**Enhancing Participation of Indigenous People in the Human Rights Council**



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# Introduction

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Indigenous People Participation Strategies

**1.0 Venues of Participation**

When using resolutions and venues of participation carved out by the United Nations General Assembly as an example of methods to involve the participation of indigenous people in political and social involvement, it is important to note that most indigenous involvement initiatives are predicated on local laws and enforcement from supporting agencies or governing parties within jurisdiction of engaging indigenous communities.

When the resolution was adopted to involve indigenous people in the promotion and protection of human rights in the last quarter of 2021, it symbolized a significant step in addressing human rights violations on the international stage.

Step one in encouraging participation involves building the trust between indigenous community councils and leadership bodies. There are several factors that must be considered when creating opportunities to engage diverse thought processes, especially when accounting for the world view of communities that have experienced prolonged oppression. Primarily, encouraging open dialogue begins the process of adapting considerations to be implemented. This will involve considerations that are not restricted to areas including political, economic, social and cultural rights. Channels of engagement should be reliant upon methodologies currently being proven and tested in indigenous communities, which in essence are determined by the people themselves.

Educational Consideration

**1.1 Participation Modalities**

Firstly, it is of paramount importance to encourage holistic education of indigenous people. Needless to say, encouraging education as the foundation of an ideal society creates a significant path in establishing several positive factors which are major determinants of their participation in the Human Rights Council.

In 2017, several young indigenous people took part at the 6th ECOSOC Youth Forum. They emphasized on the significance of securing indigenous peoples,’ including indigenous youths’ access to secure land rights in order to achieve the ambitions of Sustainable Development Goals. It is apparent that indigenous youths, as well as children have a significant contribution to present to the world.

Participation modalities should be geared towards harnessing the contributions of the youth and empowering them with a genuine familiarity of their indigenous identity, cultural heritage, sustainable living and even their relationships to their lands and territories. Furthermore, there is a need to recognise the role of youth participation in society, even theirs. Involving them in the process to work for the council will result in the sharing of vibrant ideas which can go a significant way in supporting and engaging the rights of their indigenous communities while participating in the Human Rights Council at large. Their educational development encourages participation and guarantees unmatched representation amongst other factors.

As indigenous youth are being confronted with challenges due to the intergenerational effects of colonization and assimilation policies, educational development will also alleviate their ongoing struggles to ensure their rights and identity as indigenous peoples.

Selection mechanisms that encourage their education will promote participation and are a vital tool in securing vibrant ideas that will be relevant in protecting the rights of indigenous people, and their contributions to the council.

Also, it is pertinent to note that many indigenous youths are organizing themselves in youth organizations to improve the condition of their people and guarantee that their rights are regarded and promoted.

At a global level, an example can be taken from the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, which typically meets during the UNPFII session to discuss and give guidance on issues associated with indigenous youth and children. Events of this caliber can be taken into consideration as educational opportunities.

In addition to enlightening and encouraging the participation of youths in the indigenous community, education will also expose them to the critical thinking factors of intellectual processes, while keeping them conscious of their rights and privileges. By becoming conscious of their rights, they are also becoming aware of the violations and methodologies in curtailing oppression.

Conclusively, it is imperative for indigenous communities to structure and participate in organizing an educational system that is culturally and linguistically relevant, and that does not result in acculturation. Educational systems and programs for indigenous people should also seek to implement and preserve the mother-tongue as a language, culture and instrument of identity, especially for children, youth and even adults. There is also an important need to promote vocational training, professional development and adult literacy programmes into their learning and development model.

Political Engagement

**1.2 Selection Mechanisms**

The selection criteria for a progressive and functional political system needs to be structured in such a way that promotes community and cultural leadership figures. This representation must properly represent their indigenous values and ideologies.

Article 18 of the UNDRIP states that 'Indigenous people have the right to participate in decision-making matters that affect their rights through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures.’ It also states that they have the right to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision - making strategy or system.

On a similar note, Article 19 states that: ‘States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.'

Aiding proper presentation will highlight proper representation of indigenous people at the Human Rights Council. Apart from bearing the priorities of indigenous people, it would also help to actualize productive leadership and the implementation of policies for general development.

Cultural Preservation & Inclusion

**1.2. Selection Mechanisms**

Conserving their culture would not only secure them but also ensure a fair play in their participation in the Human Rights Council. Equally important, is the recognition, inclusion and preservation of cultural values. By acknowledging the importance of cultural preservation, this will help strengthen their priorities, thereby, shaping and developing their rights towards a holistic objective and goal.

Indigenous communities have been facing major challenges in protecting their unique cultures, knowledge systems and identities from the effects of acculturation. As modernization, commercial development, land disputes, migration and lack of holistic educational and developmental resources become more pressing concerns, the recognition, conservation of cultural values, and history of indigenous people are among top priorities to structure solutions for.

Climate Change & Ecosystems

**1.3 Selection Criteria**

Indigenous people have been known to traditionally create a set of conservation measures that are passed down from one generation to the next, and as a result their ecosystem preservation practices should be considered and represented as a solution towards climate preservation measures. The influence of indigenous people on the global ecosystem cannot be ‘underemphasized.’

Like most ancient cultures and civilizations, there is historical and cultural significance to their roles as custodians to their lands. Therefore, rights and laws guiding how their lands are cultivated, managed and organized need to be carefully planned and implemented in a way that does not violate or infringe on the rights of the people. Protection of their land rights directly correlates with a positive impact on the ecosystem.

For example, industrial companies and projects that occupy land areas amongst indigenous communities ought to be mandated to observe measures that will help in impeding environmental hazards and pollution. Conclusively, encouraging the participation of indigenous people in the work of the Human Rights Council would contribute to numerous developments including alleviation of poverty, food insecurity, and other societal grievances that have a connection to our ecosystem.

Policies & Implementation

**1.3 Selection Criteria**

It is very important to bridge the gap between policy and practice when it comes to the rights of indigenous people. Care must be taken to not develop policies without implementation, as well as protective measures to ensure that policies are not positioned to disenfranchise indeigenous communities.

There are several instances of rulings by international courts on the rights of indigenous peoples including the Endorois case and others such as Saramaka in Suriname which are legally binding on governments, but yet years later many of these cases remain unimplemented.

There is a similar rift at the level of institutional policies and safeguards held by multilateral agencies like the World Bank and other international finance institutions which govern how they can lend for projects that affect indigenous peoples.

Conclusion

Enhancing the participation of indigenous people in Human Rights activities is critical to upholding and further establishing Human Right declarations and policies. It is critical to pursue practical strategies that endorse the rights of indigenous people. In order for there to be a holistic impact by development activities, practitioners and implementing partners should manage the challenges and disadvantages faced by indigenous communities and work with them through their own representative institutions. Not only will this help their contributions accomplish development objectives, but it will strengthen their role in establishing a Human Rights Council model for generations to come.

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