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POLICY BRIEF

Fair and effective climate policies: engaging indigenous peoples



Photo: Simone Köppel

The Glasgow Climate Pact, the framework document of the 2021 United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP26), recognizes the important role of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and civil society for combating climate change and emphasizes the urgent need for cooperative action at different levels (UNFCCC, 2021). It also recognizes their contributions for meeting the targets established under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, and urges the Parties to actively involve IPLCs in the design and implementation of climate actions.

To this end, the participation of indigenous peoples in climate action is widely recognized as an essential element for the formulation of inclusive and effective policies. This is not just because indigenous peoples suffer relatively greater impacts from the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss¹, but also because they possess crucial knowledge for climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as for the sustainable use of ecosystems and their services².

In response to this, initiatives, such as those described in the box below, have been created for both promoting the participation of IPLCs in the process of formulating public policies on climate, as well as recognizing and valuing their traditional knowledge and practices for a more effective approach that strengthens their resilience.

1 One of the reasons is their high degree of dependence on ecosystems that are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The International Labor Organization of the United Nations (2017) notes that indigenous peoples are among the groups that most participate in primary activities such as forestry, agriculture and raising livestock, which depend directly on ecosystem services. For example, some 60 to 70 million indigenous people (out of the 476 million indigenous people in the world) depend directly on the forest for their survival (ILO 2017; COAG, 2022). This poses a threat not only to the natural resources and livelihoods of indigenous peoples, but also to their identity (UNGA, 2017). Similarly, indigenous peoples are often part of the poorest social classes, the stratum most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to their lack of capacity and resources to overcome and recover from extreme climate events (ILO, 2017; OECD, 2015). 20% of the people living in extreme poverty are indigenous, and they have an average life expectancy that is 20 years less than non-indigenous people (World Bank, 2022). Finally, indigenous peoples are often excluded from decision-making and institutional support, which limits their access to solutions and actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change (ILO, 2017).

2 According to Garnett et al. (2018), most of the land managed or owned by indigenous peoples is less intensively used compared to land under other ownership regimes. Similarly, a higher proportion of these lands are classified as “natural” (67%), compared to land under other ownership regimes (44%). This means that the protection of this land depends on the governance, institutions and actions of indigenous peoples and the sustainable management models they have developed over time. However, the authors point out that this does not mean that all indigenous peoples have the desire to preserve their lands.

The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The LCIPP was established in 2015 with the Paris Agreement decision that “recognizes the need to strengthen knowledge, technologies, practices and efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples related to addressing and responding to climate change» (UNFCCC, 2015). The main objectives of the platform are:

- Promote the sharing of experiences and good practices to address climate change from a holistic perspective;
- Build capacities of governments and IPLCs to collaborate on climate action; and
- Include IPLC knowledge systems, practices and innovation in measures, programmes and policies, as well as enabling IPLCs to take stronger and more ambitious climate action.

The Facilitative Working Group (FWG) of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) promotes and monitors activities associated with the goals of the Platform and work plan. To learn more about the initiative and opportunities for collaboration, visit the website at <https://lcipp.unfccc.int/homepage>

Although these initiatives have been fundamental, from their experiences we can pinpoint two persistent challenges for the inclusion of indigenous peoples in climate action:

- Indigenous peoples have commonly been seen as a vulnerable social group and their effective participation requires the recognition of their importance as retainers of knowledge and expertise for climate solutions. Despite the fact that a number of projects have sought to use and value the knowledge and practices of indigenous peoples, it is important to turn this into action by promoting their inclusion in the formulation of climate change mitigation and adaptation actions.
- This participation, in most cases, has been in the form of free, prior and informed consent processes on a local scale. Efforts are still required for the greater involvement of indigenous peoples in the formulation and approval of policies on a larger scale, as well as mechanisms that reinforce the alignment of local efforts with the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.

This document discusses the main lessons learned and policy implications from the implementation of projects under the framework of the EUROCLIMA+ programme in the Forests, Biodiversity and Ecosystems (FBE) and Resilient Food Production (RFP) sectors, as well as the actions of the Gender and Vulnerable Groups programme to address these challenges.



