

## EMPOWERING INDIGENOUS WOMEN TO INTEGRATE TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES IN CLIMATE ACTION

*This study illustrates that Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) women are important agents of change for climate action and have been using their Traditional Knowledge and Technology (TKT) to build the resilience of their communities to climate and other shocks. It also reviews examples of good practices in terms of initiatives that have supported gender-responsive integration of TKT and empowerment of IPLC women in the context of climate change. This study was jointly produced by the Stakeholder Engagement and Gender Teams of the Climate Investment Funds.*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**There is an increasing recognition of the importance of traditional knowledge and technologies (TKT) in climate change research, policy, and programs.** TKT refers to the cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment. Leading climate scientists and institutions highlight the importance of TKT in climate mitigation and adaptation efforts and the recognition of IPLCs as partners in the fight against climate change. Examples of TKT applied in mitigation efforts include agroecological and natural resource management approaches that reduce emissions and sequester carbon. In adaptation, TKT has been used for resilient agricultural production, weather forecasting, combatting deforestation and supporting ecological restoration, and water management to improve resilience to droughts. Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) have been using TKT to also increase community resilience to other shocks such as COVID-19.

**The Climate Investment Funds (CIF) increasingly focus on social inclusion including through stronger engagement with IPLCs and aims to serve as a learning laboratory for climate finance.** It is within this context that CIF commissioned [The Contribution of Traditional Knowledge and Technology to Climate Solutions](#) study in 2019 to further inform the adoption of traditional knowledge for addressing climate change. The study did so by advancing the understanding of traditional knowledge systems as compared and contrasted with conventional innovation. The report analyzed relevant



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literature and findings from key stakeholder interviews and provided a strong rationale for complementing modern climate science with traditional knowledge. It demonstrated the central importance of CIF's inclusive approaches to tackling climate risks using innovative and proven solutions.

**The present study contributes to filling a knowledge gap on gender dimensions of TKT, particularly with understanding IPLC women's TKT and barriers and enabling factors to integrate their TKT in conventional climate solutions.** Existing studies on TKT for climate solutions often lack a gendered analysis, which can result in missed opportunities to partner with IPLC women in scaling up their valuable TKT approaches in the design and implementation of climate solutions. Building on the CIF's 2019 report on TKT, this study aims to show the critical role IPLC women play in the generation, application, preservation, and transmission of TKT, and the barriers and enabling factors that support gender-responsive integration of IPLC women's TKT in climate action.

**IPLCs women are one of the most vulnerable groups to climate change impacts.** IPLC women experience "triple-discrimination" for being Indigenous, women, and Indigenous women. They experience high rates of extreme poverty and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) across all regions and carry the burden of household care, ensuring food, water, and livelihood security, and have poor access to basic services. Patriarchal gender norms and traditional institutions limit their voice and effective participation in decision-making processes, and their access to critical livelihood resources (e.g. land).

**This study illustrates that IPLC women are also important agents of change for climate action and have been using their TKT to build the resilience of their communities to climate and other shocks.** IPLC women play a key role in developing, applying, transmitting, and preserving the traditional knowledge that builds and sustains IPLC communities' resilience in the face of ever-increasing extreme events, shifting seasonal and weather patterns, and emerging threats like the COVID-19 pandemic. IPLC women are at the forefront of helping their communities manage these challenges and are often defenders of their communities' rights to their ancestral lands and to the natural resources upon which their lives, livelihoods, and cultural identities depend. Specifically, IPLC women:

- Are creators, custodians, keepers, and transmitters of traditional knowledge and practices that directly support the resilience of their households and communities. Their TKT and practices have evolved over generations through IPLC women's efforts to fulfill their obligations for caregiving, sustainably managing natural resources, maintaining household food and water security, and managing risks and impacts from a range of hazards – including but not limited to the impacts associated with climate change and emerging threats like COVID-19.
- Apply traditional knowledge systems to enable their communities to build resilience in the face of extreme events and shifting climatic conditions. This is illustrated



in examples of IPLC women using their TKT to lead reforestation and sustainable forestry initiatives in Colombia, Panama, and Kenya; maintain food security and obtain, purify, and preserve water in the face of climate extremes and variability in South Asia; lead community level responses to COVID-19 in Maasai pastoralist communities in Kenya, and provide support to government agencies and frontline workers in the form of distributing food during the initial phases of COVID-19 lockdown, as in the case presented of Indigenous women in Northeast India.

