barriers to successful and rights-respecting climate policies: Some countries are concerned that the priorities of the national climate-change policies fluctuate with changes in political leadership. In the case of the Philippines, this has meant a change of emphasis from the forest sector as an important source for climate change mitigation to renewable energy and sustainable transportation. As a result of this change in focus, it is expected that there will also be a change in types of support, which could mean less assistance for Indigenous Peoples' forest protection and conservation initiatives and programs. Several country reports also emphasize the lack of coherence between climate policies on paper and in practice, due to lack of communication between national and local governments, and inadequate understanding and capacity of authorities about their obligations vis-a-vis Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Opportunities and entry points for positive change

Some of the country reports highlight possible routes in the existing climate policy framework through which some of the inadequacies outlined above could be addressed. For example, in the Philippines Indigenous Peoples are seeking to bring attention to the need for land tenure security through what is referred to as “non-carbon” benefits⁵⁵ in the national REDD+ process.

⁵³ See next sub-section for a more detailed discussion on the topic of participation.

⁵⁴ See, for example, the Myanmar report.

⁵⁵ The term ‘non-carbon benefits’ (NCB) refers to the “factors and contributions of REDD+ that go beyond mere carbon storage and carbon sequestration in forests. NCBs are generally understood as positive social, environmental and governance outcomes of REDD+ activities.” See https://www.iwgia.org/images/publications/0639_REED_Final_solved_eb.pdf

And in Bangladesh, one of the REDD+ strategy targets is to survey and demarcate 1 million ha of forest land to resolve land ownership disputes and related court cases; this could be both a threat and an opportunity depending on how Indigenous Peoples of Bangladesh are involved. Given that hundreds of cases are currently pending in court against forest villagers (mostly Indigenous Peoples) in reserved forest areas, a focus on tenure clarification and demarcation could crystallize the ongoing efforts to criminalize them on their land. However, if Indigenous Peoples were to effectively participate in the survey and demarcation processes, the REDD+ strategy target could lead to greater land tenure security for them.

In summary, where climate policies are catalyzing governments to clarify land tenure rights, it might present a rare opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to advocate for this clarification to be in line with their states' international commitments to uphold Indigenous Peoples' rights⁵⁶ (and, hence, drive legal reform in their country).

The fact that many climate programs and finance mechanisms (e.g. REDD+, the Green Climate Fund) require the participation of Indigenous Peoples—for example, in technical working groups—also represents an opportunity. It may facilitate spaces where indigenous representatives can engage with governments and intergovernmental funding mechanisms and advocate for direct support by existing climate programs to Indigenous Peoples' own mitigation and adaptation actions. In the Philippines, the People's Survival Fund (created by the Climate Change Act 2012) may represent one such opportunity, as it is open for application by local governments and communities for support for local climate adaptation initiatives. There are, however, challenges that must be overcome for this fund to bring benefits to indigenous communities. Challenges include lack of information about the fund, a highly technical application process, and uncertainty about whether local traditional practices, such as rootcrop farming, will be considered an innovative adaptation initiative.

3.3 Participation of Indigenous Peoples in climate change policies

There are two aspects to consider when analyzing the level of participation of Indigenous Peoples in national climate policy processes. First, their participation in the design and development of national policies. Second, how their participation in implementing the policies and plans is envisaged.

⁵⁶ Such as UN human rights treaties, ILO 169, UNDRIP, and safeguards linked to international climate finance.

3.3.1 Participation in the design and development of national policies

There seems to be quite a clear distinction between REDD+ policies and other more general climate change policies, including the NDCs.⁵⁷ In many countries, the REDD+ development processes are associated with greater inclusion of Indigenous Peoples. Likely reasons for this are the Cancun safeguards, which call for the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, and targeted efforts by international agencies such as UNDP and the UN-REDD Programme to bring indigenous voices into the national conversations (e.g. in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Vietnam). In most of the countries in this study, indigenous representatives have official seats on various REDD+ working groups, task forces and project boards.⁵⁸ For example, in Cambodia, the REDD+ Consultation Group includes one indigenous representative from each of the 15 provinces, plus a national-level indigenous representative.

