**UNEP’s written contribution to the stocktaking report on the participation of Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations**

* 1. **1. Existing procedures:**
  2. **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?**

Indigenous Peoples engage with UNEP through the “[Indigenous Peoples and their communities” Major Group](https://www.unep.org/civil-society-engagement/major-groups-modalities/major-group-categories/indigenous-peoples-and). Major Groups' representatives have an observer status within UNEP and its governing bodies allowing them to participate in all public UNEP meetings as well as the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), the meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) and other meetings of subsidiary bodies of UNEA. Indigenous Peoples can also attend and contribute to the Regional Consultative Meetings which take place in the six UNEP regions prior to UNEA. UNEP also engages Indigenous Peoples, through the Major Group, to participate and contribute their expertise in technical level meetings or workshops at the international, regional and national levels when relevant. One example is the ongoing 7th Global Environment Outlook process (GEO-7) consultations on integrating Indigenous knowledge perspectives to scientific environmental assessments. Among all accredited observer organisations representing Indigenous Peoples to UNEP (21 currently), two representatives are elected to coordinate inputs and exchanges for all Indigenous Peoples’ organisations across the regions.

* 1. **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?**
  2. Indigenous Peoples who are members of a UNEP accredited organization have observer status at UNEA and its subsidiary bodies, including in the sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution and in the ad-hoc open-ended working group to establish a sciences-policy panel for the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution. This gives Indigenous Peoples the right to provide both oral and written contributions throughout relevant processes and initiatives. Additionally, each Major Group has designated seats in all official sessions of UNEA and meetings of its subsidiary organs, including the CPR. UNEA, except for UNEA 5.1 and 5.2, is an in-person meeting where all plenary sessions are interpreted into the six UN languages and all official documents are issued in the six UN languages. Negotiations and working groups on draft resolutions, including informals during UNEA usually take place in English only, where observers’ participation is possible. The CPR meetings are convened in a hybrid format allowing stakeholders to participate both online and in person at the UNON compound in Nairobi. In addition to documents made available on UNEP’s open websites, UNEP accredited observers also have access to unedited working documents, such as draft resolutions via the password protected resolutions portal. Lastly, through their accreditation status, Indigenous Peoples’ organizations can apply to organize side events during UNEA.
  3. UNEP works to continuously improve the space for Major Groups and Stakeholder representatives, including Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples can engage with interested Member State representatives with a view to enhance stakeholder participation in UNEP-led events and improve the coordination between Major Groups and Stakeholders and Member States.
  4. Channels and platforms used to reach Indigenous Peoples are UNEP’s webpages on civil society engagement, through the Indigenous Peoples Major Group, and its elected co-facilitators, through UNEP’s engagement with the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and through other technical networks.
  5. These technical networks include working groups across UN agencies and other partners such as on mining and extractives, water quality, nature-based solutions, Global Environment Outlook assessments or human rights/ and environmental defenders matters. All communication to the accredited Indigenous Peoples’ groups is channelled through direct email outreach to specific groups or all Indigenous Peoples’ groups accredited to UNEP and further outreach to other networks or groups or individual Indigenous experts is facilitated through their elected representatives. Most information is communicated in English, with efforts to communicate in Spanish, Portuguese and French where possible.

UNEP funds the participation of some Indigenous Peoples for UNEA and meetings of its subsidiary bodies. The number of Major Groups and Stakeholder representatives who can be supported by UNEP is subject to available funding, but most often at least two Indigenous Peoples representatives, nominated to participate by the Major Group, are funded to participate in-person.

* 1. **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?**

Indigenous Peoples’ participants predominantly participate in UNEP meetings as representatives of their UNEP accredited organization. The Indigenous Peoples and their Communities Major Group is self-organized and open to all organizations whose work relates to Indigenous Peoples; thus, the major group is not strictly limited to individuals who identify as Indigenous. Within the major group individuals have the possibility to contribute to joint statements and in that way influence the positions of Indigenous Peoples in UNEP meetings. Additionally, Indigenous Peoples may also take up the responsibility to co-chair the Indigenous Peoples Major Group to facilitate the engagement of individuals and organizations of the Major Group across UNEP meetings. The two elected co-chairs are part of the “Major Groups Facilitating Committee” (MGFC), where all nine Major Groups and each UNEP region are represented by two representatives. Moreover, Indigenous Peoples may also reach out to elected Regional Facilitators of their region. These elected representatives are also part of the MGFC and are responsible for bringing the regional perspective into UNEP meetings, regardless of Major Group affiliation.

* 1. UNEP’s Major Groups system is not rigid but allows individuals to self-identify their affiliation. Indigenous women are free to join the Women’s Major Group and Indigenous youth are welcome to engage with the Children and Youth Major Group. When sponsoring Major Groups and Stakeholder representatives, UNEP pays close attention to gender, regional and Major Group balance.
  2. An Indigenous Peoples organisation interested in becoming a [UNEP accredited observer organisation](https://www.unep.org/civil-society-engagement/accreditation/list-accredited-organizations), needs to be compliant with the accreditation criteria, such as having a regional or international scope of work, focus on environmental and sustainable development matters and be officially registered in a country.
  3. **d. What are the selection criteria? What criteria does your organization use to select Indigenous Peoples to participate in the meetings?**

In addition to gender, regional and Major Group balance, the selection of Indigenous Peoples to participate in meetings is based on their prior experience and expertise of the topics at hand as well as if the individual has been nominated by the Indigenous Peoples Major Group in the agreed spirit of self-organisation and if the individual will have an official role in the meeting, for instance as speaker or facilitator.  
However, it should be noted that in the spirit of self-organisation, the elected co-chairs of the Indigenous Peoples Major Group reach out to all accredited Indigenous Peoples organisations to receive experts nominations for certain meetings, who will then also receive financial support to participate. UNEP’s meetings are normally open to all Indigenous Peoples from accredited observer organisations and the elected Indigenous Peoples Major Group Co-Chairs assist in the selection process.