- Play a major role in the transmission of TKT to younger generations, largely through oral traditions. IPLC women also transmit TKT to government agencies in the context of sustainable natural resource management and agroforestry programs.
- Employ social networks including family relations at the community level to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and learning on TKT, and application of TKT to enhance climate resilience of communities. Many of the case studies presented in the report are based on activities that spontaneously evolved out of the organization of IPLC women at the local level.
- Are increasingly being recognized as key agents of change in applying TKT to climate solutions as they are self-organizing from the community and regional to the national and international levels in the climate change and biodiversity conservation worlds. IPLC women and their representative organizations and networks are also influencing government programs and policy through showcasing examples of successful integration of TKT-based solutions applicable to a range of sectors, including sustainable natural resource management, conservation, agriculture, water, and climate change and disaster risk management.

**The study also shows that IPLC women face tremendous challenges and are among the groups most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change in the world.** While variations exist across contexts, IPLC women face barriers related to the following factors:

- Primary responsibility for household care, food, and water security in a context of often patriarchal gender norms and traditional institutions that limit their voice in decision-making processes, and in turn, their access to critical livelihood resources. Reduced opportunities to engage in educational and income-generating activities, and in development programs. In the context of a changing climate, these responsibilities often mean increasing time burden and health and safety risks for IPLC women and girls.
- Experience of being historically marginalized in development and decision-making processes, related to their “triple discrimination.”
- Their rights are often neglected from local to international levels. Due to the intersecting drivers of vulnerability relating to Indigenous ethnicity and gender, the specific needs of Indigenous women are not fully addressed either by Indigenous rights advocacy or by women’s rights and gender advocacy.
- Lack of legal recognition and protection of rights to land and natural resources, and exclusion from decision and policy-making processes at all levels.
- Challenges with regards to protecting their Intellectual Property Rights under the current global intellectual property governance regime.
- Disproportionately high rates of extreme poverty and GBV across all regions.
- Poor access to adequate basic services (for Indigenous Peoples this includes access to intercultural bilingual education and health services) and sexual and reproductive health services. Little or limited access to information, including on climate change.

**The report also reviews examples of good practices in terms of initiatives that have supported gender-responsive integration of TKT and empowerment of IPLC women in the context of climate change.** These examples illustrate the importance of various enabling factors that have proven critical to supporting women as agents of change in the generation, application, preservation, and transmission of TKT

for climate solutions across different contexts. These examples of good practice include:

- Initiatives that represent central areas of work and advocacy pursued by IPLC women’s organizations and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working at the nexus of climate change, IPLCs, and traditional knowledge, such as:
  - Training, capacity building, and awareness raising for IPLC women and their representative organizations around climate change and resilience.
  - Documenting, assessing, and showcasing the TKT held by IPLC women.
  - The creation of platforms and opportunities for IPLC women to connect with one another to share climate related challenges and the TKT-based approaches they are using to address these.
  - Building capacity of government stakeholders and donors to enable increased involvement of IPLC women in local, national, and international decision and policy making spaces related to climate change and sustainable management of natural resources.
  - Economic empowerment of IPLC women, including through initiatives that aim to preserve traditional knowledge.
  - Support for recognition and protection of IPLC communities and IPLC women’s rights to land and natural resources.
  - Training and mentoring for IPLC women entrepreneurs to make strategic use of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).
- Government and donor programs that explore and address the social drivers of vulnerability and resilience for IPLC communities. Examples include initiatives that support the self-determination and development priorities of IPLC communities themselves and programs that explicitly link climate change and natural resource management to poverty reduction and empowerment objectives for the IPLC communities that depend on the ecosystems that are the subject of these programs. A common feature of the examples presented in this category is the adoption of a holistic or co-design model in which IPLC communities and women are seen as partners and are involved in all stages - from undertaking assessments to setting investment priorities to program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

