



CLAIRE BARNES

THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OPERATIONAL PLATFORM

A WHITE PAPER

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations and Definitions.	2
Executive Summary.	3
Overview: Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations.	4
The Operational Platform.	6
Future Steps	10
Conclusion.	12
Citations.	13

ABBREVIATIONS & DEFINITIONS

Abbreviations

COP: Conference of the Parties

UNFCCC: United Nations Framework on Climate Change

UN: United Nations

SBSTA 47: forty-seventh session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice

Definitions

Indigenous Peoples (defined by the UN): inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment. Indigenous peoples have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live **(1)**.

Traditional Knowledge: often interchanged with indigenous knowledge; "knowledge systems embedded in the cultural traditions of regional, indigenous, or local communities. Traditional knowledge includes types of knowledge about traditional technologies of subsistence (e.g. tools and techniques for hunting or agriculture), midwifery, ethnobotany and ecological knowledge, traditional medicine, celestial navigation, ethnoastronomy, the climate, etc." **(2)**.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Nations has created a platform for indigenous peoples and local communities to get involved in climate change negotiation. However, the purpose and function of this platform were initially vague, and the UN has had a history of acting slowly on decisions regarding indigenous peoples.

The Operational Platform is extremely important for the inclusion of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge in climate change policy. If the platform is not made fully functional, climate policy will lag behind indigenous knowledge and the UN will create culturally irrelevant policies regarding indigenous peoples and local communities. While indigenous and local communities are often the first to be affected by climate change, UN action also affects everyone. Climate change affects everyone, and does not know political or social boundaries **(3)**. Currently, the operationalization of the Platform at the Conference of the Parties (COP), a UN climate change conference, has not included indigenous voices within high level negotiations.

At this point, indigenous peoples and local communities are only awarded observer status within the UN, which is fundamentally problematic and restricts the participation of these communities in decisions that inherently affect them. This white paper will divulge the background of indigenous peoples with the UN, as well as the evolution of The Operational Platform: how it came to be, what it is now, and decisions from COP 23 that have shaped the trajectory of the Platform. This background, will equip readers with an understanding of the decision-making processes within the UN, as well as some of the jargon accompanied with climate negotiations. This paper will also be informed by interviews with indigenous peoples conducted at the 23rd Conference of the Parties, by the source author. The future steps that this paper will propose, are timely for the inclusion of local communities and indigenous communities into climate policy. In order to fully operationalize the platform, the UN must. . . .

- 1) Officially recognize indigenous people as holders of traditional knowledge, not only within the platform.
- 2) Effectively incorporate indigenous peoples as decision making parties within negotiations, especially when the UN is negotiating indigenous knowledge and traditions.
- 3) Quickly establish an open-ended working group or a facilitative committee within the COP, for Indigenous Peoples on Climate Change Policy.
- 4) Officially give indigenous peoples access to full funding, in order to strengthen capacity building, as well as mitigation and adaptation projects in local and indigenous communities.

OVERVIEW

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE UNITED NATIONS

The Operational Platform does not exist in a bubble, as indigenous peoples and local communities have a long history with the United Nations. This history informs the platform today, and was influential in the development of the platform at COP 21 ('Conference of the Parties') in Paris, France.

The Conference of the Parties is an international conference that invites UN Member states to discuss mitigation and adaptation strategies to curb climate change. The COP is technically the **"supreme decision-making body" (4)** of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Between the Conference of the Parties, there are "Climate Talks" to discuss the progress of any initiative or commitment that was developed at the previous COP. Member states, students, researchers, NGOs, non-profits, and indigenous peoples attend the COP Conference.

Indigenous Peoples' interaction with the UN **began as early as 1923 (5)**, when Haudenosaunee Chief Deskaheh, defended the human and land rights of his people in Geneva at the League of Nations.

OVERVIEW

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Jose R. Martinez Cobo, **the Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (6)**, published a **study in 1981 (7)** on the oppression of indigenous peoples worldwide.

Inspired by this study, **The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (8)** established a Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982, which was tasked with the responsibility of creating a document with minimum standards for protecting indigenous peoples. At this time, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had already been published for *34 years*.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted in 2007, after a long period of drafting amendments and concerns from UN member states. These concerns originated from the inclusion of clauses concerning indigenous peoples' political sovereignty.

