

To: José Francisco Cali Tzay Special Rapporteur for the UN Rights for Indigenous People

Submitted by: Genizaro Affiliated Nations aka GAN

Title: The Role of Indigenous Women and the development, application, preservation and transmission of Scientific Knowledge

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March 21, 2022

A Genizaro Affiliated Nation Perspective:  
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The role of Indigenous women and the development, application, preservation, and transmission of scientific knowledge is to hold and walk with this knowledge as an inherent right for the next generation.

Traditionally all Indigenous women had organic knowledge of caring for and healing the ailing in their families and community. Typically many illnesses were common and were not a result of complications that modernity brings or from unknown illnesses by infection from people from the eastern continental regions. For this reason healing was a bio regional knowledge that was practiced using purification, herbs, foods, and spiritual teachings from each local region. Thus, our treatments for known Indigenous illnesses and Indigenous science and practice were common, available, and successful.

The young were mostly taught Indigenous science by watching their grandmothers and mothers who practiced their healing methods using their knowledge of gender determinants, individual characteristics, weight, age, and health history of the sick person including their family. This helped them to determine what remedy to use for what illness. Their use of purification, teas, herbs and minerals were based on empirical (observational) knowledge that was passed down to them by their grandmothers and mothers.

Healing knowledge has its own creation stories that is found among all traditional Indigenous nations. We understand this knowledge came from observing and living closely among the four legged nations, fish, and winged nations as well as from dreams.

Most Indigenous women do not refer to this type of knowledge in the same context as western science because it is culturally and historically continuous via practical evolution. It cannot be measured, contained, and sold because it is culturally specific and protected by spirit. Although, today we will find Indigenous knowledge (Indigenous Science) at different levels and breadth than that of the past due to assimilation and genocidal practices imposed on all Indigenous people regardless of region that disrupted the original (lineal) continuity.

The biggest current threat and challenges that Indigenous women face as scientific and technical knowledge keepers in the context of international human rights law both internally and externally for protecting Indigenous women's ability to develop, apply, maintain, and transmit knowledge and best practices for State and international support as well as for Indigenous led initiatives is the continual and unwavering encroachment of people who move into our communities, territories and country. Including corporate exploitation and extraction. At some point our ability to transmit knowledge and best practices for State and international support is limited by having to deal with the law makers who interrupt our abilities in lieu of political/corporate priorities, obviously they do not understand nor represent our Indigenous communities.

In Colorado, GAN/Genizaro Affiliated Nations (Puebloan, Apache, Navajo, Ute and Commanche) have been denied their rights to their ancestral land having been colonized by three countries: Spain, Mexico, and the United States. With each colonial period ancestral land changed hands using the legal language of the colonists of each period. GAN identities were changed, and slavery

became common using utilitarian titles ie. captives, household servants, god child, and tenant farmer. Spanish language and Catholicism was imposed, our cultures were destroyed, and our histories were told by the colonizers. Some international and state agreements during each colonial period include: Land Grants, Treaties, and later Homesteads. Each building on the legal language of the preceding government without free, prior and informed consent from the Indigenous peoples/nations who live on this land.

In May 2022, the Fort Garland Museum in San Luis, Colorado displayed the genealogies of slaves from the local families including their descendancy from Puebloan, Navajo, Apache, Ute, and Comanche Nations. Up until this point, the GAN peoples were not part of the state, national or international communities regarding their rights as Indigenous people. To my knowledge the only nation that has (informally) acknowledged their GAN descendent is Navajo Nation. Redress from the Colorado GAN members is still in its development stages.

Most Indigenous nations were matriarchal, and the colonial governments were/are patriarchal and thus recognition given to women was not heard of [currently limited] or acceptable thus removing the foundation in which are Indigenous nations were built.

Aside from governmental domination deterrents, the areas of scientific and technical knowledge that are specific in my communities are: environmental and climate discussions, sacred sites, ceremonial knowledge given by spiritual practitioners, preparations specific to cultural ceremonies and cultural events, clothing, prayer, emotional nurturing of children and grandchildren, family unity, community leadership, and education.

In the GAN community the role of women in developing, applying, maintaining, and transmitting to future generations both women-specific indigenous knowledge and indigenous knowledge more generally is done both in the home, in social circles, and in limited educational settings. The political and environmental decision-making of GAN is not done publicly in the over-arching communities where our members live as we are a traditional government. Although the diaspora of GAN peoples in Colorado do not include dispersion to other countries it does imply that we live in numerous towns and cities in this state with not one identifiable community nor do we have a site where our ceremonies and gathering can be practiced freely.

Despite the fact that most of our members are highly educated the educational institutions through their practice of systemic institutionalized racism maintain a certain fear of Indigenous people that limits what they will allow to be discussed in their institutions. The people in our GAN communities are rarely privileged to attend national and international conferences due to lack of inclusion that results in the lack of being informed. In addition, there exists the good ole boy way of doing things, the same so-called leaders are asked to speak and represent Indigenous people over and over again.

The traditional government GAN, where I live, operates separately from the federally recognized Indigenous people. They are the ones who hold all the federal clout with their recognition. Our GAN government attempts to implement strategies that allow us to remain who we are, we are the Indigenous people from this state that are indigenous to this land. The other federally recognized nations in Colorado are transient nations with the exception of Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute.