While the REDD+ processes are consistently highlighted in the country reports as those paying the most attention to inclusiveness, the substance of the inclusion seems to vary. In many countries, participation has focused on awareness raising and capacity building with the aim of enabling informed consultation. Yet, in some countries (e.g. Nepal) Indigenous Peoples report that they have limited knowledge about climate change and related policies, which means that meaningful participation would not be possible even if they were consulted. Some countries also report that the indigenous representation in working groups, which looks good on paper, has yet to be put into practice (e.g. Nepal).

For other national-level climate-policy development processes, most country reports emphasize that the participation of Indigenous Peoples has been minimal. If it exists at all, this has been due to a hard push from indigenous organizations (not by official government invitation to participate) and, even then, the participation has only happened through civil society organizations with diverse membership (e.g. the Philippines) where the indigenous voice is just one of many, or through non-indigenous NGOs (e.g. Malaysia).

Further, since most climate change consultations take place in big cities, they generally exclude the participation of rural indigenous communities and their representatives. Even when virtual participation is allowed, the lack of equipment and internet access has led to their marginalization.

In some places, participation by indigenous leaders and activists has also been dangerous and restricted due to government 'red-tagging'⁵⁹ (e.g. the Philippines).

⁵⁷ In one country, Vietnam, the FLEGT voluntary partner agreement (VPA) process is also highlighted as a precedent-setting process for the inclusion of indigenous and local communities in national policymaking. The engagement and advocacy of these groups contributed to the adoption of the Forestry Law in 2017, in which local communities and ethnic minorities are recognized as formal forest owners.

⁵⁸ Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Nepal, Vietnam.

⁵⁹ Labelling them as communists or terrorists.

3.3.2 Participation in implementing the policies and plans

Several of the climate policies reviewed do aim for the participation of Indigenous Peoples in the implementation of national climate policies and plans. As noted in section 3.1.2, in some cases the aim is to ensure that Indigenous Peoples' FPIC is obtained in relation to REDD+ projects. In the case of the Malaysia REDD+ strategy, Indigenous Peoples are explicitly framed as "active partners in managing our forest and the resources" and on that basis the strategy places "emphasis on empowering and supporting Indigenous Peoples and local communities to undertake biodiversity conservation".⁶⁰ However, more often Indigenous Peoples are seen as beneficiaries (as opposed to partners) of climate plan implementations through, for example, remuneration for their efforts to help reduce emissions,⁶¹ improved employment opportunities, training and capacity building.

Indigenous women, youth, and persons with disabilities: Except for one vague exception,⁶² there is no direct reference in any of the policies to efforts or aims to ensure the participation of these sub-groups of Indigenous Peoples in climate policy development or implementation. However, as noted in section 3.1.2 above, women, as a general category, are highlighted in many of the policies in relation to targets for their participation in the implementation of mitigation and adaptation measures and potential benefits flowing from these. Only some of the policies mention youth in relation to targets for their inclusion in foreseen activities. The Myanmar REDD+ strategy, for example, emphasizes the importance of taking care to "include disadvantaged groups (e.g. ethnic nationalities, women and youth)."⁶³ The Bangladesh REDD+ strategy notes that the REDD+ Stakeholder Forum has two seats for youth representatives and the Malaysian REDD+ strategy contains targets for the number of youth and children to be involved in "nature-based activities".⁶⁴ Persons with disabilities are mentioned in relation to their participation in only two of the policies reviewed.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Malaysia REDD+ Strategy, page 13: https://redd.unfccc.int/files/malaysia_national_redd_strategy.pdf

⁶¹ E.g. the Indonesia REDD+ Strategy talks about remunerating "regional governments, NGOs, communities and other groups for their efforts and performance in developing conditions that enable emissions reduction in their areas through both strategic activities and/or the formulation of supportive policies."