**The report concludes with a set of policy and operationally relevant recommendations for supporting gender responsive integration of TKT into climate change initiatives.** The

recommendations are grouped around three main themes:

**(1) Understanding the gender dimensions of TKT for climate change through research and documentation**

- Undertake systematic identification, assessment, and documentation of the TKT held by IPLC women.
- Analyze the gender dimensions relevant to IPLC communities of climate change and related sectoral operations, policies, and programs of government and development partners towards supporting the gender-responsive integration of TKT.

**(2) Activities to protect Indigenous women's TKT and support gender-responsive uptake of TKT**

- Establish educational programs and institutional structures to codify and promote TKT, including university and vocational training programs with scholarships for IPLC women, learning centers grounded in a holistic Indigenous education model, and intercultural systems for integration of modern scientific approaches and TKT for climate solutions, based on the intercultural and bilingual models applied to health and education sector programs.
- Build partnerships with existing IPLC women's groups, networks, and CSOs working with IPLC women at all levels. Upstream identification of IPLC women's groups and networks, and establishment and fostering of relationships with these groups and networks to support project-level objectives around gender-responsive integration of TKT.
- Focus on stakeholder engagement, local action, and beneficiary driven approaches in climate financing, including expansion of climate funds that are directed by and for IPLC women and climate programs that channel funds and decision-making to the local level.
- Capacity building for national and local government on aspects including the value and gender dimensions of TKT for climate mitigation and adaptation, the gender dynamics around the use of TKT in different settings, undertaking meaningful consultation with IPLCs and women, and culturally appropriate and sustainable approaches to integrating TKT and modern scientific knowledge.
- Capacity building for IPLC women's groups and networks, including on climate change, resilience, available climate

change financing mechanisms, and around leadership and capacity to effectively self-organize, develop, and implement initiatives, and engage in decision-making processes related to climate change and natural resource management at all levels. Creation of separate spaces for capacity building and training for IPLC women, including opportunities for south-south exchanges for IPLC women's groups and networks on TKT approaches that have worked in other locations.

- Ensure facilitation and add-on measures, as needed, to enable IPLC women to participate. Such measures include scheduling meetings and training events during times when women are able to attend, providing services such as childcare, assistance with transportation, and translation and dissemination of information and materials in local and Indigenous languages.
- Advocate for IPLC women's rights and their meaningful engagement in climate change decision-making and policymaking processes at all levels. This may take various forms, such as: (i) connecting climate change adaptation and mitigation programs to poverty reduction, community development, and IPLC women's empowerment objectives, and (ii) support for institutionalizing meaningful consultation with IPLC women into sector-wide and national-level planning and decision-making processes around climate change and sustainable natural resource management.

**(3) Methods for engaging IPLC women through operations**

- Adopt a co-design approach to climate programs together with IPLC women and their representative organizations. This includes co-production of assessments underpinning such initiatives (i.e., social, climate vulnerability, etc.) and meaningful engagement in a project area that begins early during project identification and continues consistently throughout project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.
- Undertake IPLC gender assessments that include IPLC women's capacity assessments to identify and address (beginning during project preparation) any capacity building needs of IPLC women to effectively engage in project design and implementation.
- Employ action research methodologies that engage all community members, including IPLC women and girls. This can support empowerment of IPLC women through recognizing and valuing their knowledge and roles as change agents in using TKT and can help to ensure that valuable TKT held by IPLC women is not missed in efforts to integrate scientific knowledge and TKT for climate solutions.