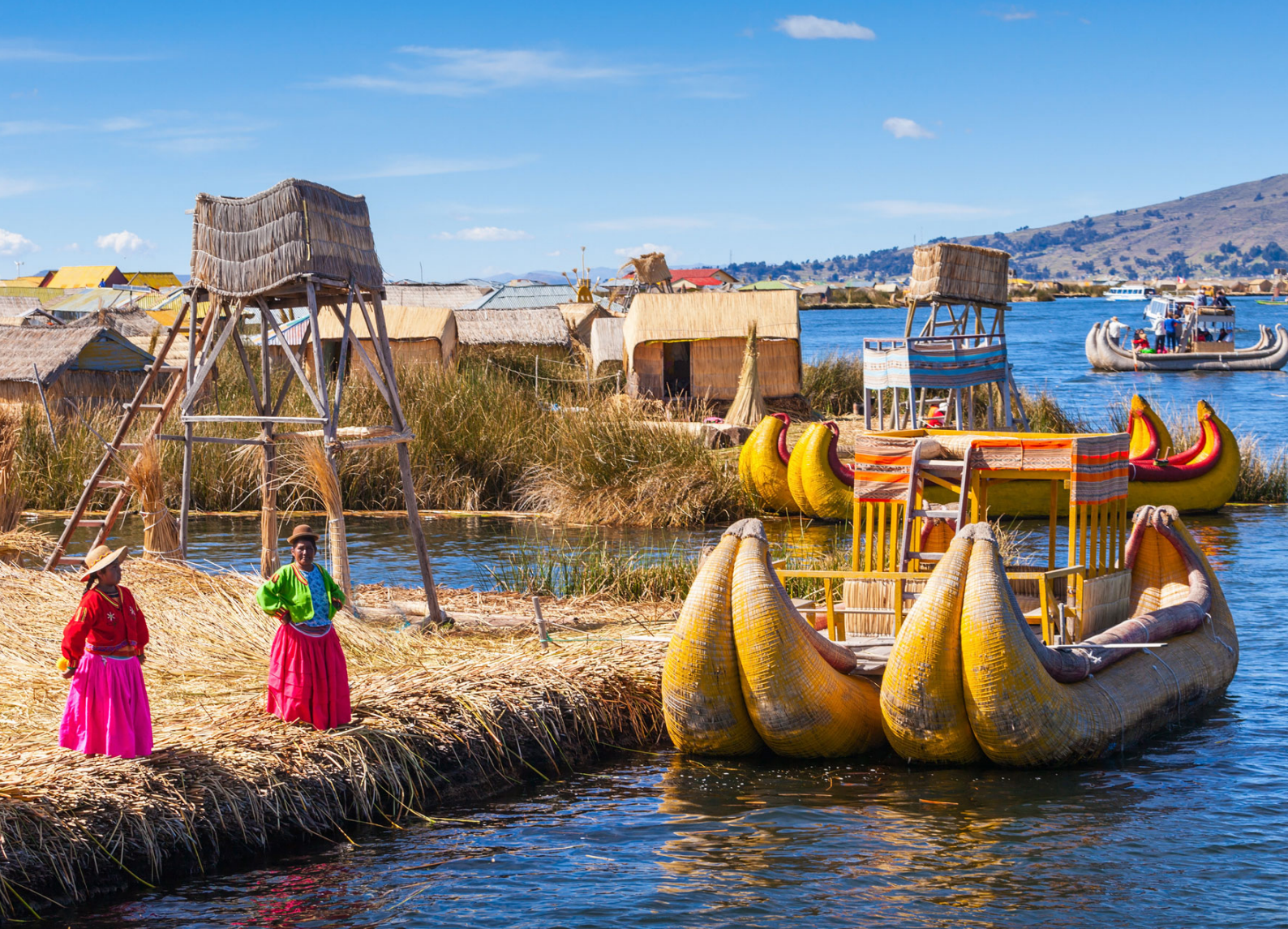
September 2025

Global Study on Indigenous Peoples' Climate Contributions

Executive Summary



The Global Study on Indigenous Peoples Climate Contributions

ELATIA
Indigenous Peoples' Global Partnership on Climate Change, Forests and Sustainable Development

صندوق محمد بن زايد للمحافظة على الكائنات الحية
The Mohamed bin Zayed SPECIES CONSERVATION FUND

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Climate High-Level Champions

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Introduction

Indigenous Peoples are indispensable leaders in climate action – safeguarding biodiversity, stewarding lands and waters, driving mitigation, and strengthening resilience – yet their contributions are too often obscured by Indigenous-information gaps and chronic underfunding.