While the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples shows a commitment from the UN to indigenous peoples, there was no operational platform for indigenous peoples to affect policy implementation or serve as a recommending body in climate negotiations, before the 21st meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP).

THE OPERATIONAL PLATFORM

At COP 21, the Paris Agreement marked a revolutionary shift in the international response to climate change and its effects. The Agreement mandated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) from UN Members States, and consequently, **all countries within the United Nations** “agreed to work to limit global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius, and given the grave risks, to strive for 1.5 degrees Celsius” (9).

The Paris Agreement also created the foundation for the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Operational Platform, which is often referred to as the Operational Platform or just simply The Platform.

In the Paris Agreement, Paragraph 135 recognizes the importance of indigenous communities in the fight against climate change.

The Agreement claims that the UN needs to “strengthen knowledge, technologies, practices and efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples related to addressing and responding to climate change” (10). The wording in the Paris Agreement is relatively vague, as the platform is tasked with sharing indigenous practices of climate mitigation and adaptation, but does not specify how this is to be accomplished. However, the inclusion of indigenous concerns into the Agreement was monumental for the potential engagement of indigenous peoples with the UNFCCC.

At COP 22, member states decided to adopt an “incremental and participatory approach to developing the local communities and indigenous peoples platform with a view to ensuring its effective operationalization” (11), and to do so, solicited feedback from stakeholders that would be discussed at SBSTA 46, during The Climate Talk in Bonn, Germany. COP 22 also opened a dialogue for stakeholders at COP 23 within SBSTA 47 (the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice).

