Indigenous peoples call for recognition of rights at the Green Climate Fund

As the Green Climate Fund (GCF) is being pressured to approve more projects and targets disbursing US$2.6 billion by end of 2016, indigenous peoples’ issues are being left out.

In its 13th meeting of the GCF Board in Songdo, South Korea on June 28-30, 2016, indigenous peoples expressed their concern that the GCF is out of sync with the emerging international good practice and transformational approaches.
This is with respect to recognition, promotion and fulfillment of indigenous peoples’ rights within the context of climate change interventions.

“We want to express that we are concerned about how the Fund is seemingly intentional in its silence about indigenous peoples’ issues,” Kimaren Ole Riamit, a Maasai and head of ILEPA (Indigenous Livelihood Enhancement Partners) from Kenya said during the civil society preparatory meeting.

ILEPA is a partner of Tebteebba advocating for indigenous peoples’ rights and issues as part of the Indigenous Peoples’ Advocacy Team on the GCF and Climate Finance.

He expressed this in light of the absence of any reference to indigenous peoples in the draft decisions or other documents that the board was set to talk about in the board meeting.

He added that despite the numerous efforts of the indigenous peoples to reach out to the board, their calls seem to fall on deaf ears.

In a letter submitted to the GCF supported by 36 indigenous peoples’ organizations, NGOs and CSO support groups and networks, indigenous peoples urgently called for the Fund to set up an Indigenous Peoples’ Policy.
The letter further expressed that “such a step would be required in order to position the Fund in the highest level of environmental, social and human rights standards as regards climate finance, while enabling the Fund to deliver high quality and high impact results.”

In line with this, indigenous peoples also called for acknowledgment of the GCF on the positive contributions of their traditional knowledge to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

They referred to the Paris Agreement that explicitly refers to the need to ensure the respect of the rights of indigenous peoples in any climate change-related activity and which acknowledges the potential contribution and the need to strengthen indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge.

When asked about how the Fund intends to engage and recognize indigenous peoples, GCF co-chair Zaheer Fakir said that the absence of an indigenous peoples’ policy does not preclude indigenous peoples to participate.

“You are welcome anytime to submit your proposals as the Fund is open to hear from you,” he added.

However, indigenous peoples find it hard to meaningfully engage at the Fund level as they are not recognized as a separate constituency. Thus, their concerns are lumped under the recognized constituencies of civil society organizations (CSOs).

In the next board meeting in Ecuador this October, the board is set to talk about environmental and social safeguards (ESS) of the Fund.

According to Francesco Martone, advisor to the indigenous peoples’ advocacy team, safeguards is a crucial issue for indigenous peoples.

“Here, we want to see that indigenous peoples’ customary rights to their land, right to free, prior and informed consent, and participation are highlighted,” he said.

Despite challenges in engaging with the Fund, indigenous peoples are still hopeful that their calls to the GCF will be heeded. The indigenous peoples’ team believes that while the GCF presents opportunities for indigenous peoples, this also poses some pitfalls and dangers—if not established well.

The GCF is created under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as a financial operating entity to disburse funds for low emission and climate resilient project and programs developed by the public and private sectors. Established in Cancun, Mexico in 2010 during the climate change conference, the Fund aims to promote a paradigm shift by funding both mitigation and adaptation projects to contribute to sustainable development of developing countries. (Tebtebba Indigenous Information Service - Helen Biangalen-Magata)