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Programme



## Background Note

### Indigenous Peoples, Marginalized Populations and Climate Change

Vulnerability, Adaptation and Traditional Knowledge

19-21 July 2011, Mexico City

An international workshop on *Indigenous Peoples, Marginalized Populations and Climate Change: Vulnerability, Adaptation and Traditional Knowledge* will be convened in Mexico City, Mexico (19-21 July 2011) by United Nations University (UNU), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in collaboration with the Mexican National Institute of Ecology (INE). A second workshop focusing on adaptation and mitigation will be held later in 2011 in Cairns, Australia. The aim of the workshops is to identify, compile and analyze relevant indigenous and local observations, knowledge and practices related to understanding climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation. The workshops will provide a key opportunity to ensure that experience, sources of information and knowledge (scientific, indigenous and local), along with data and literature (scientific and grey), focusing on vulnerable and marginalized regions of the world are made available to the authors of the IPCC 5th Assessment Report and the global community.

Information on the second workshop will be provided at a later date.

### Indigenous Peoples, Marginalized Populations and Climate Change

When considering climate change, indigenous peoples and marginalized populations warrant particular attention. Impacts on their territories and communities are anticipated to be both early and severe due to their location in vulnerable environments, including small islands, high altitude zones, desert margins and the circumpolar Arctic. Indeed, climate change poses a direct threat to many indigenous and marginalized societies due to their continuing reliance upon resource-based livelihoods. There is a need to understand the specific vulnerabilities and adaptation capacities of indigenous and marginalized communities.

Indigenous and marginalized peoples, however, are not just victims of climate change. Their accumulated knowledge makes them excellent observers of environmental change and related impacts. Attentiveness to environmental variability, shifts and trends is an integral part of their ways of life. Community-based and local knowledge may thus offer valuable insights into environmental change due to climate change, and complement broader-scale scientific research with local precision and nuance. Finally, indigenous societies and marginalized populations have elaborate and diverse coping strategies to deal with change. While the environmental transformations caused by climate change are expected to be unprecedented, indigenous and local knowledge and coping strategies may nonetheless provide a crucial foundation for community-based adaptation measures.

## Background Information

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is an international scientific body tasked with evaluating the risk of climate change caused by human activity. The panel was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The IPCC is composed of government representatives with relevant expertise. Nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations are allowed to attend as observers at the invitation of the IPCC.

A main activity of the IPCC is publishing Assessment Reports (ARs) on topics relevant to the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These reports are based mainly on peer reviewed and published scientific literature and are the most widely cited reports in almost any debate related to climate change. Governments and international organizations generally regard the IPCC reports as authoritative.

Since 1990, the IPCC has published four comprehensive Assessment Reports (ARs) reviewing the latest climate science as well as information relevant to its three working groups which address:

- The Physical Science Basis (Working Group I),
- Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability (Working Group II), and
- Mitigation of Climate Change (Working Group III).

The ARs are prepared by teams of authors with relevant expertise. Authors for the IPCC ARs are selected from a list of researchers prepared by governments, observer organizations, and academia on the basis of scientific merit and academic credentials.

The IPCC is currently working on its Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), which will be published in 2014. Like previous ARs, the outline for AR5 was developed through a scoping process that involved climate change experts from all relevant disciplines, representatives from governments, and other interested stakeholders. The outline was adopted during the 31st IPCC session in Bali, 26-29 October 2009 and specifically notes that "Chapters 14-17 will include case studies of, e.g., Least Developed Countries, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable countries and groups" (IPCC-XXXI/Doc 20, Rev. 1).

The IPCC AR4 noted that indigenous knowledge is "an invaluable basis for developing adaptation and natural resource management strategies in response to environmental and other forms of change." This was reaffirmed at the 32nd Session of the IPCC in 2010: "indigenous or traditional knowledge may prove useful for understanding the potential of certain adaptation strategies that are cost-effective, participatory and sustainable" (IPCC-XXXII/Doc 7). And in the last year, there has been an increasing realization that the observations and assessments of indigenous peoples and marginalized populations provide valuable regional *in situ* information, offer regional verification of global scientific models and satellite data sets, and provide the basis for successful adaptation and mitigation strategies.

But observations and assessments by indigenous peoples, marginalized populations and developing country scientists have remained relatively inaccessible to the IPCC process mostly due to language and socio-cultural barriers. Thus, for the most part, indigenous and marginalized peoples' knowledge that appears in grey literature (i.e. literature that is unpublished or published outside peer-reviewed academic forums) or that is made available through non-written media has remained outside the scope of IPCC assessments.