⁶² The Bangladesh REDD+ Strategy (BNRS) states that "The implementation of the BNRS will require full and effective inclusion of relevant stakeholders at relevant levels and in all major stages and topics of decision making. Special emphasis shall be given to the inclusion of the interests of forest-dependent communities, including equitably men, women and youths." See <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-e&q=bangladesh+REDD+strategy@shem=ssmd>

⁶³ Draft Myanmar REDD+ Strategy: <http://www.myanmar-redd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Draft-1-National-REDD-Strategy-Feb-2018.pdf>

⁶⁴ See page 16: https://redd.unfccc.int/files/malaysia_national_redd_strategy.pdf

⁶⁵ Philippines NDC (page 1) and Myanmar REDD+ Strategy (page 58)

Participation of Indigenous Peoples in international climate change processes

By Jo Ann Guillao

Indigenous Peoples are part of the solutions to climate change and have demonstrated their engagement at various levels of climate policymaking to date. It has not been an easy journey, but they have managed to join forces to have their voices heard and recognized. They have persisted in joining the negotiations in the global processes (e.g. UNFCCC, CBD, SDGs) despite limited spaces for engagement. For the UNFCCC process, they have been able to establish important networks and dedicated platforms, such as the Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change and the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform. The creation of these platforms has led to them engaging more systematically in the COP meetings and having a stronger presence in the negotiations. Though there have been disappointments and frustrations along the way, the spirit of solidarity among Indigenous Peoples is a good practice that has sustained their presence at the international level and that has influenced the integration of Indigenous Peoples' concerns in many outcome decisions of the UNFCCC.

The participation of Indigenous Peoples in the international spaces has been—and continues to be—informed by: the fundamentally important relationship they have with their lands, territories, and resources; their self-determined development priorities; and an aim to prevent any violations of their territorial rights and identity.



Group picture of the first activity of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform organized in 2018.

Photo credit: IISD, ENB.



Mr. Kittisak Rattanakrajangri Chairperson of AIPP contributing in the dialogue of Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform.
Photo Credit: Rafael Ponte.

04

The impact of current climate interventions on Indigenous Peoples

While most of the policies reviewed in the 10 countries are relatively new, and most are not yet linked to physical activities/projects on the ground,⁶⁶ the country reports emphasize that Indigenous Peoples are currently experiencing severely negative impacts from the implementation of older environmental and conservation policies. These impacts are closely related to concerns about climate policies discussed in section 3.2 and could shed light on the kinds of impacts that may be experienced as a result of the newer policies and plans where underlying issues (e.g. land tenure and forest laws) are not addressed. Some positive impacts are also highlighted in the reports and these should be noted and built on for future climate policy implementation.

4.1 Negative impacts

Violation of customary rights: Projects are being implemented on Indigenous Peoples' lands without their FPIC, in the name of climate and forest protection.⁶⁷ Instead of being supported to continue to protect and sustainably use their lands, territories and resources, Indigenous Peoples are often displaced from their lands and left to secure their livelihoods in areas with meagre resources. As a result, they face severe human rights violations, and food and water insecurity. The tasks of fetching water and firewood, which in many places fall on women, become more difficult and burdensome, and persons with disabilities, who often have reduced mobility, are at a particularly high risk of suffering from hunger.⁶⁸ Additionally, in some places the major focus on carbon sequestration in forested land, pushed by climate policies, has set in motion a dismantling of laws that actually contain protection for indigenous land rights.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Except for project-level implementation of REDD+.