THE OPERATIONAL PLATFORM

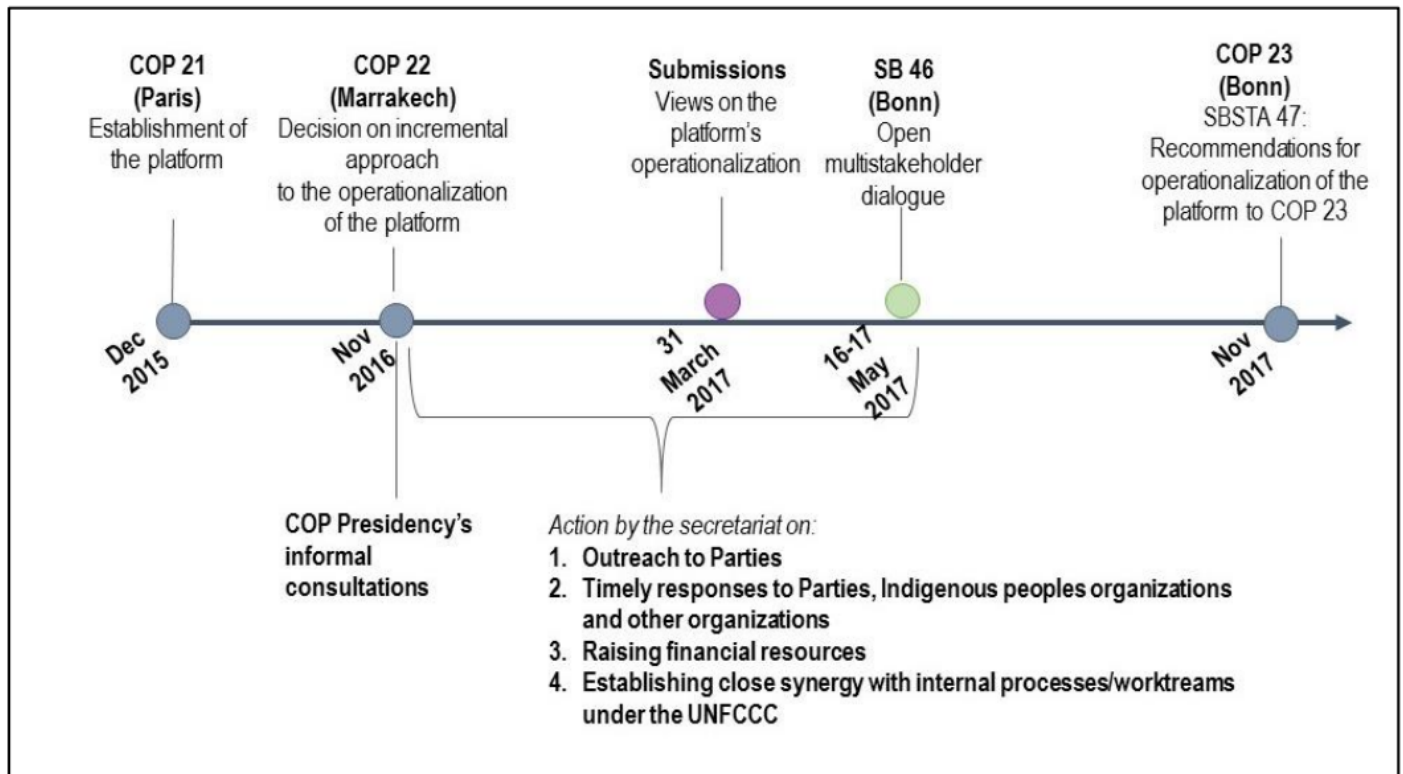


Fig. 1. The timeline of The Operational Platform.

The feedback solicited from stakeholders and constituents was compiled by the UNFCCC, and the distribution of submissions can be seen below in **Fig.2 (12)**. These recommendations were discussed at SBSTA 46, during the Climate Talks in May 2017 in Bonn, Germany. Fig. 3 displays the distribution of participants who gave feedback after COP 22.

THE OPERATIONAL PLATFORM

Distribution of submissions by region and type of submitter

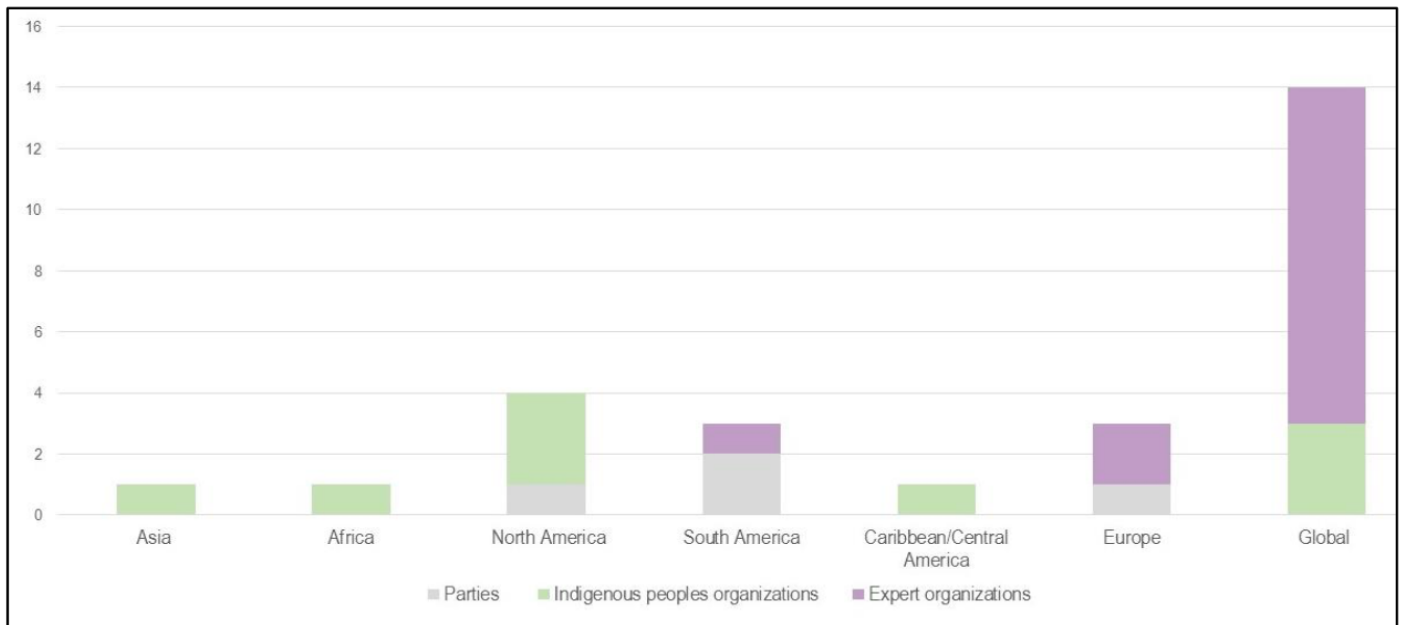


Fig. 2.