Public policy implications

The projects and initiatives implemented under the framework of the EUROCLIMA+ programme provide lessons for addressing these challenges. These translate into implications for the processes of formulating climate policies, as well as consensus, in order to strengthen national contributions to global climate goals.

Effective participation of the indigenous population for the approval of national climate policies: prior consultation for Peru's Framework Law on Climate Change.

With the actions of the action line “gender and vulnerable groups”, the International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies (FIIAPP), one of the implementing agencies of the EUROCLIMA+ programme, under the leadership of the Environment Ministry of Peru and in coordination with the Peruvian Ministry of Culture and seven national organizations representing indigenous peoples, supported the process of prior consultation for the Framework Law on Climate Change (RLMCC) in Peru. Moreover, it also supported the design and implementation of the Indigenous Peoples' Platform against Climate Change (PPICC), a space to «value, recognize and disseminate indigenous knowledge and practices that contribute to the integrated management of climate change in the country.» The platform is formally recognized by the Peruvian State.

The prior consultation process was carried out over 2018 and 2019, and the dialogue defined the contributions of indigenous peoples to be included in Peru's Framework Law on Climate Change. The process involved the binding opinions of indigenous peoples' organizations in this policy instrument, which is made up of proposals by the Ministry of the Environment and national indigenous peoples' organizations in Peru.

Lessons learned and implications for public policy:

- Regulate the participatory process in national regulations using an intercultural and gender approach that is flexible. It should also include the provision of forums for dialogue and negotiation. In this case, the regulation of the participatory process for Peruvian legislation is called «Dialoguemos.»
- Before carrying out prior consultation, identify the common goals of government authorities and indigenous peoples, and ensure sufficient time and adequate forums for dialogue to build a relationship of mutual trust. This ensures that the perspectives of indigenous peoples is included in the definition of problems and the formulation of solutions.
- Update and develop climate change capacities among indigenous peoples to strengthen their inclusion in climate policy processes.
- Employ interpreters of native languages in all dialogues, ensuring that all dissemination of the process is carried out in these languages to inform indigenous peoples and the population in general.
- Ensure expert technical support for the Ministries of Environment and Culture of Peru, as well as indigenous organizations, by facilitating the sub-processes that are part of the consultation process. In this case, the technical support provided by FIIAPP and the EUROCLIMA+ programme acted as a facilitator for the participating stakeholders, ensuring an intercultural approach in the process and the achievement of goals.
- Ensure the institutionality of the participatory process in a forum for dialogue for future processes (in this case, the PPICC).

Source: European Commission (2021a); EUROCLIMA+ (2021a).

Quechua and Aymara ancestral technological solutions for resilient food production: the «Promoting the heritage of our ancestors in resilient production, trade and consumption of cañahua and tarwi in Bolivia and Peru» project.

The project was implemented by Swisscontact and PROINPA (Foundation for the Promotion and Research of Andean Products) in 2019 and 2021. The goal was to increase the resilience of production systems in the Bolivian and Peruvian highlands by improving the production, marketing and consumption of cañahua and tarwi. Among the activities for achieving this objective, the project promoted the revaluation and sharing of Quechua and Aymara ancestral knowledge to address adverse phenomena. They organized participatory workshops with indigenous peoples to identify vulnerabilities. Following this, in a participatory process, they identified ancestral knowledge for developing solutions and, with the support of project technicians, these solutions were adapted and improved for implementation. The solutions are replicated through the training of community leaders of rural producers. The solutions have been replicated in other municipalities in Bolivia and Peru, and have resulted in cañahua and tarwi crops being included in the annual municipal and regional operational programmes in both countries.

Lessons learned and implications for public policy:

- Establish the rules and regulations for participation in the internal processes of indigenous peoples and their internal governance. In the case of this project, the implementers consulted the authorities in each municipality about who would participate in the process. In turn, they consulted their communities and made the final decision.
- Ensure there are spaces for developing capacities and sharing experiences, since the valuing of ancestral knowledge is a process in itself. In this project, many local, national and bi-national workshops were held for developing capacities on climate change, participatory identification of climatic vulnerabilities and ancestral knowledge for land preparation, planting, harvesting, storage and uses of cañahua and tarwi.
- Provide expert technical assistance, as this is crucial for facilitating the processes of identifying vulnerabilities and valuing ancestral knowledge, as well as for developing capacities. In this project, Swisscontact and PROINPA provided expert technical assistance that supported the process of valuing ancestral knowledge and its dissemination, replication and recognition.