⁶⁷ E.g. conservation areas, reserved forests, protected areas, hydro dams, solar power projects

⁶⁸ See India and Bangladesh reports

⁶⁹ E.g. see India report

Criminalization of traditional livelihoods: In several⁷⁰ of the countries reviewed, Indigenous Peoples have reported being criminalized for carrying out their traditional livelihood activities in their customary forest areas. One example is in Thailand, where a national master plan to address deforestation aims to increase forest cover by 40 per cent over a 10-year period from 2014. The agencies in charge of enforcing the policy are confiscating land and arresting persons who are allegedly encroaching and destroying forest lands. With no explicit distinction made between illegal encroachers and indigenous communities who have long lived in these areas, this entails a great threat for the latter group:

“On that day, the Forest Rangers [special task force of the National Parks Department] seized a nearby resort, and some border control officers witnessed me planting mango trees here. They said nothing, but today I was arrested on the grounds of encroaching on 5.75 rai [0.92 hectare] of land; the local police station is now preparing the documentation [...] the land I was working was passed down to me from my parents and I have farmed it for many years. How can this be considered new encroachment? I don’t even know where my 5.75 rai of land is officially located.”

— Interview with a Karen woman, 25 May 2017

4.2 Positive impacts

Increased attention to Indigenous Peoples at national level: Especially in the case of Vietnam, the country reports highlight that international climate and environmental policy processes, such as REDD+ and the EU FLEGT (Forest law enforcement, governance and trade) facility, have helped consolidate greater respect and protection for Indigenous Peoples in national laws. Indigenous advocacy within these processes has contributed to “local communities” now being recognized as one category of “forest owners” in the Forest Law. This change has become an important legal entry point for promoting the recognition of community conserved areas.

Increased attention to gender equality: In Vietnam, international donors’ requirements for the inclusion of vulnerable groups in relation to climate change programs have helped empower women to effectively engage in policy planning, implementation and monitoring. Legal progress has also been seen since 2013, with the Land Law now requiring that both husband and wife be named in land-use titles and that any transfer of use rights must be agreed by both parties.⁷¹ These requirements strengthen women’s participation in household decision-making and investment.

⁷⁰ See e.g. Thailand, Indonesia and Bangladesh reports.

⁷¹ See Vietnam Land Law (2013): <https://vietnamlawenglish.blogspot.com/2013/11/vietnam-land-law-2013-law-no-452013qh13.html>

Access to finance: Some of the country reports highlight cases where finance linked to climate and environmental processes has successfully reached Indigenous Peoples and helped improve their livelihoods and increase their food security. In Malaysia, the Global Environment Fund’s Small Grants Programme has helped over 3,000 Orang Asal (since 1999) to access electricity through 11 micro-hydro, solar energy, and biogas projects. This has enabled communities, including women, to generate alternative incomes through sewing, baking, carpentry and rice milling. In Vietnam, the increased investment in sustainable agriculture (e.g. crop variation, agroforestry systems, irrigation, and biogas technology in animal husbandry) has diversified and improved livelihoods, increased food security and reduced poverty among Indigenous Peoples.⁷² Environmental policies have also allegedly contributed more directly to the reduction in poverty, with payments for environmental services contributing 20 per cent to the total income of poor people.⁷³



AIPP, IMN and Mae Jok villagers showing the varieties of vegetables harvested from the shifting cultivation field, Thailand.
Photo credit: Lakpa Nuri Sherpa, AIPP.

⁷² The national poverty rate has been reduced from 9.88% in 2015 to 3.75% in 2019.

⁷³ See Vietnam report.



Headman of Mae Yod village in the shifting cultivation field in Northern Thailand.

Photo credit: Mr. Lakpa Nuri Sherpa, AIPP.

05

05

Indigenous Peoples' contributions to addressing climate change

So far, this report has discussed how Indigenous Peoples' livelihoods are affected by climate change and what threats and possible opportunities climate change policies (and their implementation) present for their lives, rights and participation in policy processes. This section is dedicated to highlighting Indigenous Peoples' agency, i.e. how they are making invaluable contributions—through their day-to-day way of life as well as through targeted projects—to global climate mitigation and adaptation goals, as set out in the Paris Agreement.

