

Draft Terms of Reference (ToR)

Indigenous Peoples Caucus under the UNCCD

Established pursuant to UNCCD Decision 5/COP16

I- Background and Rationale

Indigenous Peoples represent approximately 476–500 million people worldwide, Despite being over 6% of the global population¹ For generations, Indigenous communities have served as protectors of the world's remaining biodiversity. Indigenous Peoples Own or Manage at Least One Quarter of World's Land Surface² and contribute to the preservation of 25% of the world's carbon sinks³. They are recognized as being present in the seven sociocultural regions: i) Africa; ii) the Arctic; iii) Asia; iv) Central and South America and the Caribbean; v) Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; vi) North America; and vii) the Pacific. However, they are frequently underrepresented or marginalized in national censuses and data systems, which hinders the effective planning and delivery of their positive actions on land restoration and ecosystems preservation.

Historically, Indigenous Peoples' have governed and steward land, territories and various natural resources sustainably, harnessing the ecosystem services and securing the benefits for subsequent generations. Their traditional and customary authorities govern ownership, access and use of their lands and territories that have kept people, lands and biodiversity thriving in harmonious co-existence.

International recognition of Indigenous Peoples is grounded primarily in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007)⁴, which affirms their rights to self-determination, lands and territories, natural resources, culture, and effective participation in decision-making processes that affect them. Over the last decade, Indigenous Peoples' participation to multilateral environmental agreements construction and implementation has grown significantly. Both Paris Agreement (2015) and the Global Biodiversity Framework (2021) emphasis the increased need to include Indigenous Peoples' rights in environmental frameworks and their implementation mechanism, with a critical recognition of the importance of their knowledge.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) recognizes the vital role of Indigenous Peoples and their traditional knowledge systems in addressing desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), strengthening climate resilience, and conserving biodiversity. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge is fundamental to advancing the sustainable management of land, soils, rangelands, and water, as well as to agricultural and silvo-pastoral practices that are resilient to climate variability. In many contexts, these practices have proven effective in preventing soil erosion, restoring the fertility of degraded lands, and maintaining fragile ecological balances. Parties to the Convention have consistently acknowledged the essential contributions of Indigenous Peoples to the effective implementation of the UNCCD.

In this context, COP16 Decision 5. requests the secretariat to support the development of relevant terms of reference for the creation of a Caucus for Indigenous People ensuring an approach that guarantees its representativeness and the unique perspectives and priorities of Indigenous Peoples. An Indigenous Peoples Caucus under the UNCCD as a dedicated, self-organized, and representative mechanism to

¹ https://www.fao.org/indigenous-peoples/who-we-are/en?utm_source=chatgpt.com

² <https://www.un.org/en/desa/indigenous-peoples-continue-face-barriers-realizing-rights-lands-and-territories>

³ World Bank (2023). Indigenous Peoples context. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/Indigenouspeoples>

⁴ https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

enable the effective, inclusive, and rights-based participation of Indigenous Peoples in UNCCD processes and decision-making.

“Decision 5/COP.16 Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: 9 (b) Support, as appropriate, the development of relevant terms of reference for the creation of a Caucus for Indigenous Peoples and a Caucus for Local Communities, ensuring an approach that guarantees its representativeness and the unique perspectives and priorities of Indigenous Peoples as well as of local communities, and in alignment with the principles of the Convention.”

These Draft Terms of Reference build upon consultations already organized with Indigenous Peoples involved in the implementation and established practices and institutional precedents identified through the desk review in annex, with particular references to experiences and arrangements under the Rio Conventions, as outlined below:

- The UNFCCC Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) and its Facilitative Working Group (FWG)⁵;
- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), including Articles 8(j) and 10(c), and the creation of the Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities body under COP16 in Cali⁶;
- The participatory engagement models of the UNCCD Women’s caucus⁷ and Youth engagement and strategy⁸;
- The UNEP’ engagement with Indigenous Peoples under Indigenous Peoples and their Communities⁹;
- The Indigenous Peoples Major Groups for Sustainable Development, IP-led Global Coordinating Committee (GCC)¹⁰; and
- The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)¹¹.

