Making the Green Climate Fund Respond to Indigenous Peoples’ Needs

DOHA, Qatar, 30 November (Tebtebba Indigenous Information Service) – Even as they have to push for “full and effective participation” at the Green Climate Fund Board meetings and during climate negotiations, indigenous peoples’ representatives are optimistic that the Fund, once available, can help respond to their climate change-related needs, concerns and issues.
“If we can push for equitable access to the Green Climate Fund, we can help our communities to adapt better to the impacts of climate change,” said Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Executive Director of Tebtebba, a Philippine-based indigenous institution promoting “self-determined development.”

Tauli-Corpuz moderated on 28 November a side event at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change meetings, which began last Monday at this capital city of Qatar. The event was organized by Tebtebba and the Indigenous Peoples’ Partnership on Climate Change and Forests and supported by the Norwegian Agency for Cooperation and Development.

If guided by international standards on environmental and social safeguards, the Fund can strengthen “our gains in the last 50 years” in the areas of “rights-based and socially responsive development” for indigenous and local communities, said Tauli-Corpuz.

For her part, Niranjali Amerasinghe of the Washington D.C.-based Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), stressed on “principles-based safeguards” in the GCF Governing Instrument as they apply in different disbursement contexts, and consultation.

What is needed, she said, is an “additional operational text providing more definitive guidance to governments on how to comply with them.”
She also suggested that the GCF could channel funds through regional development banks. But the banks’ safeguard measures should be complementary to those of the GCF, she said.

Meanwhile, indigenous peoples have yet to hurdle some challenges, particularly on how to fully and effectively participate in the policy-making process related to the Fund.

During the first two meetings of the GCF Board, indigenous peoples were not differentiated from civil society at GCF Board meetings and had no speaking rights during formal sessions, said Mrinal Kanti Tripura, Executive Director, Maleya Foundation, an indigenous organization based in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh.

He also stressed the need for indigenous peoples to have direct access to the GCF. “The Fund must respect the principles of free, prior and informed consent, and others contained in the UN Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples,” he added.

Given the opportunity to build their capacity, indigenous peoples can help build what some policy-makers call “climate change-proof” communities. “Indigenous peoples cannot always be victims of climate change, but they can also be part of the solution if given the chance,” said Stanley Kimaren, Executive Director of the Indigenous Livelihood Enhancement Partners (ILEPA) in Kenya.

The Maasai leader cited a partnership project between his organization and Tebtebba, which, he said, enhanced indigenous peoples’ capacity to deal with climate change impacts. This partnership is called the Indigenous Peoples’ Partnership on Climate Change and Forests.

He said the partnership enabled the 16 partner-organizations in 12 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to visit each other and share lessons and best practices. The partnership, among other things, has promoted the diversification of livelihoods as a climate adaptation measure, he said.

“The partnership also helped build the capacities of indigenous peoples, who can now effectively engage with government about climate change policies,” said Kimaren. “Other partners have shown that given the opportunity, they can also measure carbon and map their territories and ensure the tenure rights over their lands and resources.”