Second-generation indigenous leaders successfully finish virtual training on policy advocacy in the UNFCCC and related processes

“Nothing is really ambitious if we really want to make change.”

Baguio City, Philippines -- Glenn Ernie Cuthbert Dixon, an advisor and technical assistant to the Permanent Working Commissions of the parliamentary body of the South Caribbean Autonomous Government in Nicaragua, challenged his fellow participants during the closing program of the 3-month virtual training on policy advocacy in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that culminated in early August, this year.
Twenty-two (22) indigenous advocates successfully finished the course which is the second segment in a 3-part training program that aims to develop next generation indigenous leaders equipped with a clear understanding of their rights and skills to undertake sustained advocacy with their governments and in key global processes, and lead in initiatives and actions that help strengthen and develop their communities and organizations. The first segment focused on policy advocacy in the processes of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UN CBD).

The topics are focused on climate change and its relation to indigenous peoples and to their human rights, on fundamentals of policy advocacy and on indigenous peoples’ rights. Emphasis was also put on the UN systems, on the UNFCCC, on climate finance including the Green Climate Fund, and on the Paris Agreement.

“Indigenous peoples must be involved at every level of climate change talks to deliver their contributions in addressing climate change such as being at the top of discussions concerning carbon credits”, Idris Fredison of Verening Inheemse Dorpshoofden Suriname (VIDS) said. Shylina Lingaard, assistant manager of the same organization, agreed, noting that indigenous peoples should be key players in climate change discussions and have their necessary voices heard.

Discuss these questions (20 minutes)

1. How has climate change impacted human rights in your community?

2. Share some experiences of applying the UNDRIP as an instrument for safeguarding IPs rights.

Alternatively, (if there have been no country experience), in what ways can/should your country implement UNDRIP to safeguard IP rights, especially in the context of climate change?

1. Strategic – Advocates must plan carefully.

2. Series of Actions – Advocacy is not simply one phone call; one petition, or one march but a set of coordinated activities.

3. Designed to Persuade – Advocates must use ideas or provide arguments that convince people that the desired change is important and that they should support it.

4. Targeted – Advocacy must be aimed at specific people who have the power to bring about the change desired.

5. Building Alliances – Work with many stakeholders to increase the impact of the campaign.

6. Results in Change – Advocacy results in positive change in the lives of the people affected by the problem. A key indicator of effectiveness is when advocacy targets are convinced that what the advocates want is what they want.
There were also substantial discussions on the negotiations at the UNFCCC and how important the engagements of indigenous peoples are in these climate change discussions not only at the global level but also in national climate change programming and actions. Opportunities for indigenous peoples, as well as risks in their engagements in relation to climate change, were also tackled.

The advocates developed their advocacy plans as part of exercising the knowledge and skills on policy advocacy which is embedded in the training course. The advocacy plans have vibrant themes and activities that are related to increasing awareness of indigenous peoples, including the youths and concerned local government officials about climate change, its impacts and their different roles to address it, to application of Community-Based Monitoring and Information Systems (CBMIS) in generating data to monitor the impacts of climate change and to campaigns that respond to droughts.

Strengthening the capacities of indigenous peoples to engage climate finance bodies including the Green Climate Fund, campaigning for moratorium on Blue Carbon projects in the Pacific and developing a framework and generating evidence-based policy recommendations linking loss and damage to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction are also the focus of the advocacy plans.
“Relevant information is power,” said Stanley Kimaren ole Riamit, the Executive Director of Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA) in Kenya and the training team lead, as he emphasized some general reflections that capture the lessons from the training beginning day one. However, he said that it is not enough to have knowledge. He noted that knowledge can only become power when it is strategically applied.

Riamit also stressed that nobody else understands better the issues of indigenous peoples but them. “So, we know what hurts us and know what can cure it,” he reflected. Further, he pointed out that the extent of usefulness of opportunities that indigenous peoples have, e.g. recognition of indigenous peoples’ rights, provision of safeguard instruments, creation of platforms, etc, which will be dependent upon the self-determination of indigenous peoples.

“Self-determination is what makes us different in times to come,” said Riamit as he also emphasized that self-determination associated with strategic solidarity as indigenous peoples’ community across levels and strategic collaboration with like-minded actors is important.

Through their advocacy plans, the trained indigenous leaders aim to make change and contribute to addressing the negative impacts of climate change and of climate change solutions on the livelihoods, land tenure and on the overall respect, protection and fulfillment of the human rights of indigenous peoples.

A number of the participants with advocacy plans that passed the selection criteria will be granted a small fund to implement their advocacy plans in the next months.

The participants also noted a number of lessons from the training. Bidhya Hirachan, board member of the Center
for Indigenous Peoples Research and Education (CIPRED) in Nepal, said that indigenous peoples have a common goal which they can, in turn, reach together. In addition, Lekakeny Nakola, assistant researcher at ILEPA in Kenya stressed that there are more opportunities available for indigenous peoples in terms of financial support that contributes to lowering emissions. As there are many opportunities for indigenous peoples, Kantuta Diana Conde Choque, an Aymara and a member of Red de Jóvenes Indígenas de América Latina y el Caribe (RED-LAC) in Mexico, said that these have to be shared between indigenous peoples and their communities.

“We have a responsibility as indigenous peoples today to continue that effort and to pass that on to the next generations in forms that are efficient,” said Lice Cokanasiga, campaign assistant of Pacific Network on Globalization in Fiji Islands, as she reflected on the successes and challenges of indigenous peoples in their long struggle to raise their issues in national, regional, and global platforms.

Speaking on behalf of the participants at the conclusion of the training, Kantuta Diana Conde Choque, stressed that they “are happy as guardians and promoters of indigenous peoples’ rights” for participating in the training.

The young leaders who are expected to sustain advocacy initiatives of indigenous peoples at various levels and spaces were endorsed by Elatia partners and indigenous organizations that are being supported by Nia Tero, a non-profit organization working with indigenous peoples and movements worldwide.

The training was sustained by a team who has long engagements in the UNFCCC as well as in the Green Climate Fund. They are Stanley Kimaren Ole Rimit, Eileen Mairena Cunningham, and Helen Biangalen-Magata. Guest lecturers include Jennifer Corpuz and Grace Balawag, who both have intensive policy advocacy experiences in the UN CBD and the UNFCCC, respectively.

The training is being jointly implemented by ILEPA and the Elatia Indigenous Peoples Training Institute with support from Tebtebba, Nia Tero and Bread for the World.

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