

CLIMATE CHANGE PARTNERSHIP WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN EAST AFRICA

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND COPING MECHANISMS

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation of Indigenous Peoples in Tanzania:
What Role Can Indigenous Knowledge Play?

Who are Tanzania's indigenous peoples?



Photo 1: Hadza Women doing beadwork for sale as an alternative source of income to cope with impacts of climate change. (Elie Chansa/PINGO's Forum)

Rather than providing a definition of indigenous peoples in Africa, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights¹ lists their most common characteristics. These include the following:

- (a) Their cultures and ways of life differ considerably from the dominant society and their cultures are under threat, in some cases to the point of extinction.
- (b) The survival of their particular way of life depends on access and rights to their traditional land and the natural resources thereon.
- (c) They suffer from discrimination as they are regarded as less developed and less advanced than other more dominant sectors of the community.
- (d) They often live in inaccessible regions, geographically isolated and suffering from various forms of marginalization, both socially and politically.
- (e) They are subject to domination and exploitation within national political and economic structures that are commonly designed to reflect the interests and activities of the national majority.²

In the same report, and in other different communications, the Commission accepts the following communities in Tanzania as being indigenous peoples: the Taturu, the Barbaig, the Maasai, the Akiye and the Hadzabe. The first three groups practise pastoralism whereas the last two are predominantly hunter-gatherers.

1 Report of the African Commission's Working Group of Experts on Indigenous Populations/Communities, IWGIA and ACHPR, 2005 p. 92

2 Ibid p. 89

Indigenous peoples and climate change

Climate change is a matter of life and death for local and indigenous communities. This is not only because adaptation techniques require economic and technological ability that is lacking among poor and marginalized communities such as the P & HG of Tanzania but also because the mitigation strategies currently in place largely militate against the rights and welfare of indigenous peoples.



Photo 2:

Hadza elders sharing indigenous knowledge with their youths [not in picture] (*Elie Chansa/PINGO's Forum*)

In this info brief we show why indigenous knowledge matters for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and how to go about protecting such knowledge for sustainable development and biodiversity conservation.

Indigenous peoples have developed unique livelihood strategies, tailored to the specific ecosystems in which they live. Their knowledge and practices are key to the sustainable management and use of renewable natural resources. While many indigenous peoples live a “low-carbon” lifestyle, they are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change since they directly depend on natural resources and thus their ecosystems. The adverse impacts of climate change disrupt their productive cycles, affect food and water security, lead to deteriorating health, and undermine cultural practices, institutions and social cohesion.

Indigenous peoples in Tanzania, as elsewhere in the world, are disproportionately affected by poverty, are the least educated, and are marginalized in terms of political participation and decision-making. Their traditional livelihood practices are met with restrictions, their rights to lands and resources are not recognized and they face severe human rights violations, especially when trying to mobilize to address all these issues. Indigenous peoples are not even recognized as such in Tanzania, which adds to their vulnerability and the failure to enforce their rights.

Climate change, when not properly addressed, leads to a disruption of traditional livelihoods and an irreversible loss of the traditional and cultural resources that constitute invaluable contributions to climate change mitigation and adaptation. There are already numerous examples in Tanzania that prove the negative effects of climate change and of the mainstream actions taken to mitigate it.

In this info brief, we show why indigenous knowledge matters for climate change mitigation and adaptation and how to go about protecting such knowledge for sustainable development and biodiversity conservation.

Why indigenous knowledge matters

Indigenous knowledge is the collected knowledge of local and indigenous communities that enables them to live in harmony with the environment while supporting and sustaining their livelihoods.

This knowledge is termed indigenous not because it is old but because it is “created, preserved, and disseminated in the cultural traditions of particular communities”. Indigenous knowledge is thus time-tested, as it has enabled local and indigenous communities to interact sustainably with nature for centuries.

Three reasons can be advanced as to why it is particularly vital to protect IK and related genetic resources with the advent of climate change:

1. Eco-friendly life of indigenous communities



Photo 3: Livestock grazing side by side with wildlife in Ngorongoro.

(Elie Chansa/PINGO's Forum)



Photo 4: Resource use plan enables reserve grazing land.

(Elie Chansa/PINGO's Forum)

Through IK and its associated genetic resources, indigenous communities are able to live an eco-friendly life with very little impact on the environment, and very little production of GHG.³ Local and indigenous communities have many lessons to offer the world with respect to environmental conservation and sustainable development. This claim is also supported by the Convention on Biological Diversity, which requires member parties to preserve, protect and promote indigenous knowledge related to biodiversity conservation.

The most publicized climate change mitigation mechanism, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), depends extensively on indigenous people, who are the custodians of the forests. Protection of indigenous knowledge, as well as the social and economic empowerment of local and indigenous communities, is vital if forests are to remain sustainable.

2. Poverty eradication and community empowerment

Along with climate change and biodiversity loss, global poverty is often cited as one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that these issues are all closely intertwined. Because climate change leads to excessive droughts, reduced livestock and the spread of diseases, it also contributes to intensification of poverty and to marginalization and vulnerability.

Protecting indigenous knowledge is thus also important because it enables local and indigenous communities to sustain their economic livelihood. Disregard for IK deprives the indigenous peoples, who are generally poor, of a share in the economic opportunities and potential benefits accruing from the use of their knowledge. Even more alarming, however, it contributes to deteriorating conditions for the craftsmen, leading to poverty and, in extreme cases, even suicide.

3. Time-tested adaptation strategies

Indigenous peoples have a long tradition of interaction with nature. Indigenous knowledge related to ecology, food production and preservation, as well as weather forecasting, has enabled them to survive under critical conditions. All these elements are entrenched in the community, enabling them to forecast different seasons, animal diseases and arrangements for land use and providing them with avenues for preparedness.

Protection of IK and implications for climate change mitigation and adaptation

Protection of indigenous knowledge has become an important agenda item in international fora and a topic of interest to lawyers, conservation scientists, anthropologists and development scholars alike. Such an unprecedented increase in interest is undoubtedly due to the importance IK holds in contemporary social, economic and scientific fields. In spite of this significance, it is widely documented as being under increased threat owing to a lack of respect for IK and its holders, a loss of traditional lifestyles, the misappropriation of IK, and its use without any benefit-sharing, along with the reluctance of younger members of the community to carry traditional practices forward. Conventional intellectual property rights, particularly patents, have been used as a tool to misappropriate IK, much to the detriment of local and indigenous communities. The Ayahuasca, Neem and Hoodia cases, as summarized by Gopalan and Sivakumar,

bring the message home loud and clear.

Various ways of protecting indigenous knowledge have been proposed. In this essay, we submit that the most important protection strategy is to ensure the rights of local and indigenous communities to their ancestral lands. It is impossible to protect indigenous knowledge while destroying the very fabric that holds communities together. Evicting local and indigenous communities is one of the most destructive and degrading acts performed by modern governments in developing countries. Armed police and even soldiers are used to forcibly evict local communities in order to pave the way for investors in the guise of climate change mitigation, such as the Clean Development Mechanism. These hostile and traumatizing actions demonstrate a complete disregard for indigenous peoples' rights and are, furthermore, undermining the potential of IK.

Positive protection of the intellectual property of local and indigenous communities can contribute to poverty eradication and, subsequently, to empowerment and the capacity to deal with challenges related to climate change. Access and benefit-sharing, as provided by the Convention on Biological Diversity, is one approach whereby researchers are required to obtain prior and informed consent before using the indigenous knowledge and associated genetic resources of local and indigenous communities. Such economic incentives are crucial with the advent of climate change adaptation. Local and indigenous communities can use such income to build bridges and dams aimed at adapting to the effects of a rise in sea level and other climate change impacts. Financial resources are also crucial for creating water sources such as boreholes and providing other social amenities, which are conspicuously absent among local and indigenous peoples.

PINGOs Forum (The Pastoralists' Indigenous Non-Governmental Organizations Forum') is an advocacy coalition of (currently) 53 indigenous peoples' organizations that have been working in Tanzania for the rights of marginalized indigenous pastoralist and hunter-gatherer communities since 1994. As a human rights and development network, PINGOs Forum seeks to advocate and support the development of competences on the sustainable livelihoods of pastoralist and hunter-gatherer communities in Tanzania. It endeavours to amplify the voices and foster the interests of pastoralists and hunter-gatherers by advocating for change on good governance and human rights. PINGOs Forum also addresses issues of gender, HIV/AIDS, environment, and climate change (www.pingosforum.or.tz).

IWGIA is an international human rights organization staffed by specialists and advisors on indigenous affairs. IWGIA supports indigenous peoples' struggles for human rights, self-determination, the right to territory, control of land and resources, cultural integrity, and the right to development. IWGIA was founded in 1968 with the aim of establishing a network of concerned researchers and human right activists to document the situation of indigenous peoples and advocate for an improvement in their rights. Today indigenous peoples from all over the world are involved in IWGIA's global network (www.iwgia.org).

TIPTCC was formed in 2013 by a committee consisting of seven key indigenous organizations⁴ with the goal of creating a mechanism to raise awareness of climate change and its effects on indigenous peoples' livelihoods in Tanzania and to promote the integration of indigenous peoples' livelihoods and rights in climate change policies and initiatives. TIPTCC has since its formation provided a forum for discussing indigenous peoples' positions on different climate change and REDD+-related policies and initiatives, including the draft REDD+ policy, REDD+ safeguards, and the REDD+ Information and communication system, plus the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework.



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4 PINGOs Forum, the Association for Law and Advocacy for Pastoralists (ALAPA), Community Research and Development Services (CORDS), Parakuiyo Pastoralists Indigenous Community Development Organization (PAICODEO), Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT), Sunya, Lengatei and Dongo (SULEDO), and the Hadzabe Survival Council (HSC),