## **Indigenous women as knowledge keepers**

1. How has indigenous women's scientific and technical knowledge contributed to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in particular on the following issues:

- a) treatment and prevention of COVID-19 or other health concerns

*Women have been instrumental in protecting the health of their babies and unborn with the understanding that this virus could desimate an entire generation if it were not controlled.*

- b) climate change solutions and environmental protection

*The women who have direct ties to their indigenous land base have generational knowledge and oral stories about historical climate changes and how their ancestors addressed, adapted, and found ways to maintain cultural practices that informed and directed their families in time of challenges.*

- c) peace and conflict

*Due to the nature of life giving, most Indigenous women have an innate unconditional love for their child where the elimination of conflict and peace is ultimately upheld to perpetuate life.*

- d) food security

*In our not too distant past, all if not most, Indigenous women had knowledge on how to grow, preserve, and store food implementing seasonal knowledge. It is the seasonal knowledge where the security is regarded because people ate and lived in seasonal rounds to ensure their survival. This type of food security is still being practiced within many communities.*

- e) development of indigenous-led business enterprises

*No comment.*

- f) security of land tenure and resources

*Security of land tenure and resources was understood by many women to mean family survival. Their knowledge of their bio region and land base was/is the foundation for survival. Living on and with the land was/is an organic function whereas the women are in direct communication with life and growth in all that grew. Indigenous science was not linear it did not measure, the women spoke (and sang) to the plant, mineral and animal nations- this was our science. There was never a time when the spirit of life did not respond which is why Indigenous science should not be interrupted.*

- g) women's empowerment within their communities

*Many facets of women's empowerment in their own communities has been invisible and yet effective. Women frequently do not need public acknowledgement to be empowered because it is evident in their family, children and community. Many powerful women are humble and have done great things.*

## **Current threats to indigenous women's knowledge**

1. What are the main obstacles, both external and internal from within their communities, that indigenous women face in retaining or revitalizing their role as knowledge keepers?

The assimilated nature of the dominate culture is reflective in the relationships between Indigenous women and men. Among nations we see most of the leadership of the men, this can be an obstacle for some Indigenous groups. I believe one way to revitalize the women's role as knowledge keepers involves re-visiting the traditional, culturally specific ways each nation dealt with and respected gender roles.

2. What are the challenges faced by indigenous women in transmitting their scientific knowledge and are there any mechanisms in place to ensure that indigenous women remain in control over the manner in which their knowledge is transmitted?

Opportunities to transmit scientific knowledge held by women is challenging because there are few mechanisms in place. The federal government is currently addressing and providing mechanisms but there is still mistrust between Indian Nations and the federal government.

3. How has indigenous women's knowledge, notably through the legal concept of intellectual property, been misappropriated and exploited for the financial gain of others?

There has been very little reinforcement when it comes to citing and giving credit to a source in which the researcher is utilizing. Morals and ethics are in dire need in this country.

4. What can indigenous peoples, States or international organizations do to support indigenous women's participation in the market economy as it pertains to their scientific knowledge and genetic resources (for example, through intellectual property rights protections)?

Writing policies specific to "women's" knowledge, and genetic resources. Policies need to be enforceable, and violations of these policies need to be followed by punitive action.

### **Best practices led by indigenous peoples, States and international organizations**

1. What are indigenous peoples, States or international organizations doing to support indigenous women in developing, applying, transmitting, and preserving specialized scientific, cultural and environmental knowledge or to invest in indigenous women-specific initiatives?

Outside of IITC and Oceti Sakowin Treaty Council there is nothing that I am personally aware of.

Has indigenous women's knowledge been integrated into any governmental systems and/or policies (e.g., school curricula, healthcare systems, conservation efforts, etc.)? If possible, please share your personal experience with indigenous women's knowledge being acknowledged, respected, preserved and/or protected? (Personal information and details will not be included in the report.)

At Bemidji State University I wrote a four-year degree program in Indigenous Studies. At first there was administrative organizational support. Then the lateral violence began with a self-identified Indigenous male professor. He had been at the university twenty plus years and was seen as the golden boy. Along with one or two white colleagues he was able to persuade the university to not give me tenure. There were seven Indigenous women who left that university in one year including myself. The state colleges and university system did believe that systemic institutionalized racism and lateral violence was the forced reasons why the native women left. As you know Indigenous people have the smallest representation of Ph D's in this country with the women being less represented than men.

2. In what ways are States or international organizations acknowledging indigenous women's contributions or impairing the ability of women to preserve, develop, apply and transmit indigenous knowledge?

Just as your question says, both States and international organizations are doing both.

3. Is indigenous women's knowledge recognized and protected by indigenous legal systems, or by local, national or international laws and policies?

Yes, to some degree Indigenous women are recognized and protected by organizations such as treaty councils, Violence Against Women's Act, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Women of all Red Nations and by the current Department of the Interior congress women, Deb Haaland and

other state representatives and governors. However, this is only a minor improvement because this representation is new and the Americans are slow to regard their authority.

4. What are indigenous peoples and their representative organizations, States and international organizations doing to address impediments to women's participation in political processes, planning and decision-making?

Indigenous peoples have public movements that are supported by their representative organizations.

5. Are indigenous peoples, States and international organizations collecting and analyzing disaggregated data on indigenous women as it pertains to their role as knowledge keepers?

There has been some effort recently, but there has never been a dedicated government office that is designated to do this specific type of data collection to my knowledge. Most organizations do their own.