

**Human Rights Council
Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
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Asia Indigenous Caucus Statement

**Agenda Item 6: Study on the Promotion and Protection of the rights of IP
in Natural Disaster Risk Reduction and Prevention and Preparedness
Initiatives**

Indigenous peoples in Asia are the most impoverished, marginalized and vulnerable peoples in the world and are also the most affected by climate change impacts and its uncertainties.

Generally, indigenous peoples inhabit marginal and fragile ecosystems. These areas are most threatened from increased climatic uncertainties and calamities, unpredictable occurrences and slow onset climatic events like cyclones, hailstorms, desertification, sea level rise, floods and prolonged droughts. These events are occurring in increased intensity, which is severely impacting our lives since our livelihood system is directly dependent on these ecosystems. And we would like to note that these are effects of the operations of extractive industries and so-called development projects mostly supported by the states over the past decades.

Further, the economy, social organization, identity, and cultural and spiritual values of the indigenous peoples are closely linked to our biological diversity. Therefore, climatic uncertainties can cause specific effects such as demographic changes, mass migration, loss of livelihoods and food security; land and natural resource degradation; water shortages, health problems, loss of traditional knowledge, housing, forest and natural resource management; and human rights violations etc. and adaptation have serious adverse implications to indigenous peoples.

For instance, there are many cases of forced evictions or displacement of indigenous peoples from their homelands as a result of mitigation measures such as construction of large dams, bio-fuel plantations and creation of Protected Areas in our territories without our consent.

However, indigenous peoples should not be looked upon as just ‘vulnerable people’ to climate change. What is being missed out is that Indigenous peoples are *ecosystem peoples* who have sound knowledge and intimate relationship with environment. Indigenous knowledge is unique to a given culture and environment as they are acquired through generations of empirical experiences. These rich knowledge systems and practices can be tapped to provide solution to many mitigation and adaptation measures to climate change. Many indigenous peoples are taking their own initiatives in coping with climate change in the form of identifying the changes that are occurring in climatic patterns and the ensuing challenges. In some cases, indigenous communities have developed specific coping strategies to extreme variations of weather.

Some indigenous-led adaptation practices and strategies related to livelihood and well-being of indigenous peoples are as follows:

- Indigenous peoples have grown different varieties of crops like legumes, cereals and vegetables in the same plot of land for generations in Sabah, Malaysia, as is the case in many part of Asia. This minimizes the risk of extensive crop failure from any weather and climate changes since different crops thrive under different conditions.
- In the areas prone to flooding, indigenous peoples are creating floating vegetable gardens. For instance, in plain areas of Bangladesh they practice this under the name 'Baira Cultivation'.
- Indigenous peoples shift the calendar of livelihood activities such as planting and crop harvesting and wild plant gathering.
- Rainwater harvesting has been a common adaptation practice in South Asia for centuries, both for household use and agricultural purposes.
- Indigenous peoples on the coastlines of Vietnam are planting windbreaks along the cost to diffuse the tropical storm waves.
- In Bangladesh, indigenous people have increased the height of their houses from the ground in flood prone areas.
- Indigenous peoples are practicing shifting cultivation in new locations, which are less susceptible to climatic condition.
- To counter the disappearance of medicinal plants that is found in the forest areas, some communities have started ex-situ conservation in their backyards or in community gardens guided by indigenous healers in countries like Nepal, Malaysia and Vietnam, etc. Some of this knowledge are documented and taught in community schools for knowledge transmission.

It is therefore essential to recognize both the vulnerability and contributions of indigenous peoples in designing culturally appropriate adaptation and mitigation development plan as defined by the communities.

We are highly affected by climate change externalities in terms of our livelihood and tangible assets, as well as our culture and traditional knowledge. Conversely, our positive contributions to sustainable management of resources and the abatement of greenhouse gases have not been recognized and compensated by the UNFCCC and other multilateral and bilateral agencies.

One of the most prominent issues and concerns of indigenous peoples is our full and effective engagement in policies and strategies on climate change adaptation and access to resources. We would like seriously to draw your attention on the following points:

- Indigenous peoples have minimal access to resources to cope with climate change such as the adaptation fund and the green climate fund established by the UNFCCC, among others.
- Support in developing countries for adaptation, culturally appropriate programmes and technology, interventions and capacity building has routinely been overlooked by national governments.
- Many planned adaptation and development projects, such as National Adaptation Programme of Actions (NAPAs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), have also ignored our rights, issues and concerns and are being implemented without our consent. We have not been involved nor have we been consulted in the development of NAPA and NAP. Indigenous peoples are often excluded in decision-making processes at all levels.
- Many policies, measures and strategies adopted to deal with climate change undermine indigenous peoples' cultural and social identity, right to self-determination and livelihood.

Climate change is a reality and many research studies have concluded that climatic uncertainty will increase in the future. This will inevitably create a harsh situation for indigenous peoples if adaptation and mitigations policies and plans do not effectively incorporate our issues and concerns. Unfortunately, though indigenous peoples are at the forefront of the issue of adaptation, there is no adequate mechanism for us to participate effectively in the discussions regarding the development of adaptation strategies, plan and funding mechanisms at the national and international levels.

This calls for an urgent need for the creation of such mechanisms and awareness raising and capacity building of indigenous peoples so that we can actively participate in climate change negotiations and processes at all levels.

In this regard, we present the following recommendations:

- Recognize, protect and promote indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge and community-based adaptation practices, measures and strategies.
- Recognize the rights of indigenous peoples to our land, territories and resources, our sustainable resource management systems and our right to self-determined development and customary law.
- Recommend the government agencies to study and support indigenous peoples on traditional cultivation and climate change adaptation.
- Ensure genuine FPIC in all Climate Change mitigation and adaptation processes, mechanisms, and activities impacting Indigenous Peoples.
- Ensure the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in NAPAs, NAPs and in all relevant agreements, policies and programmes at local, regional and international levels.
- Ensure that indigenous peoples have direct access to adaptation funds and culturally appropriate technologies for climate change adaptation.
- Provide support and assistance in building the capacities of indigenous peoples for climate change adaptation, especially in disaster hotspots.
- Provide sustainable livelihood diversification support to indigenous communities to cope with the impacts of climate change and strengthen our adaptive capacities.
- Promote collaborative research and action between indigenous peoples and research institutions.