Distribution of participants by region and type of submitter

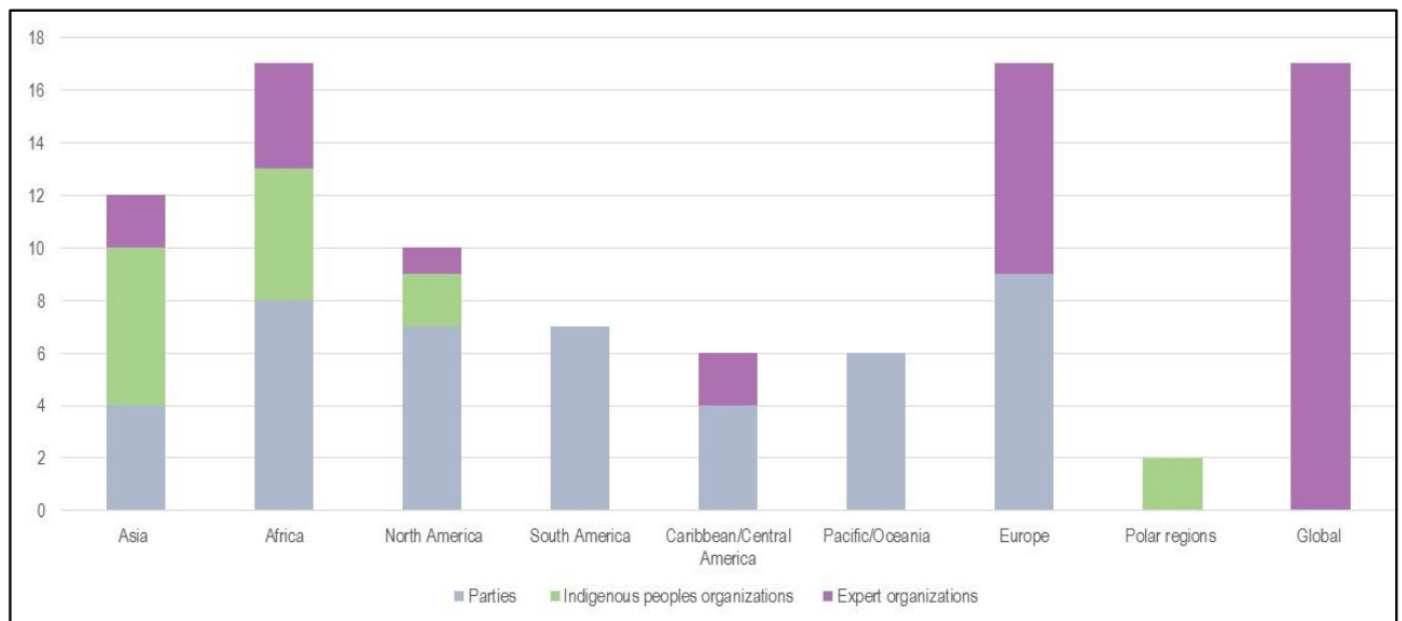


Fig. 3.

THE OPERATIONAL PLATFORM

Constituents in the dialogue solidified 3 main goals and purpose for the platform. These are also called the “core functions” of the platform, and are illustrated in an infographic below (13). The platform will. . .

- 1) Promote the exchange of knowledge between indigenous peoples, local systems, and the UNFCCC, while taking into consideration free, prior, and informed consent of local and indigenous constituencies.
- 2) Promote a capacity for engagement. The Platform will help indigenous peoples engage with the UNFCCC in regards to the Paris Agreement and other climate change policies, and vice versa.
- 3) Promote climate change policies and actions, that take into consideration (1) indigenous knowledge and peoples and (2) more ambitious climate action.