II- Purpose

The **Indigenous Peoples’ Caucus** aims to facilitate the meaningful, effective, and coordinated participation of Indigenous Peoples in the processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). In doing so, it strengthens dialogue, coordination, and engagement between Indigenous Peoples and Parties to the Convention in matters related to policy development, negotiations, implementation, monitoring, and review.

To support this purpose, two complementary engagement spaces are recognized.

- 1- First, the **Indigenous Peoples’ “Plenary” Caucus** functions as primary internal collective coordination space exclusively for Indigenous Peoples’ representatives from the seven socio-cultural regions. This space enables Indigenous Peoples’ participants to meet, dialogue, exchange information, coordinate positions, and prepare joint contributions to the UNCCD processes.
- 2- Second, the **Indigenous Peoples’ Caucus**, as a **“Consultative”** engagement body within the Convention’s processes, provides a structured platform for dialogue and engagement between Indigenous Peoples and Parties to the Convention. Through this

⁵ <https://lcipp.unfccc.int/>

⁶ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-16/cop-16-dec-05-en.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2025-07/Gender%20Caucus%20TOR.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.unccd.int/resources/other/unccd-youth-engagement-strategy>

⁹ <https://www.unep.org/civil-society-engagement/major-groups-modalities/major-group-categories/indigenous-peoples-and>

¹⁰ <https://www.indigenouspeoples-sdg.org/index.php/english/who-we-are/gcc>

¹¹ <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpfii>

mechanism, Indigenous Peoples' representatives and Parties can engage in discussions related to the development and implementation of policies, strategies, and actions under the Convention.

Together, these two complementary spaces aim to ensure that Indigenous Peoples' rights, knowledge systems, cultural practices, governance institutions, and priorities are effectively reflected in the work of the Convention, consistent with the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

III- Mandate

Pursuant Decision 5/COP16, the Indigenous Peoples Caucus Consultative Body under the UNCCD is mandated to function as a self-organized, representative, and inclusive mechanism to facilitate the effective, meaningful, and rights-based participation of Indigenous Peoples in the meetings and processes of the Convention.

Within this mandate, the Caucus shall engage in UNCCD processes, including the Conference of the Parties, subsidiary and intersessional bodies, in accordance with the objectives of the Convention and relevant COP decisions and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

IV- Objectives

The objectives of the Indigenous Peoples Caucus Consultative Body under the UNCCD are to:

1. Enhance the participation and visibility of Indigenous Peoples in UNCCD policy and decision-making processes, including negotiations and implementation-related discussions and facilitate engagement with all relevant stakeholders in coordination with the Plenary Caucus of Indigenous Peoples;
2. Promote the recognition, protection, and application of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems, practices, culture, technologies, innovation, perspectives, and experience to support the implementation of the Convention, particularly in relation to desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), land restoration, drought resilience, and sustainable land management, including with the Committee of Science and Technology (CST) and the Science Policy Interface (SPI);
3. Facilitate coordination, dialogue, and information-sharing among Indigenous Peoples across their regions, particularly regions affected by desertification, land degradation and drought ensuring inclusive engagement of knowledge holders, elders, women, and youth;
4. Strengthen coherence and synergies with Indigenous Peoples' engagement bodies under other Rio Conventions (UNFCCC and CBD) and with other UNCCD mechanisms as women, youth and local communities caucuses;
5. Promote the recognition and integration of Indigenous Peoples' rights, priorities, and safeguards in UNCCD policies, strategies, and relevant initiatives, consistent with applicable international frameworks and national policies;
6. Support the follow-up and implementation of relevant COP decisions, and contribute to mutual learning and exchange of good practices related to Indigenous Peoples' contributions under the UNCCD.
7. Encourage the participation of Indigenous Peoples to implementation of COP decisions, and other frameworks, policies and actions serving the objective of the UNCCD

V- Scope of Work

The Caucus as Consultative Body may engage in, but is not limited to, the following activities:

- Preparation of joint statements, submissions, and policy recommendations to the COP, CRIC, CST, SPI, working groups and subsidiary bodies;
- Participation in negotiations, contact groups, and informal consultations; as well as dialogue with implementation entities;
- Engagement with Parties, the UNCCD Secretariat, the Global Mechanism, and relevant stakeholders;
- Organisation of side events, dialogues, workshops, and knowledge exchanges;
- Monitoring and assessment of UNCCD decisions and implementation affecting Indigenous Peoples;
- Liaison with Indigenous Peoples' bodies under the UNFCCC, CBD, and other relevant international processes.

VI- Functions

The Indigenous Peoples Caucus Consultative Body may function on four pillars :

1. Participation and Representation

To facilitate the effective, coordinated, and inclusive participation of Indigenous Peoples in UNCCD meetings and processes, including the Conference of the Parties, subsidiary bodies, and intersessional meetings, and thematics engagement in a manner consistent with COP decisions.

2. Knowledge, Culture and Policy Inputs

To contribute Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems, cultural practices, values, innovations and technologies to UNCCD policy discussions, scientific and technical work, and implementation processes related to desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), land restoration, drought resilience, and sustainable land management.

3. Capacity for engagement

To promote coordination, dialogue, and information-sharing among Indigenous Peoples across their regions, particularly regions affected by desertification, land degradation and drought and to support inclusive engagement of knowledge holders, elders, women, and youth, including through, regional gathering, capacity-building and mutual learning in person and online.

4. Implementation

To support the implementation at the national, regional and international level, follow-up and visibility of relevant COP decisions and UNCCD initiatives concerning Indigenous Peoples, and to engage, as appropriate, with Parties, the Secretariat, and relevant stakeholders to share experiences and good practices.

Reference table

<i>Pillar</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Alignment/Notes</i>
<i>1. Participation and Representation</i>	To facilitate the effective, coordinated, and inclusive participation of Indigenous Peoples in UNCCD meetings and processes, including the COPs, subsidiary bodies, and intersessional	Aligned with LCIPP participation function and UNCCD Gender and youth Caucuses practice

	meetings, and thematic engagement in a manner consistent with COP decisions.	
2. Knowledge, Culture and Policy Inputs	To contribute Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems, cultural practices, values and innovations to UNCCD policy discussions, scientific and technical work, and implementation processes related to desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), land restoration, drought resilience, and sustainable land management.	Aligned with LCIPP knowledge pillar and CBD IP&LC advisory functions
3. Capacity for engagement	To promote coordination, dialogue, and information-sharing among Indigenous Peoples across their regions, particularly regions affected by desertification, land degradation and drought and to support inclusive engagement of knowledge holders, elders, women, and youth, including through, regional gathering, capacity-building and mutual learning in person and online.	Aligned with LCIPP capacity for engagement pillar, CBD IP&LC coordination mechanisms and Gender Caucus internal organization
4. Implementation	To support the implementation at the national, regional and international level, follow-up and visibility of relevant COP decisions and UNCCD initiatives concerning Indigenous Peoples, and to engage, as appropriate, with Parties, the Secretariat, and relevant stakeholders to share experiences and good practices.	Aligned with CBD implementation support and UNCCD Gender Caucus engagement role

VII- Membership

The membership to the Indigenous Peoples Caucus Consultative Body will be based on UNCCD objectives and the Indigenous Peoples principles: full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples; regional representation of Indigenous Peoples, particularly regions affected by desertification, land degradation and drought and of Parties, leadership rotation roles; self-selection of Indigenous Peoples representatives in accordance with their own procedures; and adequate funding from the secretariat and voluntary contributions to enable the implementation of the functions above.

While the Indigenous Peoples caucus Consultative Body should keep its nature on regional representation between Indigenous Peoples seven sociocultural regions and Parties five UN regions (7+5), each member should have an alternate representative. It is strongly recommended that the Caucus designate standing members as follows :

- Co-chairs (from among the members) : Indigenous Peoples' representative and a representative from the Parties to the Convention each with an alternate. The co-chairing arrangement should rotate among their respective regions at each COP, with priority given to regions most affected by desertification, land degradation and drought;;
- Secretariat: UNCCD Secretariat;
- Thematics Groups Leads: members volunteering depending from their expertise (in the base of a working program to adopt by the caucus and can be supported by appropriate UN agencies, intergovernmental agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations);
- The working language : English with interpretation into all the rest of the UN languages as appropriate.

