Enhancing Capacities for Engagement: Making the GCF Indigenous Peoples’ Policy Work

“Indigenous peoples’ symbiotic and interdependent relationship with their environment and ecosystems is central to their collective survival.”

Kimaren ole Riamit, Executive Director of the Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA), discussed how “indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge systems and climate-resilient livelihood practices have contributed least to (harmful) emissions but immensely to nature conservation” in the context of the need for indigenous peoples to access climate finance.
But discussions around climate finance should not only be focused on the quantity of resources.

Erika Lennon of the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) stressed the need to prioritize the quality over the quantity of Green Climate Fund (GCF) programs and projects being approved and carried out globally during the three-part Webinar Series on Indigenous Peoples and the Green Climate Fund on 8, 13, and 17 September 2021.

“It’s not about how much money goes into each GCF program (or project) but about what the quality of each program or project is. The challenge in each GCF initiative is to make sure that rights are respected and that all of the Fund’s policies are practiced,” she said.

“This is why the role of the GCF Accredited Entities (AE) is very crucial,” Helen Biangalen-Magata of Tebtebba reasoned. She asserted that AEs, being the designated fund channels, need to ascertain that necessary safeguards are applied, thereby ensuring that all GCF projects and programs are in line with the policies.

This is also why “it is essential for indigenous peoples to understand the architecture of the GCF, including how funds are accessed, so that indigenous peoples are able to engage and be prioritized,” confirmed Tebtebba Deputy Director Raymond de Chavez. Knowing these, he added, can also further limit and mitigate the negative impacts of subsequent programs and projects of the GCF.
The Green Climate Fund and Indigenous Peoples

Currently one of the largest—if not the largest—climate finance in the world, the GCF is a critical element of the historic Paris Agreement that stemmed from the Parties’ existing human rights obligations in the United Nations Framework Convention on climate Change (UNFCCC).

Grace Balawag of Tebtebba’s Climate Change Action and Mitigation Program (CCAMP) said that the “GCF is specifically set up to provide financial support to developing countries as they limit or do away with damaging greenhouse gases and implement necessary climate change adaptation strategies.”

Eileen Mairena Cunningham of the Centre for the Indigenous Peoples’ Autonomy and Development (CADPI) and current GCF Active Observer for Developing Countries agreed on the importance of ascertaining the Fund’s accountability to its own policies.

According to her, “the environmental and social policy sets the principles and requirements to make sure that environmental and social risks are minimized, avoided, or managed in the overall outcomes of all GCF-financed activities.” Additionally, the GCF is mandated to incorporate “a gender perspective from the outset into its policy frameworks and funding operations,” she said.
Nonetheless, an increasing volume of GCF-funded activities are going to be implemented in indigenous territories. Hence, it is equally important that the GCF Indigenous Peoples’ Policy be also applied.

Riamit, pointed out the necessity of obtaining free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) from indigenous peoples as well as noting the three key points of the Fund’s Indigenous Peoples’ Policy which are: (1) policy implementation by GCF accredited entities and other actors; (2) avoidance of adverse impacts or the do-no-harm approach; and (3) mitigation and development benefits that must be “mutually agreed upon, culturally appropriate, commensurate with risks, as well as sustainable and timely delivered.”

He also highlighted the necessity of “looking within and looking without” when using the said policy, referring to the roles played by both indigenous peoples and state or development actors, respectively.

Meanwhile, Titi Soentoro of Aksi! for Gender, Social and Ecological Justice raised an important issue regarding the principle of country ownership.
Country ownership means that “GCF projects must be decided by the specific country where the project or program will take place and should be derived from the said country’s priorities,” she posited. Soentoro, however, mentioned that these GCF projects must not only be determined by the government but also by non-government stakeholders, including women, local communities, and indigenous peoples, through meaningful and active participation and consultation. This is due to the fact that “civil society organizations (CSOs) hold a key role in assessing the GCF in the execution of various climate projects,” Claire Miranda of the Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD) said.

Ultimately, full and meaningful participation in the development of a “GCF country program, with the use of the Environmental and Social Policy as well as the Indigenous Peoples’ Policy as guideposts, paves a way toward our self-identification and self-determination as indigenous peoples,” Riamit emphasized.

Funded by the Climate Justice Resilience Fund (CJRF) and Both ENDS, the three-part webinar series is in line with Tebtebba’s capacity building program for second-generation indigenous youth leaders which aims to bring more indigenous peoples’ voices into GCF discussions and processes.