Three core functions of the local communities and indigenous peoples platform

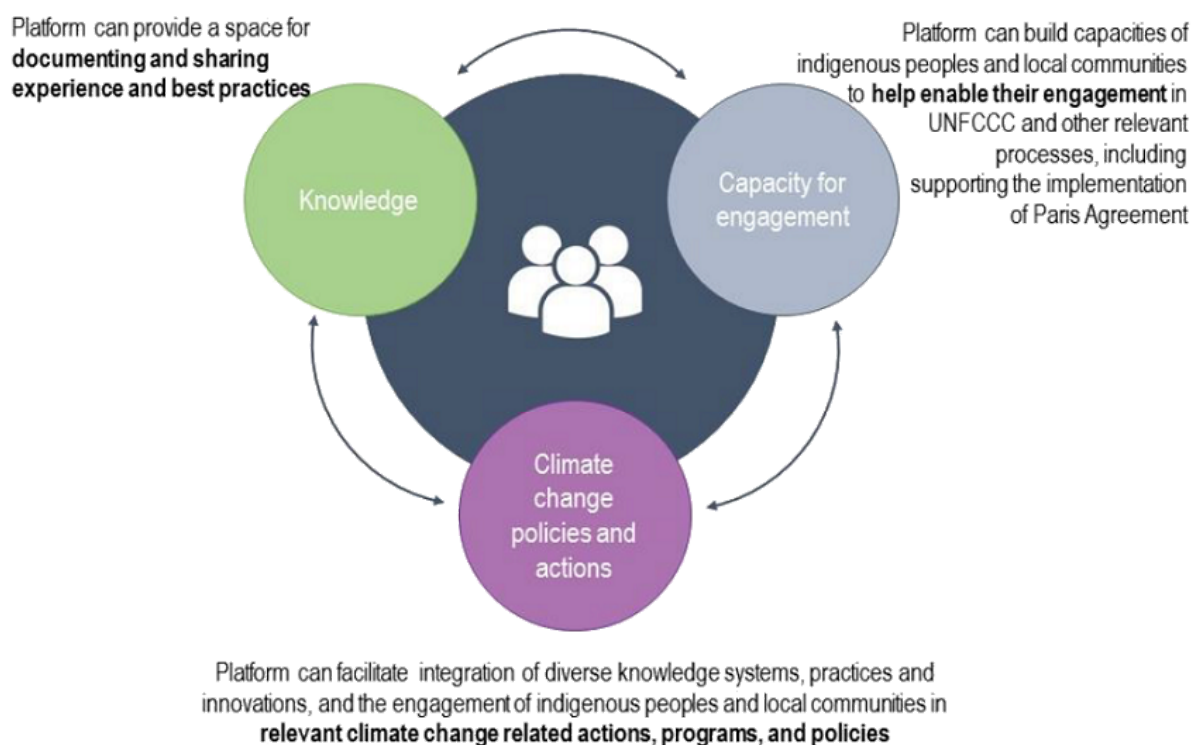


Fig. 4. Three Core Functions of the Platform. Produced from SBSTA 46.

FUTURE STEPS

At COP 23, a multi stakeholder dialogue was held to discuss the functions, governance, and funding for the platform. In a report by the UN Secretariat, which includes the proposals of members states based on the multi stakeholder dialogue, the platform recognizes that “climate change will disproportionately affect local communities and indigenous peoples that live in and rely on fragile ecosystems, threatening their homes, livelihoods and cultural survival” **(14)**.

COP 23 has prioritized finding funding and resources for the operationalization of the platform, the UNFCCC must create a funding mechanism for indigenous peoples within the Platform and Green Climate Fund for effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in climate negotiations. The COP has identified three proposals in regards to sources of funding for the operationalization of the platform, proposals include:

- (a) The regular budget of the UNFCCC;
- (b) Partnerships with non-state actors to secure innovative sources of financing;
- (c) Party support for the participation of representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities in relevant meetings, workshops and events under the platform.

In terms of structure, COP 23 has identified 2 forms of governance for the platform-- an advisory and technical function. The advisory function of the platform include “provision of policy recommendations for workstreams, constituted bodies and processes under the UNFCCC” and the technical portion of the platform will involve “the development, implementation and monitoring of the platform’s work programme” **(15)**.

FUTURE STEPS

Future steps, adopted from Madame Hindou's interview with Claire Barnes at COP 23 in Bonn, Germany (16), must be taken to ensure the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in climate policy. These include future policy decisions surrounding funding and the platform's structure. Future steps include:

1) Officially recognize indigenous people as holders of traditional knowledge, not only within the platform.

2) Effectively incorporate indigenous peoples as decision making parties within negotiations, especially when the UN is negotiating indigenous knowledge and traditions.

a) This would mean, the UN must change the status of indigenous peoples, nations, and communities from observer to party.

b) In order to ensure the diversity of indigenous voices are heard, these co-chairs must be chosen from the 7 regions of indigenous peoples recognized by the UN, and interchange every year after the Conference of the Parties.

3) Quickly establish an open-ended working group or a facilitative committee within the COP, for Indigenous Peoples on Climate Change Policy.

a) This working group would have equal representation from indigenous peoples and estate parties, and co-chairs--two from UN Member States and two from indigenous peoples.

