**Existing procedures on the participation of Indigenous Peoples at UNESCO**

UNESCO reply to OHCHR

07 May 2024

UNESCO’s approach to including Indigenous Peoples in its global mandate is transdisciplinary and intersectoral, focusing on cultural heritage, languages, engagement in designated sites and their diverse knowledge systems. Through dedicated efforts in World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO Global Geoparks, UNESCO partners with Indigenous Peoples as key rights holders and actors in sustainable development. UNESCO’s 8-year medium term strategy and associated programmes and intergovernmental processes ensure that Indigenous voices are heard and remain integral in shaping global policies and environmental conservation efforts. These programs and mechanisms work synergistically to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are recognized and integrated into global and national frameworks for sustainability, education, and cultural preservation.

1. **Existing Procedures:**

*a. What are the current* ***venues of Indigenous Peoples' participation in your organization?*** *In what meetings can Indigenous Peoples officially participate? Do they participate in meetings at the national or international levels? If so, where?*

1. Indigenous Peoples actively engage in UNESCO initiatives, contributing both nationally and internationally across diverse platforms such as the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on World Heritage, education forums, Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks, International Hydrological Programme, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL2022-2032), the UN Ocean Decade, the Water Action Decade, the IPBES Technical Support Unit on Indigenous and Local Knowledge (IPBES TSU-ILK), the BES-Net TSU-ILK, among others. These platforms are culturally respectful and facilitate dialogue between diverse knowledge systems with an integrated approach to Indigenous participation.

*b. What are the* ***modalities of Indigenous Peoples’ participation****? Are there remote avenues for engagement at different stages of any process (i.e. before, during and after convenings)? How can they participate? What can they do during the meetings? How can they influence the outcomes of the meetings? Do they participate online or in person? Are there special channels/platforms to reach Indigenous Peoples and in which languages? How does your entity guarantee the meaningful, inclusive and safe participation of Indigenous Peoples?*

1. UNESCO ensures inclusive participation through both in-person and digital platforms, facilitating remote engagement and providing materials in multiple languages, including Indigenous languages. Indigenous representatives participate in shaping discussions, influencing decisions, and offering insights. The IPBES and BES-Net TSU-ILK, both hosted at UNESCO, facilitate Indigenous Peoples’ involvement in global, regional and national biodiversity assessments. For IDIL2022-2032, IPOs directly participate as members of the Global Task Force and in developing National Action Plans. UNESCO also focuses on enhancing the capacity of Member States and scientific entities to include diverse knowledge systems in scientific assessments and policy formulation.

*c. What* ***participation criteria*** *does your organization apply to accredit Indigenous Peoples’ participants? Do Indigenous Peoples participate as organizations? Can Indigenous Peoples’ representative institutions participate as such? Do they participate as individuals or independent experts? How does your entity guarantee the participation of Indigenous women, youth and persons with disabilities?*

1. Participation is open to Indigenous representatives from recognized regional networks, organizations and independent experts. Emphasis is placed on inclusive representation from diverse Indigenous communities all over the world, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities. UNESCO prioritizes cooperation with Africa, SIDS and LDC countries, including in its engagement with Indigenous Peoples.

*d. What are the* ***selection criteria?*** *What criteria does your organization use to select Indigenous Peoples to participate in the meetings?*

1. Participants are selected based on their relevance to the topics discussed, their ability to represent diverse community perspectives and traditional knowledge systems, and their expertise in specific subject areas within UNESCO’s mandate, ensuring a well-rounded and inclusive dialogue. In IDIL2022-2032, IPOs nominate themselves to join the Global Task Force, and decision-making on representation by socio-cultural region is fully undertaken by the IPOs themselves.

*e. Since when have Indigenous Peoples participated in your organization's meetings? How has their participation evolved?*

1. Following the 2007 adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the involvement of Indigenous Peoples in UNESCO operations evolved with the UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples and their roles expanding to include central actors and advisors. There has been a substantial expansion of participation of Indigenous Peoples in UNESCO processes, notably in the Conventions, Designated Sites, and various areas of specialized expertise.

*f. Please briefly describe any good practices within your organization that should be considered for this report.*

1. Key initiatives are notable for their direct engagement of Indigenous perspectives in managing natural and cultural heritage sites, and linguistic preservation:
   * Through its LINKS program, UNESCO ensures that Indigenous knowledge is included into environmental policies effectively.
   * Biosphere Reserves: development of roadmaps for social mapping of Indigenous conservation initiatives.
   * Cultural conventions: guidelines developed with focus on Indigenous Peoples’ participation. The International Indigenous Forum on World Heritage was established in 2017 for reflection on the involvement of indigenous peoples in the identification, conservation and management of World Heritage properties. Several NGOs accredited to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage active in indigenous issues are regular partners of UNESCO.

* International Decade of Indigenous Languages: The Decade ensures IPOs within and external to the Global Task Force can participate. IPOs and relevant organizations share activities, resources and best practices on our Community Engagement Platform. Indigenous activists also participate as speakers in IDIL2022-2032 events co-organized with various public and private partners. The Decade also establishes favorable conditions for Indigenous Peoples for digital empowerment, freedom of expression, media development, access to information and language technology.

*g. Does your organization have an Indigenous advisory group or similar? If so, what are its functions?*

1. Advisory bodies such as the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on World Heritage provide essential insights into the management of cultural and natural heritage, emphasizing Indigenous perspectives. Engagement with the IPBES TSU-ILK and BES-Net TSU ILK also enriches global, regional and national biodiversity assessments with traditional knowledge directly contributed by Indigenous Peoples.

*a) What success factors could be highlighted from your organization’s experience with Indigenous Peoples’ participation?*

1. Successful engagement stems from establishing direct dialogues with Indigenous Peoples, and ensuring their active participation in all planning and implementation phases. Involvement of Indigenous peoples at all levels ensures they are forefront and center to the IDIL2022-2032. IPOs participate as co-chairs, members of the Steering Committee, and as advisors in the IDIL2022-2032 Global Task Force. Further, by facilitating Indigenous participation in scientific assessments and fostering knowledge networks, LINKS helps bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and contemporary environmental management strategies. UNESCO’s advocacy and influence in global and national environmental processes, methods, norms, and standards, have led to broader recognition and application of ILK in policy and decision-making, promoting more inclusive and effective environmental governance, such as in the recently adopted Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
2. **Existing Gaps:**

*h. What have been the main challenges to Indigenous Peoples’ participation in/engagement with your organization?*

1. Despite its achievements, UNESCO faces challenges related to limited resources and staffing, which can restrict full participation of Indigenous Peoples. Additionally, there is an ongoing need for capacity building within the Organisation, in Member States, within the scientific community, and within Indigenous communities themselves to scale up achievements but also bridge the gap between traditional cultures, values and knowledge and formal environmental and management strategies, as well as cultural policies. A recent recommendation by Member States has asked UNESCO Secretariat to review the 2017 Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples, which will require national cooperation and resources to enable a global process of reflection.

*a) What action has your organization taken to address these gaps?*

1. UNESCO has facilitated access to Indigenous Peoples to its platforms and instruments to engage with environmental assessments, cultural sites, biosphere reserves, and geoparks. The approach focuses on Indigenous Peoples as **key actors, rights-holders and knowledge holders** across UNESCO programme areas. UNESCO works closely with the Inter-Agency Support Group (IASG) to cofinance and support Indigenous Peoples in key UN forums and within the system of UN decades and years.