Source: EUROCLIMA+ (2021b)



Action Based on Indigenous Knowledge³ (ABIK) and its implementation at the national level: the «Water Sowing and Harvesting, Water Service Fees and Acknowledgement of Environmental Services Payments in the South-South Cooperation Framework» project implemented in Costa Rica and Peru.

The project was implemented by the Association for Research and Integral Development (AIDER, Peru) and the National Forestry Financing Fund (FONAFIFO, Costa Rica) between 2019 and 2021. The project focused on the construction of water reservoirs, or «lagoons,» that function as regulators of the water supply by restoring the landscape and feeding the water springs in the areas at lower altitudes. The knowledge of these reservoirs, called Q'ochas («lagoon» in Quechua) was revived by Peruvian indigenous women, the Machaca engineers and founders of the Bartolomé Aripaylla Association in Peru, and complemented by their engineering knowledge. This technology offers a solution to water regulation problems resulting from climate change. The knowledge was transmitted through training and support for 1,200 rural landholders (campesinos) in the province of Guanacaste, Costa Rica. The initiative was expanded and replicated in Costa Rica with the Rural Development Institute (INDER) investing USD 125,000 for the construction of 28 additional reservoirs.

Lessons learned and implications for public policy:

- Directly involve indigenous peoples in the design, implementation and monitoring of measures. In this case, the Machaca engineers were involved in the design of the reservoirs implemented in the province of Guanacaste, as well as in the dissemination of the ABIK in other areas. This was carried out in a «teaching by showing» approach where both the engineers and the beneficiary campesinos were directly involved in implementing the technology. The monitoring of the ABIK and its results ensured greater credibility and trust in the technology for scaling up the implementation.
- When traditional practices and knowledge are not yet recognized, it is crucial to provide specialized technical assistance to ensure a dialogue with indigenous peoples aimed at fostering the recognition and valuing of their practices and knowledge and, when appropriate, complement this with external knowledge. This assistance can be crucial for coordination between stakeholders aimed at dissemination and addressing the challenges that arise from differences in language and world views. In this project, AIDER played a fundamental role, ensuring cooperation between the Bartolomé Aripaylla Association and the Machaca engineers, as well as the National Forestry Financing Fund (FONAFIFO) and the Rural Development Institute (INDER) to achieve the inclusion of the ABIK in the formulation of climate actions. This process was successful because AIDER is an organization that is recognized by both indigenous peoples and government agencies for its experience and history of collaboration with indigenous peoples.

Source: European Commission (2021b).

The experience from the projects implemented under the framework of the EUROCLIMA+ programme underscore that a legal framework that recognizes and regulates processes for participation and the free and prior informed consent for developing policies is essential to ensure the active involvement of indigenous peoples in climate action. Similarly, these participatory processes should not be limited to a single process, but rather develop through dialogue in recognized forums and platforms for the ongoing participation and consultation of indigenous peoples for the formulation of climate policies.

Ensuring the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the formulation of climate solutions requires strengthening their role as a community that has perspectives and knowledge essential for understanding climate problems, as well as for formulating solutions. This implies recognizing and valuing this knowledge. To achieve this, it is crucial to involve stakeholders with experience collaborating with indigenous peoples and who understand their context, such as the EUROCLIMA+ programme agencies and organizations that facilitate this process. At the same time, it is necessary to implement processes for developing capacities and skills so that indigenous peoples can play a role in the formulation of policies and demonstrate their contribution to achieving climate targets.

3. Action Based on Indigenous Knowledge (ABIK) refers to the “use of indigenous knowledge, in any area, combined with knowledge external to it, which can even be the knowledge of another indigenous people” (European Commission, 2021b).

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