Today, less than 1% of relevant finance reaches Indigenous Peoples and local communities for securing tenure rights and managing forests in tropical countries, leaving evidence-based solutions under-recognized and under-resourced.

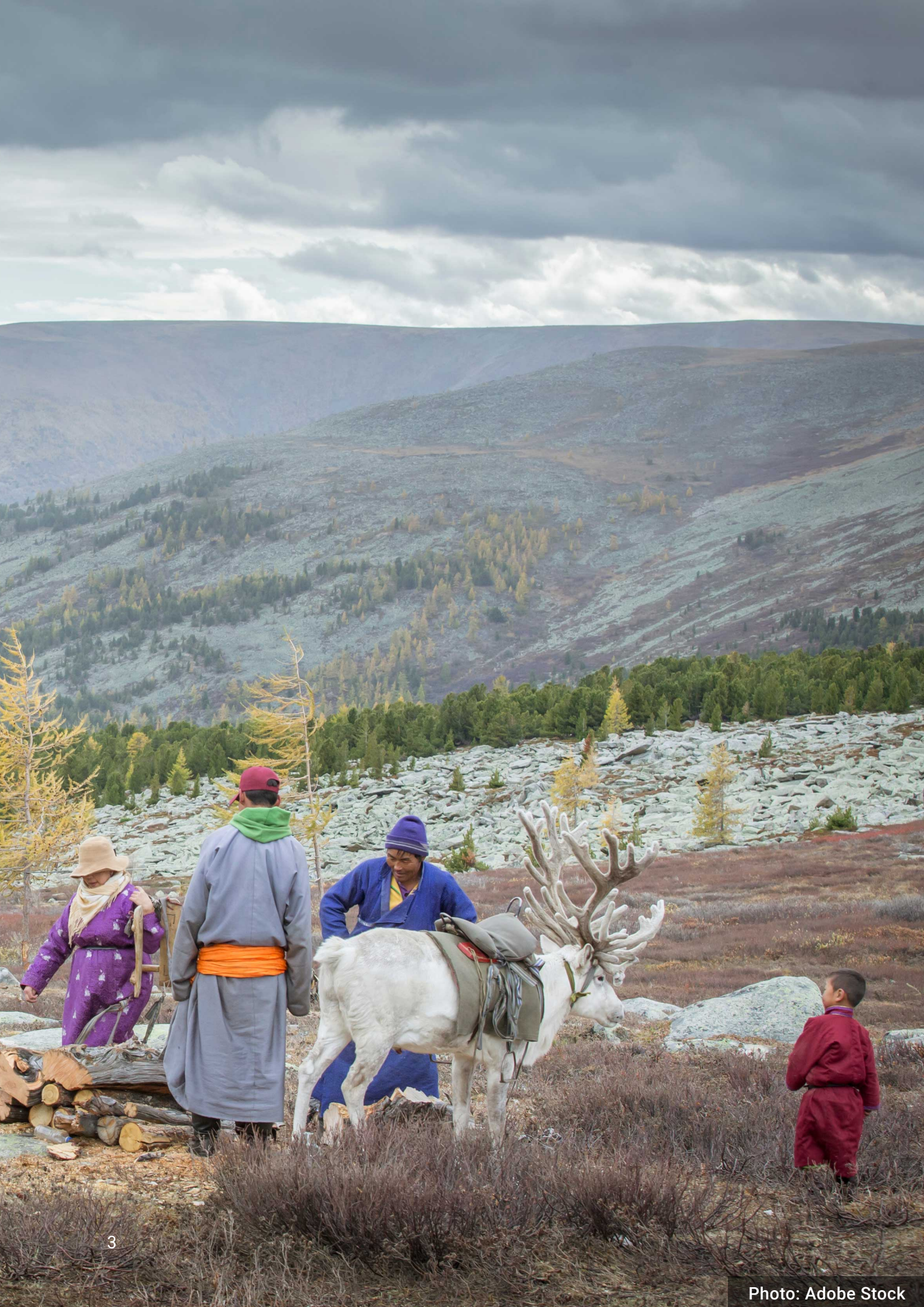
The COP28 High-Level Champion and managing director of the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Razan al Mubarak, launched, supported and funded the *Global Study on Indigenous Peoples' Climate Contributions* to strengthen the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and evidence of impact in international climate discourse and decision-making.