* 1. **2. Good practices a. Since when have Indigenous Peoples participated in your organization's meetings? How has their participation evolved?**

After the [Earth Summit](https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992) in 1992, UNEP adopted the **Major Groups** approach as defined in Agenda 21, where Indigenous Peoples and their communities was one of nine Major Groups. Currently 21 Indigenous Peoples organizations are [accredited to UNEP.](https://www.unep.org/civil-society-engagement/accreditation/list-accredited-organizations)

Furthermore in 2012, UNEP developed together with Indigenous peoples, a [policy guidance](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/11202/UNEP_Indigenous_Peoples_Policy_Guidance_endorsed_by_SMT_26_11_12.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) to build on Indigenous Peoples rights, knowledge and guidance in the organization’s work to protect people and the planet. This policy guidance is to be reviewed in the near future.

More recently the 7th Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-7), is incorporating Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous experts in assessing the global state of the environment following a request by Member States. Through using the procedures developed by the [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Ffiles.ipbes.net%2Fipbes-web-prod-public-files%2Finline-files%2FIPBES_ILK_MethGuide_MEP-Approved_5MAY2022.pdf&data=05%7C02%7Claetitia.zobel%40un.org%7C745c83b5e92443b4c52208dc75b3e7d6%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638514662763013876%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=oJXLMhocfZCUrsOilzzBRL2ZSsTU9b0YCGzoR2lstys%3D&reserved=0), GEO has created a taskforce of scholars (some with Indigenous background), to help guide the Indigenous Knowledge process and develop the approach to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into GEO-7. Additionally, three Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities dialogues are being convened throughout 2024 allowing knowledge holders to directly provide their inputs to GEO-7. A final dialogue is scheduled at the launch of GEO-7 which, inter alia, will describe the GEO-7 findings including in an Indigenous context.

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration has also elected Indigenous Peoples representatives to participate in the Advisory Board of the Decade to allow Indigenous Peoples to contribute their invaluable knowledge and stewardships towards a sustainable future. On the Action Plan of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration there is a specific [challenge (challenge 5.1)](https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/publications/action-plan-un-decade-ecosystem-restoration-2021-2030) focusing on Indigenous Peoples as well as local communities, with the goal to recognise their land resource rights as a cornerstone of the restoration movement.

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

Through equating Indigenous knowledge with scientific knowledge in the GEO-7 process, Indigenous Peoples are respected, listened to and able to directly contribute to the report. Incorporating Indigenous knowledge in such way, instead of as an afterthought, is a good practice that should be replicated in future research and report-drafting, particularly on environmental issues.

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

UNEP has not established an Indigenous Advisory Group comprising of indigenous members. The Indigenous Peoples Major Group representatives however, together with all active and interested accredited Indigenous Peoples organizations are regularly consulted on relevant matters and projects when approached.

Currently UNEP’s Indigenous Peoples’s focal point is located in the organization’s Ecosystem Division represented by [Fabrice Inkonkoy](mailto:fabrice.inkonkoy@un.org) and supported by the Civil Society Unit in the Governance Affairs Office. UNEP is now considering, via the Senior Management, the establishment of an internal working across its divisions and offices, comprised of staff. The functions of the different working and advisory groups would be to engage in dialogues and invite Indigenous Peoples’ expertise on relevant activities, decisions and work programmes and projects.

Some of the UNPFII members and other Indigenous leaders with strong expertise have been advising UNEP over the years towards enhancing collaboration and more sustainable impact of Indigenous Peoples perspectives and knowledge towards building better understanding and expertise within UNEP in relation to the importance of integrating Indigenous perspectives and challenges into our work.

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

UNEP has had a longstanding tradition to invite, engage and include Indigenous Peoples in many of its core activities and the UNEA and also to recognise Indigenous Peoples as important allies, rightsholders and knowledge holders to UNEP. Despite budget restrictions, limiting the participation of Indigenous experts in relevant project and programmatic work, UNEP’s commitment to inviting the participation of Indigenous Peoples has resulted in successful outcomes, including the GEO-7 process and the dedicated “Challenge” within the Action Plan of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. .

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

Limited outreach and sometimes language barriers have been the main challenges to Indigenous Peoples’ participation and engagement with UNEP. Only 22 organizations are accredited to the Indigenous Peoples Major Group, limiting the diversity of Indigenous voices represented. Additionally, having only two elected Indigenous Peoples’ representatives may not be sufficient to ensure consistent and regular outreach to the Indigenous Peoples constituency due to the heavy workload of the representatives. As the case is across the UN system, communication in mainly English and Spanish, with limited provision for Indigenous language coverage, is also a significant barrier to participation. In addition, limited funding to engage more than a few Indigenous representatives per relevant meeting has been limiting participation and therefore also the wider and more consistent engagement of Indigenous Peoples in UNEP’s work.

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

UNEP through the Indigenous Peoples Major Group co-facilitators as well as in collaboration across UNEP offices is encouraging more Indigenous Peoples organizations to become accredited. Larger networks of accredited indigenous organisations are able to invite smaller organizations and individuals to join the meetings and discussions.

An informal interoffice group of colleagues engages regularly on Indigenous Peoples issues, ensuring a more solid engagement capacity that is also being complemented through the active collaboration in the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues.