Indigenous Peoples Call for the Urgent Adoption of the Green Climate Fund’s Indigenous Peoples Policy

As the world scrambles to limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5°C, countries have been designing and submitting their national climate action plans that show their contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement was adopted by 195 countries in December 2015 and gov-
Governments agreed to undertake rapid reductions thereafter and set more ambitious targets every after five years. As in previous agreements, climate finance has been identified as linchpin in making the Paris Agreement successful.

The Green Climate Fund has been created by the Conference of Parties (COP) to be the operating entity of the Financial Mechanism of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Likewise, Article 9 of the Paris Agreement states that the GCF as an institution serving the agreement shall aim to ensure efficient access to financial resources through simplified approval procedures and enhance readiness support. As such, the GCF is mandated to fund mitigation and adaptation projects for developing countries, with half of its fund for adaptation going to least developed countries (LDCs), African states and small island developing states (SIDS).

With an initial guidance from the COP and under the governance of the GCF board, the fund has established its independent secretariat in its headquarters in Songdo, Republic of South Korea with the World Bank as its interim Trustee. To date, the fund has approved a total of 53 projects amounting to 2.6 billion USD.

**But why should indigenous peoples matter in climate finance?**

It has been said time and again that while climate change impacts everyone, the most vulnerable including indigenous peoples are the ones who carry the heavier burden. Unfortunately, indigenous peoples are also at the forefront of unsafeguarded mitigation measures and actions—which are taken in response to climate change. Thus, indigenous peoples pay a ‘double negative price’ for Climate Change. They suffer from direct adverse climate change impacts, as well as from actions or measures taken to stop climate change from occurring or developing further (Riamit, 2016).

Ironically, indigenous peoples also possess the remaining biodiversity hotspots in the world and their breadth of knowledge in managing their resources are crucial to both climate change mitigation and adaptation. But for indigenous peoples to be able to continue their practices and for these practices to be maximized to contribute to climate solutions, indigenous peoples have to be fully engaged.

Indigenous peoples have been engaging in many climate finance mechanisms to raise the need for inclusion, respect for indigenous peoples rights and direct access, among others. Even the governing instrument of the Fund recognizes the crucial importance of input and participation of indigenous peoples in the design and implementation of the strategies and activities to be finance by the Fund (Paragraph 71). And rightly so because according to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNSRRIP) Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, indigenous peoples are the ones who are land based and are direct managers of the forests. They are not mere advocates—they are the actual occupants of the remaining resources in the most parts of the world (Tauli-Corpuz, 2016.)
As a result of strong engagement of indigenous peoples with civil society organizations and the GCF, the board came up with a decision to develop and indigenous peoples policy. In its 15th board meeting in Samoa on December 2016, the board adopted a decision that a) requests the Secretariat to prepare for consideration by the Board, at its seventeenth meeting, a fund-wide Indigenous Peoples Policy; and b) invites submissions from the Board, and Alternate members and observer organizations in relation to the development of the GCF Indigenous Peoples Policy.

“We welcome this decision as we have been calling for an IP policy in the Fund since we began engaging in the Fund” said Kimaren Riamit, the alternate active observer for the Southern CSOs and a member of the Indigenous Peoples’ Global Advocacy Team on the GCF, during the 15th meeting of the board.

Consequently, right after the 17th meeting of the board on July 2017, the GCF secretariat has called for public inputs on a draft Indigenous Peoples’ Policy that has garnered quite a number of inputs from indigenous peoples and civil society organizations as well. Tebtebba and the IP team has also facilitated a joint indigenous peoples’ submission that welcomed the draft policy and also reiterated the overarching principles that include among others- a) do-no-harm, b) do good and c) full and effective participation of indigenous peoples.
The several letters to the board and submissions to the secretariat called for the key principles and components of an IP policy - the same demands that were reiterated by the International Indigenous Peoples’ Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC). Among these are:

a. To support and promote the positive contributions of indigenous peoples to climate change mitigation and adaptation;

b. To enable the critical role of indigenous peoples in assisting the Fund to achieve its transformational goals, with regard to more effective, sustainable and equitable climate change results, outcomes and impacts;

c. To avoid and mitigate possible adverse impacts of the Fund’s activities on indigenous peoples’ rights, interests and well-being;

d. To ensure the respect of the rights of indigenous peoples in the whole spectrum of the Fund’s activities and initiatives, in full alignment with applicable international obligations and standards such as ILO Convention 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP);

e. To recognize and respect in all activities financed by the Green Climate Fund, indigenous peoples’ rights to collectively own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired;

f. To recognize and effectively apply the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), in accordance with relevant international laws and standards, and international best practice principles; and

g. To promote and ensure the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples at all levels of the Fund’s activities and initiatives.

Since the GCF is already fully operational and is now approving projects, several of which are in indigenous peoples’ territories, it is crucial that necessary safeguards are in place to ensure that indigenous peoples’ rights are fully respected and promoted.

Indigenous peoples are therefore urgently calling for the Green Climate Fund board to adopt the IP policy without delay on its next board meeting (19th BM) on February 27 to March 1, 2018. (Tebtebba Indigenous Information Service-Helen Biangalen-Magata)