Grounded in a rights- and responsibilities-based approach, the study, carried out by the Indigenous Peoples' Global Partnership ELATIA, with inputs from an Indigenous Peoples Advisory Committee and External Review Expert Group, examines Indigenous Peoples-led climate adaptation, mitigation, ambition, and finance across the globe, while also documenting loss and damage, and centring climate justice.

The study compiled information from over 700 Indigenous Peoples-led or Indigenous-partnered climate initiatives worldwide. Its aim is practical and immediate – improve the quality and availability of Indigenous Peoples-generated evidence, elevate Indigenous leadership, and reorient resources toward effective, equitable, and scalable Indigenous Peoples-led climate solutions.

A regional snapshot of climate impacts and responses; and key insights and recommendations to guide governments, funders, and partners are summarised below.

Further information about the Study is available at https://research.ilepa-kenya.org/wp/.



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Regional Impacts and Responses

Africa

Climate change is disrupting Indigenous Peoples livelihoods by intensifying droughts, eroding food and water security, spreading disease, and threatening cultural survival. Indigenous Peoples in Africa are countering these pressures by blending Indigenous Peoples' knowledge with science, securing land and resource rights, revitalising mobility for pastoralists, empowering women leaders, and co-managing ecosystems to foster both resilience and peace. Although recognition of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge has improved over the past decade, escalating climate extremes make Indigenous Peoples' rights, funding, and a real seat at the table more urgent than ever.

Arctic

Rapid Arctic warming is making hunting, travel and food storage far less predictable for Indigenous Peoples. Consequently, climate impacts have intensified (e.g., village relocations, rampant wildfires, rapid permafrost thaw) over the past decade. In response, Arctic Indigenous Peoples have expanded both traditional and innovative adaptations while simultaneously asserting their rights against disruptive tourism, shipping, resource extraction, and poorly sited renewable-energy projects.

Asia

From melting glaciers to erratic monsoons and rising seas, Indigenous Peoples in Asia struggle to secure food and water across a diversity of environments and cultures. Communities are mobilising Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and innovative practices to build resilience, yet large-scale dams, biofuel plantations, and exclusionary conservation schemes often dispossess them or ignore their expertise. Persistent land-tenure insecurity and top-down "green" projects continue to undermine equitable, rights-based climate responses in the region.

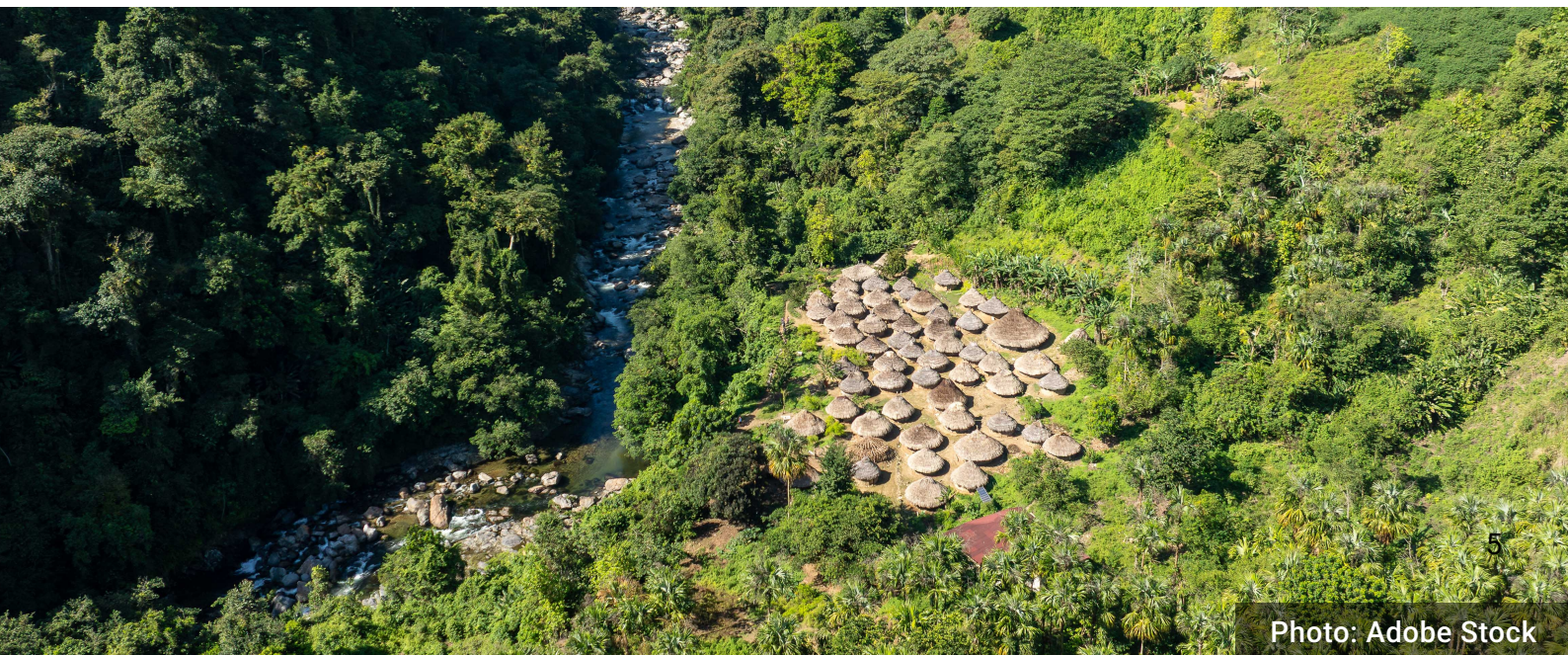
Central & South America and the Caribbean

Indigenous Peoples across Central & South America and the Caribbean face accelerating climate threats – from Andean glacier loss and Amazonian drought-driven fires to intensifying hurricanes and coastal erosion – endangering water supplies, food security, and cultural heritage. Leveraging ancestral knowledge and new alliances, they are leading innovative, community-driven adaptations, while successfully defending land rights and embedding Indigenous Peoples' worldviews in national climate policies. New forms of adaptation include Indigenous-planned relocation, women- and youth-led resilience initiatives, and gender-responsive finance mechanisms.

From Mexico's cenote guardians and mangrove restoration collectives to Colombia's biodiversity credits and Peru's recognition of climate's mental-health toll on Indigenous women, these initiatives expand the region's adaptive capacity. Regional networks, women-led initiatives, and landmark legal victories now place Indigenous Peoples at the forefront of climate resilience and mitigation, even as deforestation, extractive pressures, and funding gaps remain persistent challenges.

Eastern Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia & Transcaucasia

Indigenous Peoples in the Eastern Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia & Transcaucasia region are experiencing severe, place-specific climate impacts – glacier retreat in the Altai, intensified wildfires in southern Siberia, and erratic weather in the Carpathians – that undermine traditional hunting, pastoralism, and food sovereignty. Rain-on-snow events, permafrost-linked landscape change, and wildfire regimes disrupting reindeer herding and river/forest livelihoods from Yamal to Yakutia. Indigenous Peoples are countering these threats by revitalising Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, renewed mobility/education models, partnering in participatory mapping and monitoring, and diversifying livelihoods, yet large-scale development projects, weak land-tenure recognition and limited respect for rights continue to heighten their vulnerability.



