

The Bhutan Declaration on Climate Change and Mountain Indigenous Peoples

International Network of Mountain Indigenous Peoples



Mountain Communities Workshop on Climate
Change and Biocultural Heritage

26 May – 1 June 2014



We, over 100 indigenous peoples and traditional farmers from 25 communities in 10 countries speaking 22 languages, together with civil society organisations and research institutions, gathered in Bhutan in the communities of Jangbi and Ura from May 26 to June 1, 2014, to analyze the impacts of recent climatic changes on Mother Earth and on the livelihoods and cultures of indigenous peoples in mountain regions, and to develop responses to this crisis.

“Even though we are suffering disproportionately from climate change impacts, we contribute the least to global emissions”

Our communities include the Monpas and Uraps of Bhutan; the Naxi and Zhuang of China; the Kumaon, Lepcha, Limboo, Monpas, Newar and Sartang of India; the Batken, Kochkor, and Kopro-Bazar from Kyrgyzstan; the Herowana-Ubaigubi, Jiwaka and Yupna of Papua New Guinea; the Rasht Valley, Shughnan and Wakhan Valley communities of Tajikistan; Quechua communities of the Potato Park from Peru; the Mintapod community of the Philippines; the Tayal, Kakanava and Pangcah of Taiwan; and the Pgakenyau Hinladnai of Thailand.

Our gathering took the form of a “Walking Workshop”, which provided the appropriate methods and tools for an effective exchange of ideas and experiences, the airing of common problems and a collective brainstorming on possible solutions. It included food and video festivals and direct interaction with the people of Jangbi and Ura. This creative tool for networking and promoting our special indigenous spirit and sense of mission concluded in the formation of an International Network of Mountain Indigenous Peoples. We are happy to present to the international community this promising new network on the occasion of the 14th Congress of the International Society of Ethnobiology.

We are also happy to announce that we have initiated a unique seed exchange program between the Potato Park in Peru, the communities in Yunnan, China and the Ura and Jangbi communities in Bhutan. This exchange will be expanded to other members of the

network, being mindful of local ecosystems, culture and indigenous peoples’ intellectual property rights.

Mountain biocultural systems are home to many indigenous cultures and languages, and are rich but fragile repositories of cultural and biological diversity, water and other critical ecosystem services. Of unique importance are the indigenous agricultural traditions that have provided us all with important food crops critical for the food security of the world. These are the result of the traditional knowledge and innovation systems of our peoples. The survival of our knowledge systems is critical for the survival of humanity.

We found that in many mountain regions, indigenous and traditional cultures already face drastic changes in their food and agricultural systems, including changes in rainfall patterns, increased temperatures and increased pests and diseases. For example: a 50-60% decrease in water sources in the Eastern Himalayas; extreme drought in SW China; extreme rainfall in Taiwan; extreme typhoons in the Philippines; and rains arriving too late or too early in many cases. In Quechua communities, potato cultivation is moving up in altitude due to increased temperatures and pests and diseases; in Papua New Guinea animals that people depend on for food are migrating to higher levels due to increased temperatures; while unusual weather patterns are affecting forest ecology in Thailand and crops in Kyrgyzstan. As a result, the often-intimate connections between people and agricultural crops are strained, as are the community institutions, traditional values and spiritual beliefs that underpin them.

Even though we are suffering disproportionately from climate change impacts, we contribute the least to global emissions; nevertheless we have been marginalized from participating in the development and implementation of policies, programs, plans and actions related to our local adaptation.



As an emerging International Network of Mountain Indigenous Peoples concerned for the future of mountain ecosystems and the livelihoods of our communities, and in the spirit of solidarity and reciprocity, we call upon governments, research organisations, academics, civil society organisations and the international community to:

1. Recognize the sacred nature and inherent rights of Mother Earth, particularly to its diversity, richness and the welfare of all its children, including plants, animals, rivers, mountains, birds, wind, rocks, spirits, etc., and adhere to the principles of reciprocity and balance with nature, which nurtures life for everyone.
2. Acknowledge and respect the world views and cultural and spiritual values of indigenous peoples and traditional farmers, and recognize the sacred nature of their seeds.
3. Respect and promote the Biocultural Heritage rights of indigenous peoples and traditional farming communities and fully implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
4. Promote the use of indigenous and traditional languages as living libraries of critical traditional knowledge associated to mountain biocultural heritage, and provide adequate funding for indigenous educational processes, learning models and pedagogical practices, involving the youth and elders in knowledge transmission.
5. Recognize the contributions of traditional knowledge to the conservation and sustainable use of mountain ecosystems and their agro-biodiversity, and support the creation and management of traditional knowledge banks that would allow us to share appropriate adaptation strategies and continue innovating.

6. Support processes for bridging traditional knowledge and science to create effective methods and solutions for the conservation and sustainable use of agro-biodiversity, food security and climate change adaptation; while respecting our right to reject the use of technologies such as Genetically Modified Organism and Geo-engineering for being an attack to the integrity of Mother Earth.
7. Support and promote cross-cultural exchanges of knowledge, innovations and technologies among indigenous and traditional farming communities from mountain ecosystems to enable them to find appropriate and effective solutions to common challenges.
8. Support activities around the International Year of Family Farming, and recognize the value and contributions of traditional agricultural systems to national food security by integrating traditional knowledge into sectoral policies, plans and programs at the national level.
9. Support seed exchanges and the repatriation of seeds from international gene banks to create more options for adaptation and ensure local food sovereignty and the food security of the world.
10. Support the strengthening of local governance, customary laws, traditional authorities, and the Wisdom and participation of elders.

We call on indigenous peoples and traditional farmers to assert their Food Sovereignty and to first and foremost give importance to the food and nutrition of our children, and we call upon national governments to fully implement the Right to Food.

Finally, we want to reaffirm our commitment to working together and in our own communities towards our goals of ensuring food sovereignty and fostering biodiversity-rich agricultural systems and the protection of our Biocultural Heritage and local rights.

“ we call upon national governments to fully implement the Right to Food ”

Get involved

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