Indigenous Peoples (IP) are a critical and inadequately considered population in the climate change crisis. On the one hand, IP represent a rich source of local environmental knowledge and adaptability that can significantly contribute to global solutions. On the other hand, IP globally face systemic discrimination and exclusion from political and economic power. This is particularly pertinent at the United Nations international climate change negotiations (UNFCCC) where IP are largely marginalised and their voices dismissed. To address climate change fairly and effectively, the marginalisation of Indigenous Peoples needs to be addressed. We propose actions necessary to right the scales and respect human and Indigenous rights.

**Indigenous Peoples globally face three tiers of marginalisation:**

- **Geographical**
  IP tend to exist in marginal places. This is a result of either original remoteness from colonial centres, being forced out of their native homelands to less ‘desirable’ spaces; or a conscious strategy to avoid subjugation and preserve cultural origins.

- **Economic**
  IP represent one-third of the world’s extremely poor rural people. IP often reside within less-developed countries or regions of the world, increasing likelihood of shortages related to development, infrastructure and aid.

- **Political**
  IP have faced a history of discrimination and violence. Today, the nation states within which they exist rarely acknowledge their traditional governance structures or grant them political autonomy.
These tiers of marginalisation exist at the UNFCCC

Politically, IP are not able to self-represent; they are admitted as ‘observers’. The nation states responsible for their historical and current political marginalisation speak on their behalf. Geographically, the space offered to IP is outside the main negotiating space of the conference. Economically, IP attendance and representation is restricted by lack of finances. Negotiating power and Indigenous voices at annual Conference of the Parties (COP) are thus subordinated.

Excluding IP is a problem for several reasons:

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<th>Environmental Knowledge:</th>
<th>Adaptation:</th>
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<td>Understanding of local-level climatic change impacts is limited. IP, with histories and knowledge systems related to close interactions with their environments, are a crucial source of detailed information and knowledge to address these gaps. Stories and lived experiences of changing seasonality; unpredictable rainfall; more extreme droughts and floods; and sea level rise; are prevalent and need to be listened to before adequate support can be delivered.</td>
<td>IP globally are already responding to climate change; and represent critical diversity and capacity in forming adaptive solutions to problems posed by climate change in varied contexts. Rather than implementing top-down, prescribed adaptation projects that can negatively impact local autonomy and cultural integrity, local actions should be acknowledged and supported.</td>
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<th>Loss and Damage (L&amp;D):</th>
<th>Human Rights:</th>
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<td>The newest and least defined work programme at the UNFCCC can be improved with Indigenous knowledge and input. This is especially true for the aspect of L&amp;D known as ‘Non-Economic Loss and Damage’, referring to those impacts that are difficult or impossible to quantify economically. Relating particularly to knowledge, livelihoods, and cultural heritage, these are areas of particular importance to IP worldwide. The process should not continue without their input.</td>
<td>IP have the right to self-determination. They must have a voice in the decisions that directly affect their lives. Since climate change – and decisions to address it – will affect IP more than most populations globally, denying IP adequate influence in the negotiations equates to a loss of rights as defined under the UN charter and numerous international declarations.</td>
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Indigenous diversity and knowledge for climate change solutions:
Representing 370 million people across 90 countries, and 5,000+ distinct cultures, IP account for most of the world’s cultural diversity and dwell in areas holding most of the world's biodiversity. With histories, livelihoods and knowledge systems intimately linked to the natural world, they are also amongst the most exposed, and closely attuned, to climate change. This diversity and knowledge is a critical global resource in understanding and adapting positively to climate change and must not be ignored.

“We actually have some legitimate solutions. … They might not come out the way that scientists talk, but it’s hidden in there. It’s hidden in the stories, and the history.”
- Carinnya Feaunati, Architect, Samoa/New Zealand

“We’re seeing later freeze-up, later snow in the fall, and earlier break up in the spring”
- Gunn-Britt Retter, Sámi Council
### Recommendations for addressing marginalisation of IP at the UNFCCC: righting the scales

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<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Increase negotiating power: Promote IP to full member status at the UNFCCC</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Allowing nation states to represent IP, in the context of historical and current-day marginalisation and incompatible interests, is inadequate.&lt;br&gt;• Promotion of an indigenous delegation to full member status, as recently achieved at the IUCN, is necessary to ensure effective and just participation of IP; and to uphold Human Rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples.</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Employ IP as experts in work-streams and decisions around Adaptation and Loss &amp; Damage</strong>&lt;br&gt;• IP are the world’s expert climate change witnesses; and at the frontline of adaptation challenges. Their knowledge, and diversity of perceptions and responses, is vital to ensure these evolving work programmes and their outcomes are locally appropriate and effective.&lt;br&gt;• Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) should be respected and prioritised in its complexity. To do this, work to integrate TEK and western science, at the level of the UNFCCC is needed.</td>
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<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Direct financial streams towards increasing the autonomy and voice of IP</strong>&lt;br&gt;• To counter financial barriers to access, funds to facilitate IP and civil society inclusion and participation in the conferences are needed. Specifically, translation, travel and training should be covered.&lt;br&gt;• IP must be granted direct active observer status for Green Climate Fund (GCF) Board meetings. An IP Advisory Group to the GCF board should be established.&lt;br&gt;• Financial support for a platform cross-cultural knowledge sharing between Indigenous groups within global regions will support adaptation and resilience.</td>
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<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ensure respect for IP and their rights and livelihoods:</strong>&lt;br&gt;• A culture of respect for IP rights and livelihoods across all levels of society must be cultivated.&lt;br&gt;• Acknowledgement and respect for TEK and Indigenous rights, including their adaptive and sustained historical existence and contemporary right to continue their cultural lifeways through self-determination under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is imperative. All climate and development “solutions” should be reviewed for potential omissions of indigenous knowledge and impacts on IP cultural wellbeing.&lt;br&gt;• The inclusion and full participation of IP in decisions and programmes relating to climate change is imperative for an effective and just transition to a more equitable and stable world.</td>
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Please cite as below, and direct enquiries and comments to [claudia.comberti@ouce.ox.ac.uk](mailto:claudia.comberti@ouce.ox.ac.uk)


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6 see Fankhauser et al. (2014). Policy Paper, February 2014; The Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy (CCCEP)  
7 United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, 24 October 1945, 1 UNTS XVI; also International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights  
8 See the UN Charter, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Paragraph 1; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and UNDRIP