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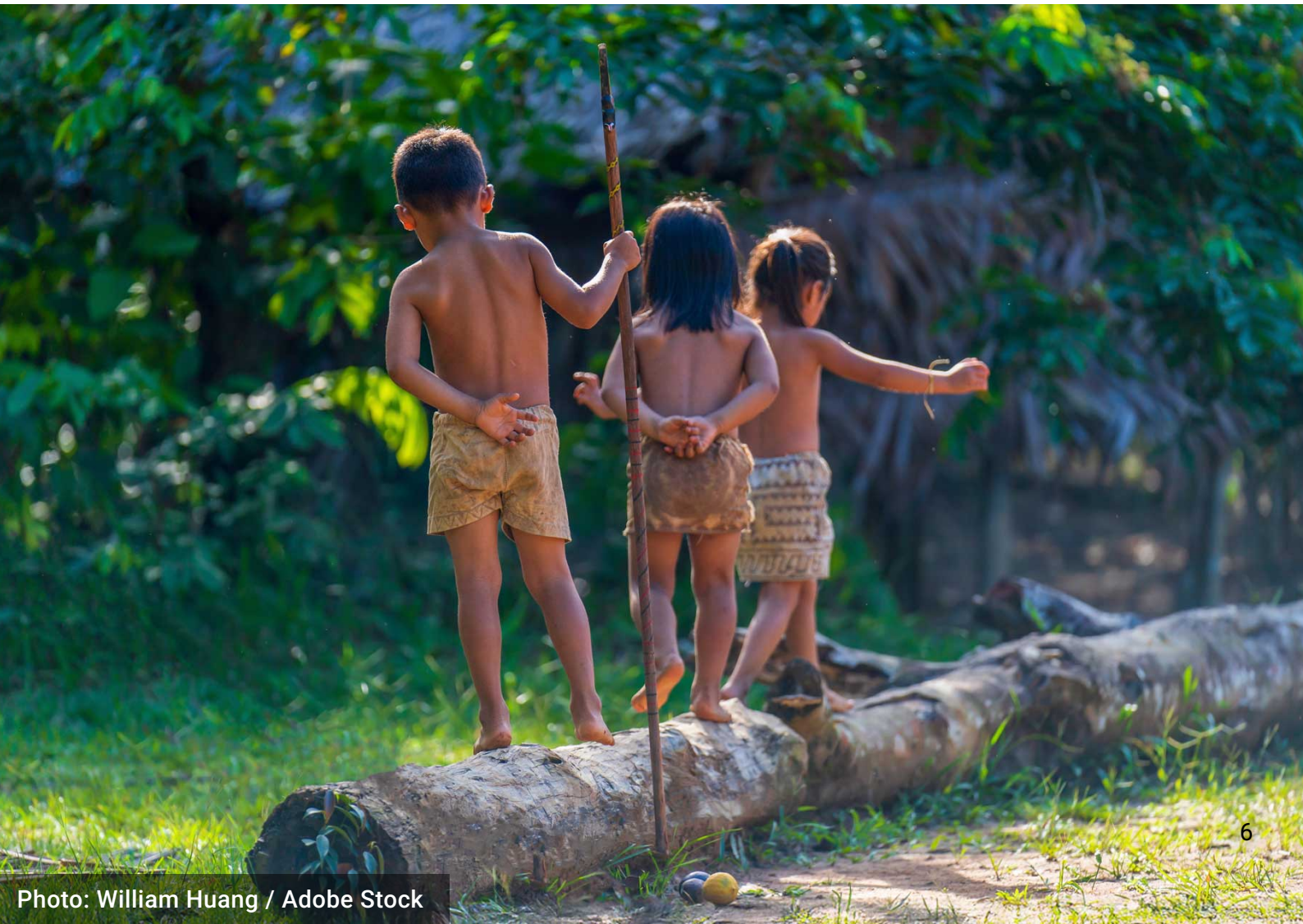
North America

Indigenous Peoples in North America are confronting rapidly intensifying climate impacts – from extreme heat, drought, wildfires, and storms to shrinking ice roads and eroding coasts – that undermine food sovereignty, water security, health, and infrastructure. At the same time, they are leading innovative, self-determined adaptation initiatives that braid Indigenous Peoples' knowledge with Western science, even as chronic barriers like inadequate funding, land loss, and colonial decision-making persist. Communities have moved from resisting harmful projects to spearheading renewable energy, restoration, and policy advocacy on national and global stages.