4) Officially give indigenous people' access to full funding, in order to strengthen capacity building, as well as mitigation and adaptation projects in local and indigenous communities.

a) Currently, within the UNFCCC, there is no funding window dedicated to indigenous peoples. This funding would go directly to indigenous peoples, and would not be funneled to members states as it in via the Green Climate Fund (17).

CONCLUSIONS

Moving forward **the COP has also identified priorities** for the platform, which are hopeful statements for further operationalization of The Platform and coincide with my recommendations as well. However, these are principles which were proposed for The Platform and have not been yet actualized. These include:

- “full and effective participation of indigenous peoples;
- equal status of indigenous peoples and Parties, including in leadership roles;
- self-selection of indigenous peoples representatives in accordance with indigenous – peoples’ own procedures; and
- adequate funding from the secretariat and voluntary contributions to enable the implementation of the functions of the platform” **(18)**.

In addition to proposing these priorities, the COP needs to adopt the priorities formally, set a timeline for the operationalization of The Platform, and increase the timeliness and speed at which they accomplish these goals. The rhetoric of the operationalization is optimistic, and the UNFCCC needs to further develop a logistics plan for the awarding of indigenous peoples with Equal Status of Parties. The development of a funding window for indigenous peoples within the Green Climate Fund and the Secretariat is of equal importance.

Overall, while indigenous peoples have made positive strides towards their inclusion in climate policy and UN Negotiations, logistics need to be solidified before any victories are celebrated. The Operational Indigenous People's Platform does however, provide indigenous peoples and local communities with a window to engage in climate change negotiation, and to discuss the critical nature of traditional knowledge and indigenous livelihoods.

CITATIONS

(1) Nations, United. "Indigenous Peoples at the UN For Indigenous Peoples." *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us.html.

(2) "Traditional Knowledge." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 7 Nov. 2017, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_knowledge.

(3) "United Nations and Climate Change." *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climatechange/.

(4) Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United. "Conference of the Parties (COP)." *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, 6 May 2014, unfccc.int/bodies/body/6383.php.

(5) Nations, United. "Indigenous Peoples at the UN For Indigenous Peoples." *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us.html.

(6) Nations, United. "Indigenous Peoples at the UN For Indigenous Peoples." *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us.html.

(7) Martínez Cobo, José. "Study of the Problem of Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations Final Report." *Division for Social Policy and Development Indigenous Peoples*, United Nations, 30 July 1982, www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/publications/martinez-cobo-study.html.

(8) Nations, United. "UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC and SOCIAL COUNCIL." *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/ecosoc/en/.

(9) "United Nations and Climate Change." *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climatechange/.

(10) *Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Twenty-First Session, Held in Paris from 30 November to 13 December 2015*. FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1. United Nations, 2016.

CITATIONS

(11-12) *Local communities and indigenous peoples platform: proposals on operationalization based on the open multi- stakeholder dialogue and submissions.* Report by the UN Secretariat.

(13) "COP23 ADDRESSES THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PLATFORM." United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 20 Oct. 2017, www4.unfccc.int/sites/NWP/News/Pages/IPP-PreCOP23_Article.aspx.

(14-15) *Local communities and indigenous peoples platform: proposals on operationalization based on the open multi- stakeholder dialogue and submissions.* Report by the UN Secretariat.

(16) Barnes, Claire. "Interview: Hindou Oumaro Ibrahim." *cop23adventures.Wordpress.com*, 9 Dec. 2017, cop23adventures.wordpress.com/stories-2/interview-hindou-oumaro-ibrahim/.

(17) "Green Climate Fund." *Green Climate Fund*, www.greenclimate.fund/home.

(18) "The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform Becomes Operational at COP 23." *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, 6 Dec. 2017, www4.unfccc.int/sites/NWP/News/Pages/Indigenous-Peoples-and-Local-Communities-Platform-Update.aspx.

Cover Image Citations: 1) **UN Web TV:** <http://webtv.un.org/watch/part-1-high-level-event-on-the-10th-anniversary-of-the-adoption-of-the-united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples-25-april-2017/5410903940001> 2) **10th Anniversary of UNDRIP:** https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2016/08/UNDRIP_card_E6.jpg 3) **UN News Centre:** <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54001#.Wi8YgLQ-dp9>