Protection of forests and biodiversity: There is an inherent connection between the cultures of Indigenous Peoples and the environment that surrounds them. Since Indigenous Peoples are directly dependent on their surroundings for their health, food, water and general wellbeing, sustainably managing and protecting their natural resources is deeply embedded and integrated in their customs, rules, knowledge, traditional practices, and innovations. Each indigenous community has its own customs, spiritual beliefs, rituals and taboos that help manage the consumption and extraction of resources, averting situations where resources are over exploited, so that they are conserved and available for future generations. For example, many Indigenous Peoples have rules prohibiting community members from moving through or clearing trees in areas through which animals migrate, rules prohibiting hunting during mating seasons, and rules banning fishing at full moon.⁷⁴

Accordingly, while constituting only 5 per cent of the global population, Indigenous Peoples manage around 25 per cent of the world's land, which contains much of the planet's biodiversity and the carbon stored in soil and biomass.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See specific examples in Bangladesh, Thailand and Myanmar reports.

⁷⁵ Garnett, S.T., Burgess, N.D., Fa, J.E. et al. 2018. A spatial overview of the global importance of Indigenous lands for conservation. *Nat Sustain* 1, 369–374. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-018-0100-6>; Forest Peoples Programme, International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network, Centres of Distinction on Indigenous and Local Knowledge and Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2020) *Local Biodiversity Outlooks 2: The contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and to renewing nature and cultures*. Moreton-in-Marsh, England: www.localbiodiversityoutlooks.net, pages 234–235 and 263; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2019) *Special Report on Climate Change and Land*, 'Chapter 7.6.5 Land Tenure': "Much of the world's carbon is stored in the biomass and soil on the territories of customary landowners, including indigenous peoples (Walker et al. 2014; Garnett et al. 2018), making securing of these land tenure regimes vital in land and climate protection. These lands are estimated to hold at least 293 gigatonnes of carbon (GtC), of which around one-third (72 GtC) is in areas where indigenous peoples and local communities lack formal recognition of their tenure rights (Frechette et al. 2018)."

Despite increasing external pressure on their land, it is still regularly found that forests and other ecosystems within areas managed by Indigenous Peoples are in better health than nature outside these areas.⁷⁶ As one example, the India report emphasizes how Indigenous Peoples have steadfastly resisted forest diversion⁷⁷ and destruction with the result that forest cover on lands they managed within so-called tribal districts gradually increased between 2017 and 2019, whereas in officially notified forests within those districts, forest cover declined. Often, indigenous women play a central role in the sustainable management of forests and biodiversity. The Myanmar report highlights how women establish plant nurseries, select seeds, and protect germinating seeds and new tree saplings in a manner that prevents forest degradation.

While these contributions by Indigenous Peoples are increasingly recognized in international policies and political forums,⁷⁸ they are not yet fully accounted for and supported by countries at the national level, including in the climate policies of most countries reviewed for this study.

Customary sustainable use of natural resources: One key example of sustainable resource use by Indigenous Peoples—a practice that is embedded in their customs—is the practice of shifting cultivation. There is big variation in the shifting cultivation practices carried out by different people, but a general characteristic is the clearing of land for food production for a limited period, followed by a relatively long fallow period during which the land is allowed to regenerate. Studies have found that the amount of carbon stored in the plants and in the soil during the fallow period—plants need carbon to grow stems and leaves—is significant and far exceeds the amount of carbon dioxide released during clearing (burning) of the land.⁷⁹ Despite this, shifting cultivation is regularly defined as a driver of deforestation (and one to be addressed) in national policies.

⁷⁶ Diaz, S. et al. 2019. Report of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. IPBES: https://www.ipbes.net/sites/default/files/ipbes_7_10_add.1_en_1.pdf

⁷⁷ ‘Forest diversion’ refers to the use of forest land for non-forestry purposes under the Indian Forest (Conservation) Act 1980.