Pacific

Climate change impacts across the Pacific have rapidly intensified, bringing higher temperatures, sea-level rise, extreme weather, and ecosystem disruptions that threaten Indigenous Peoples' lands, livelihoods, and cultural heritage. In response, Indigenous Peoples in the Pacific are leading adaptive actions – from community-managed relocations and revived cultural burning to nature-based solutions and the formal integration of traditional knowledge into disaster planning and national climate strategies – while also advancing climate-justice litigation and global advocacy.



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Key Insights and Strategic Actions

1. Indigenous stewardship is a planetary climate stabiliser

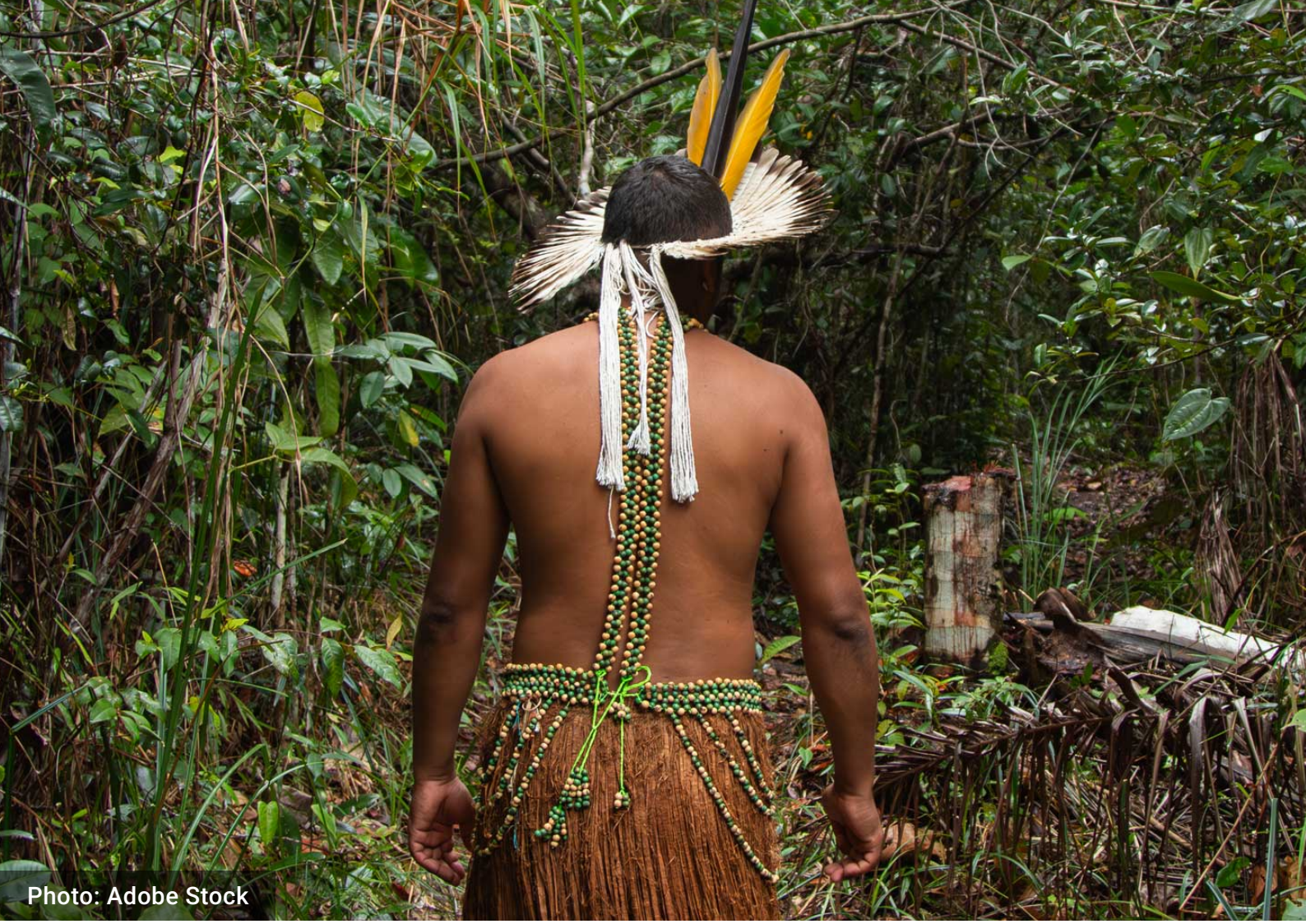
Insights

- Indigenous Peoples manage ~25 % of global land and ~40 % of the last large, intact ecosystems.
- The study identifies quantifiable emissions reductions in several case studies. For example, Australia's Indigenous fire management programs alone reduce emissions by over 1 million tonnes CO_2e annually, using satellite-based methods accepted under national carbon standards.
- Where Indigenous Peoples' tenure rights are recognised, forests remain standing, grasslands stay healthy, and wildfire rates plummet.
- These areas lock away billions of t CO_2e and buffer communities against floods, droughts, storms.

Strategic Actions

Put Indigenous Peoples' land and water stewardship at the heart of Nationally Determined Contribution Strategies (NDCs) & Nature-based Solution (NbS) programmes.

- Recognise Indigenous Peoples' customary ownership and governance over their identified ancestral territories and resources.
- Fast-track legal recognition and titling of Indigenous Peoples' territories, in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
- Scale Indigenous Peoples' conservation and/or resource management initiatives (including guardian and ranger programmes) as part of national mitigation & adaptation budgets.
- Require, at a minimum, Indigenous Peoples' co-governance and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for every land and water-based initiative.



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2. Rights are the hinge between success and failure

Insights

- Case studies show dramatic drops in land and sea country degradation and deforestation once tenure is secure.