At its 32nd session, the IPCC recommended broadening the participation of regional experts, the inclusion of grey literature, literature in other languages, and the organization of workshops - particularly in developing regions - to collect and assess relevant *in situ* observations and scientific data on topics relevant to AR5 (IPCC-XXXII/Doc 7).

## Workshops

Noting that assessing impacts on all regions and populations is the mandate of Working Group II and that issues related to indigenous peoples and marginalized populations will be prominent in several of the chapters of the AR5, IPCC and UNU in July 2010 agreed to co-organize two workshops to redress the shortfall of available information on indigenous and marginalized peoples and their climate change adaptation and mitigation. Subsequently SCBD, UNDP and UNESCO agreed to help co-convene these events.

The two planned workshops - which will focus on adaptation and mitigation respectively - will bring together lead authors for the AR5, indigenous peoples and marginalized population experts, and developing country scientists. The workshops will allow for more in-depth focus on the topics and regions for which IPCC is seeking input. The workshop outcomes will be made available to Working Group II and Working Group III lead author meetings for the AR5, as well as to the general public. An international panel of experts will oversee both workshops.

United Nations University (UNU) will contribute its extensive network of indigenous and scientific partners in the developing world and research data on the topic of indigenous peoples, marginalized populations and climate change. UNU's initial contribution to the workshop is the October 2010 publication *Advance Guard: Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation, Mitigation and Indigenous Peoples - A Compendium of Case Studies*, which aims to provide an information baseline for the meeting and a preliminary analysis of trends emerging.

UNESCO's Climate Frontlines, an interagency platform on climate change and the knowledge of indigenous peoples, small islanders and other vulnerable communities, which is implemented in partnership with the SCBD, the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII) and the Office of the High Commission on Human Rights (OHCHR), will also contribute its database and networks to the workshops.

### **Aims**

The overall aims of the workshops are to:

- Advance understanding of climate change vulnerability, adaptation and mitigation with respect to indigenous peoples and marginalized populations, with particular attention to vulnerable regions.
- Compile regional and local data and grey literature that are relevant for understanding climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation involving local and indigenous knowledge holders, marginalized populations, and developing country scientists.
- Engage indigenous peoples, marginalized populations and developing country scientists and their research in international climate dialogues and debates.
- Provide policy-makers with relevant information on the vulnerabilities, knowledge and adaptive capacity of indigenous peoples and marginalized populations.

### **Workshop Convenors**

- United Nations University (UNU)
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
- Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

### **Timing and Location of Workshops**

- Workshop on Vulnerability, Adaptation and Traditional Knowledge: 19-21 July 2011, Mexico City, Mexico
- Workshop on Adaptation, Mitigation and Traditional Knowledge: TBC, Cairns, Australia

### **Participants**

Broad international representation including indigenous peoples and local community knowledge holders and experts, developing country scientists and members of IPCC WG II and WG III.

### **Proposed Programme Outline for Workshops**

- Day 1: Opening ceremony and traditional welcome. Plenary session with overview lectures and presentations on workshop themes.
- Day 2: Breakout into groups to discuss workshop themes in detail. Summary reports for each session to be circulated at the end of the day.
- Day 3: Plenary session for discussion and update of summary reports that will be presented by the chairpersons of breakout groups.

## **Expected Outcomes**

- An overview of current knowledge on climate change vulnerability, adaptation, and mitigation held by indigenous peoples, marginalized populations and developing country scientists. To be presented through workshop reports.
- Collation of conference background papers and relevant literature/data with integration into a global database.
- Creation of a broad international network, including indigenous peoples, representatives of marginalized populations and scientific experts.

## **Further information**

The workshops will be held in English. Subject to demand and availability of funds, Spanish and/or French translation may be made available. A limited number of travel grants will be made available for selected participants.

Submissions will be accepted through the online submission form ([http://www.unutki.org/abstract\\_submission.php](http://www.unutki.org/abstract_submission.php)) until 18 March 2011. For more information about the workshops please visit [http://www.climatefrontlines.org/workshop\\_background](http://www.climatefrontlines.org/workshop_background) or [http://www.unutki.org/default.php?doc\\_id=187](http://www.unutki.org/default.php?doc_id=187). Questions regarding the workshops can be directed to the workshop secretariat via [tkimeetings@ias.unu.edu](mailto:tkimeetings@ias.unu.edu).

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