⁷⁸ Note, for example, the Special Report on Climate Change by the IPCC, endorsed by governments worldwide, which recognizes that “land titling and recognition programs, particularly those that authorize and respect Indigenous and communal tenure, can lead to improved management of forests, including for carbon storage.” (Chapter 7.6.5. Land Tenure)

⁷⁹ In Thailand, shifting cultivation farms, including active and rehabilitating fields, were found to sequester about 10 times more carbon dioxide than was emitted during burning. See AIPP, IWGIA and NDF (2011). Climate change, trees and livelihood: A case study on the carbon footprint of a Karen community in Northern Thailand. p. 21.

Traditional knowledge and climate change adaptation: Many of the country reports highlight examples of how Indigenous Peoples have adapted to and been able to thrive in harsh climatic and environmental conditions where, at first glance, human life is not easy to sustain. They have been able to do so by acquiring and maintaining a deep understanding of their surroundings, and transmitting this understanding between generations through unique sociocultural values and knowledge systems that govern relations among their people as well as their relations with nature. Such knowledge and practices make an invaluable contribution towards enhancing societal resilience to climate change and it is this knowledge and these practices that national adaptation actions “should be based on and guided by”.⁸⁰

One notable example is the water management system (the *Kghyamba*) of the Lhoba indigenous people of Lo-menthang in Nepal. For centuries, the Lhoba have ensured that every household has enough water in the dry and high-altitude area of the Himalayas where they live, by collectively operating and maintaining an irrigation system. Central to their efforts are traditional norms, rules, rituals and institutions that allow them to collectively organize the irrigation system and avoid and solve disputes. Another example, also involving a community’s collective management of scarce water resources for the benefit of all, is the *subak* traditional farming landscape in Bali. Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the *subak* system is also effective in ensuring fair distribution of water among the community and in addressing potential conflicts over water.

Transmission of traditional knowledge: Following from the above emphasis on the importance of traditional knowledge for climate change adaptation, it is important to also highlight the efforts of Indigenous Peoples, including the role of women, and their organizations to ensure the continued transition of knowledge from older knowledge-holders to young people. This is vital given the context in which many indigenous communities find themselves, with increasing pressure on youth to leave their birthplace to take up education or work. With fewer spaces and activities in everyday life that allow social interaction between youth and elders, the continued transition of valuable knowledge increasingly requires dedicated and focused activities.

⁸⁰ The Paris Agreement, article 7(5): “Parties acknowledge that adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and should be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate.”

For instance, Baan Huai Ei Kang village in Thailand has allocated part of their community forest to a women’s group to run a “natural classroom” where youth can acquire knowledge and skills in natural resource management—knowledge and skills traditionally held by women—including planting medicinal plants, producing natural dyes and collecting wild foods. In Indonesia, the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago is running a program that encourages youth to return to their communities. The program has, for example, helped young university graduates develop ways to use their skills in their villages, including through business plans. The physical returning of young people is key to the cultural survival of indigenous communities and the regeneration of their collective knowledge.

Food security and sovereignty: Some Indigenous Peoples stand as inspiring examples of how to build and maintain resilient food systems. Such examples should inform the transformation of larger food systems in order to adapt to a changing climate. A notable example are the majestic rice terraces in Ifugao, Philippines, which have been declared a UNESCO World Heritage site. The terraces stand as symbols of the resilience of the indigenous population and their ability to provide food security for generation after generation through transmitting their traditional practices and knowledge. Among the Lumads, also in the Philippines, a rich tradition of seed preservation and storage is also key to continued food security. And in Mae Chok village in Thailand, villagers had the strength and resilience of their food system put to the test during the COVID-19 pandemic when the village completely locked down for three months. With nobody entering or leaving the village for that time, the village was fully self-sufficient.

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