- Projects that bypass rights provoke conflict, stall, or collapse – costing time, carbon emission reductions, money and lives. For example, Indigenous Peoples impacted by oil-palm plantation expansion in Asia with secured tenure have been able to halt destructive deforestation practices and undertake successful restoration and carbon sequestration initiatives.

Strategic Actions

Enforce the "no rights – no deal – no data" principle.

- Make rigorous land-tenure due-diligence mandatory for all public- and private-sector climate finance, grounded in protocols of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).
- Embed grievance, benefit-sharing and protector-security clauses into carbon, conservation and renewable-energy contracts.
- Tie multilateral funding disbursements to demonstrable progress on Indigenous Peoples' rights reform.

3. Indigenous Peoples' climate leadership is surging, but finance rarely reaches them

Insights

- Indigenous Peoples-led funds, though tiny, have already moved > US$ 30 m to > 2 000 projects with high ecological and social return on investment (ROI).

Strategic Actions

Prioritize money to Indigenous Peoples directly, for long-term and at scale

- Set a hard target: ≥ 25 % of climate finance to Indigenous Peoples-controlled channels by 2027, rising thereafter.
- Capitalise Indigenous Peoples-governed funds; let them set priorities.
- Streamline grant rules (oral applications, flexible overheads) and provide multi-year core support.
- Guarantee Indigenous Peoples seats on public-private finance decision-making arrangements.
- Public–private finance platforms should publish annual "direct Indigenous Peoples finance" scorecards to track progress and accountability.

4. Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge + Western Science = Innovation + Transformation

Insights

- Indigenous Peoples combine Indigenous Peoples' knowledge with other scientific methods to create more robust forecasting, adaptation and mitigation strategies. Indigenous Peoples-led knowledge co-production results in more accurate predictions, lower losses, and high community buy-in. For example:

  → Pacific cyclone early-warning systems integrate elders' environmental indication (bird calls, cloud formations) with satellite data to significantly improve forecasting lead times.

