

UNFCCC Intersessional Meeting, Bangkok 2009

Briefing Paper

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND CLIMATE CHANGE



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Indigenous peoples depend on natural resources for their livelihood and they often inhabit diverse but fragile ecosystems. At the same time indigenous peoples are among the world's most marginalized, impoverished and vulnerable peoples. While having hardly contributed anything to the cause of global warming, they are among the most heavily affected. However, they have minimal access to resources to cope with the changes.

For many indigenous peoples, climate change is already a reality. Melting ice sheets in the Arctic makes hunting sea mammals and fishing difficult and risky, erratic rainfalls reduce productivity of fields and pastures, storms and floods destroy crops and homes. While indigenous peoples' diverse and resilient livelihood systems have enabled them to survive in often harsh and forbidding environments, the speed by which climate is changing is putting to the test the abilities of indigenous communities to adapt. Climate change however not only puts indigenous livelihood systems under stress, it also undermines indigenous human rights. For long it has been overlooked that climate change and the mitigation and adaptation schemes devised by governments and international organisations are often directly violating the rights of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to the potentially invaluable contributions of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge, innovations and practices in the global search for viable solutions for the many problems caused by climate change.

Indigenous Peoples, Climate Change and Human Rights

Within the United Nations Human Rights Framework, the connection between climate change and human rights has been highlighted in a recent report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.¹ The report, which was adopted at the March 2009 session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, outlines various implications of climate change and mitigation measures for indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups' human rights. The report concludes that climate change and the measures adopted to mitigate it threatens to undermine not only indigenous peoples' subsistence and livelihood, but also their cultural and social identity, and ultimately, their right to self-determination.



“Indigenous Peoples have suffered the very worst impacts of climate change without having contributed much to its creation and we must not be placed in the position of suffering more due to the impacts of climate change mitigation strategies in order that northern nations can continue their culture of over-consumption.”

Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change, Bali 2007





Participation in International Climate Change Processes

Indigenous peoples recognise the importance and urgency of developing policies and schemes to address climate change. Most of the concerns raised by indigenous peoples relate to the right to participate in decision-making and implementation, rights that are clearly recognized in international legal instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Agenda 21.

Despite the fact that climate changes are impacting intensely on indigenous peoples, they are very rarely considered in public discourses on climate change. In the national, regional and international processes, such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), where climate change mitigation policies are discussed, negotiated and designed, indigenous peoples have found it very difficult to get their voices heard and their concerns taken into consideration. Indigenous peoples have participated in the UNFCCC meetings since 2000. However, unlike the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) where the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) is an advisory body to the Convention, the UNFCCC is not providing any similar space for indigenous peoples.

Mitigation Schemes

Many of the climate change mitigation policies and schemes currently being developed have severe impacts on indigenous peoples. Nuclear energy, large-scale hydropower projects, agro-fuel plantations, the Clean Development Mechanism, and forest offsets coupled with carbon trading mechanisms are posing direct threats to indigenous peoples land, resources and their livelihoods.

Indigenous peoples are also opposed to many of these schemes because they do not address the real causes of climate change: the over-consumption of the world's resources by the few. Unfortunately, there is no political will among the rich and powerful nations to seriously



address the underlying cause. Instead, they propose compensation schemes like carbon trading which allow those who can afford to buy cheap “carbon credits” in the Global South to continue emitting greenhouse gases.

From April 20 – 24, 2009, indigenous representatives from all over the world gathered in Anchorage, Alaska to exchange their knowledge and experience in adapting to the impacts of climate change. It was the first time that a meeting on climate change focused only on indigenous peoples. The participants came up with key messages and recommendations which will be presented when the UNFCCC meets for the fifteenth Conference of Parties (COP15) in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009. In the Anchorage Declaration indigenous peoples challenged states to “abandon false solutions to climate change that negatively impact Indigenous Peoples’ rights, lands, air, oceans, forests, territories and waters.”

Indigenous Peoples’ Proposals

Based on the Anchorage Declaration and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2007, the International Indigenous Peoples’ Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) has come up with a number of concrete policy proposals that will be shared at the UNFCCC Intersessional Meeting in Bangkok in September/October 2009. These include:

1. Shared Vision for long-term cooperative action

- The adoption of a long-term global goal for emission reductions;
- Recognition of the rights, role and contribution of indigenous peoples, and in particular indigenous women;
- Adoption of a global rights-based framework for the new climate change treaty, adhering to relevant regional and international instruments, obligations and agreements, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, International Covenants etc.





2. Enhanced action on adaptation and its means of implementation

- The recognition of the importance of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge and customary ecosystem management for adaptation actions;
- Compliance of any adaptation policy or action with international instruments, obligations and agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- Full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples – subject to their Free, Prior and Informed Consent – at all stages of the adaptation process, including governance and disbursement of adaptation finance, planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting;
- A concrete commitment of Annex I Parties to provide finance for adaptation and ensure direct access for Indigenous Peoples to adaptation funds to support adaptation actions on indigenous lands, territories and resources, as well as the provision of risk insurance.



3. Enhanced action on mitigation

- Compliance of national and international mitigation action with international instruments, obligations and agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- Full and effective participation of indigenous peoples – subject to their Free Prior Informed Consent – in planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting of all mitigation actions that are likely to impact on their lands, territories, waters and resources;
- Recognition of the plurality of core values and benefits of forests (such as biodiversity, use and non-use value, traditional livelihoods) and of the key role of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge and livelihoods and sustainable land and forest management systems in preventing deforestation and degradation





4. Enhanced action on financing, technology and capacity-building

- Explicit commitment to base any financial mechanism (such as the proposed Multi-lateral Fund for Climate) on the principle of a common but differentiated responsibility of the Parties and to ensure Indigenous Peoples' participation in any of the options related to the governance, including all proposed bodies e.g. Board, Expert Panel, Monitoring Panel, Technical Panels, etc. of the Financial Mechanism, and to ensure access to direct funding for Indigenous Peoples' organizations and communities;
- Commitment of Annex I Parties to secure financing in order to ensure that the enhanced actions of the agreement can be fulfilled by parties involved;
- Ensure participation of Indigenous Peoples at all levels of decision-making on technology cooperation and sharing;
- Ensure direct support to capacity strengthening initiatives of Indigenous Peoples, their communities and organizations

Notes

¹ Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the relationship between climate change and human rights. A/HRC/10/61, 15. January 2009, Advance Edited version. The report is available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/10session/A.HRC.10.61AEV.pdf>



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Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples Network**