  → Sámi communities pioneered the use of internet-connected reindeer tracking systems, blending their Indigenous Peoples' knowledge with technology for real-time pasture monitoring to enhance their adaptive capacity. Evenki reindeer herders also integrate their Indigenous Peoples' knowledge with scientific mapping techniques, adapting migration and pasture management in response to climate-driven landscape changes,

  → Maasai Indigenous Peoples' climate forecasting allows pastoralist communities to prepare effectively for droughts, adapt herd sizes and secure local livelihoods in increasingly variable climate conditions.

- Quantitative and qualitative integration in research allows for better understanding of global trends and local specificities.

Strategic Actions

Fund Indigenous Peoples-led knowledge co-production as a core adaptation and mitigation activity.

- Support Indigenous Peoples' data sovereignty platforms so communities own and govern climate-related data.

- Encourage research institutes and meteorological services to formally engage with Indigenous Peoples and indicators in their models.

- Ring-fence lines in climate budgets for Indigenous Peoples/Western science partnerships led by Indigenous Peoples and their knowledge holders.

- Dedicate consistent space in IPCC for insights on data related to Indigenous Peoples' knowledge in the context of climate change.

5. Indigenous Peoples women and youth are force multipliers for climate resilience

Insights

- Indigenous women's groups run successful seed banks, drought-resistant gardens, forest-care enterprises, usually on shoestring (< US$ 100 k) budgets. Indigenous women's networks lead disaster preparedness and community-based adaptation initiatives across the globe, significantly improving local climate resilience, safeguarding biodiversity, and enhancing food security at the grassroots level.
- Indigenous youth fuse tech (GPS, drones, solar) with tradition to build micro-grids, monitor ice routes, map fires and create other innovative solutions.
- Projects led by Indigenous women & youth consistently report stronger food security, faster innovation uptake, and higher cultural transmission.

Strategic Actions

Build gender- and youth-responsive climate finance, governance and programming.

- Dedicate grant windows for Indigenous women-led and youth-led projects; set minimum spends in every major fund.
- Guarantee Indigenous women and youth seats on climate-decision bodies (national task forces, GCF boards, project steering committees).
- Fund leadership pipelines (scholarships, fellowships, peer-exchange networks) that combine climate science, finance skills and Indigenous Peoples' knowledge.

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6. Self-determined solutions stick and scale better

Insights

- Indigenous Peoples-designed endowment funds deliver sustained financial resources explicitly for climate adaptation and ecosystem stewardship, safeguarding critical carbon sinks and biodiversity hotspots from climate threats (e.g., Thaidene Nëné Trust in Canada).
- Indigenous Peoples-led conservation protects large-scale ecosystems, significantly reducing deforestation-related emissions and enhancing carbon storage (e.g. Kayapo Fund in the Amazon).
- Indigenous Peoples-managed restoration initiatives rehabilitate ecosystems degraded by climate stress, increasing carbon sequestration and strengthening resilience through sustainable local economies (e.g. Xingu Seed Network in Brazil).
- Microgrant schemes offer rapid and flexible funding directly to Indigenous Peoples facing immediate climate impacts, effectively building grassroots resilience and enabling locally relevant climate responses (e.g. Ayni Fund).
- Indigenous Peoples-led funds have shown that adhering to UNDRIP, applying participatory mechanisms at each operational step, and employing differentiated modalities and size of grants promotes better response to climate change challenges.

Strategic Actions

Treat Indigenous Peoples as partners and lead implementers, not beneficiaries nor a social risk factor.

- Establish co-design with Indigenous Peoples and their governance authorities as a mandatory criterion for all climate project approval.
- Invest directly in Indigenous Peoples institutional capacity (project and financial management, legal defence, negotiation and monitoring) as a core part of climate budgets – not peripheral "capacity-building" add-ons.
- Prioritise peer-to-peer learning grants to enable successful Indigenous Peoples' models to scale across regions.
- Allocate sufficient resources and time for meaningful and robust application of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) to reinforce Indigenous Peoples' self-determination and decision-making power.
- Invest direct finance in Indigenous Peoples-led funds to scale impact.

Learn more about the study.

Click here or scan the QR code to visit our website.

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