The Caucus Consultative Body members should be elected for four (4) years mandate with one additional year by half of the seats, four (4) from Indigenous Peoples' and two (2) from Parties representatives with priorities to regions affected by desertification, land degradation and drought in a rotation based to ensure continuity and lesson lean.

Coherence and Coordination

To ensure coherence, effective coordination and strong regional representation, the Indigenous Peoples' members of the Consultative Body should be the same regional representatives serving within the Indigenous Peoples Plenary Caucus.

1. Eligibility

Membership in the Caucus Consultative Body is open to Indigenous Peoples' from the seven Indigenous Peoples' socio-cultural regions who self-identify and are endorsed through their own regional governance and decision-making processes, as well as to regional representatives from Parties of the Convention in the five UN regions with priorities to regions affected by desertification, land degradation and drought.

2. Representation Principles

The Caucus shall strive for:

- Equitable regional representation from the seven Indigenous Peoples' socio-cultural regions (Africa; the Arctic; Asia; Central and South America and the Caribbean; Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; North America; and the Pacific) and five UNCCD regional and interest groups (Africa, Asia and Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern European Group and Western Europe and others Group) . model of 7+5;
- Priorities to regions affected by desertification, land degradation and drought;
- Gender balance;
- Inclusion of Indigenous youth and elders;
- Respect for Indigenous Peoples' diversity, autonomy, and self-determination.

VIII- Mechanisms of Engagement

In accordance with Decision 5/COP.16, and with the objective of strengthening the effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the implementation of the Convention, the Indigenous Peoples Caucus shall operate through three complementary mechanisms of engagement.

These mechanisms are designed to facilitate internal coordination among Indigenous Peoples, structured engagement with Parties, and the provision of technical contributions to the work of the Convention.

Mechanism 1: Indigenous Peoples Caucus Consultative Body *(based on Section VII: Membership)*

- The Indigenous Peoples Caucus shall serve as a structured platform for dialogue, consultation, and engagement between Indigenous Peoples' representatives and Parties to the Convention, as well as relevant stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Convention.
- The Conference of the Parties may provide opportunities during sessions of the COP and relevant intersessional processes for Indigenous Peoples to share perspectives, experiences, and contributions related to the objectives of the Convention.

- The modalities of engagement may be further defined by the Indigenous Peoples Caucus members in coordination with the secretariat, in accordance with the rules and procedures of the Convention.

Functions

Members of the Caucus Consultative Body may:

- Develop a multi-year work programme aligned with the objectives of the Convention and relevant COP decisions;
- Facilitate dialogue between Indigenous Peoples and Parties on matters related to implementation of the Convention;
- Contribute to the sharing of experiences and good practices at global, regional, and national levels;
- Coordinate with the Indigenous Peoples Plenary Caucus to ensure coherence between internal coordination and engagement with Parties.

Mechanism 2: Indigenous Peoples Plenary Caucus

- The Indigenous Peoples Plenary Caucus shall serve as the primary internal coordination space for Indigenous Peoples participating in the processes of the UNCCD.
- The Plenary Caucus shall be composed exclusively of Indigenous Peoples' representatives from the seven socio-cultural regions, in accordance with their own representative institutions and participation mechanisms.
- The Plenary Caucus shall provide a safe and inclusive space for Indigenous Peoples participants to meet, dialogue, exchange information, coordinate positions, and prepare joint contributions to the UNCCD processes.

Functions

The Plenary Caucus shall:

- Facilitate the exchange of information and experiences among Indigenous Peoples;
- Coordinate positions and priorities relevant to the implementation of the Convention;
- Validate common messages, inputs, statements, and recommendations;
- Provide strategic guidance to Indigenous Peoples' representatives participating in formal UNCCD processes.

The Plenary Caucus shall convene during sessions of the COP, meetings of subsidiary bodies, and intersessional processes, and may also meet virtually as self-organized by Indigenous Peoples.

Mechanism 3: Thematic and Technical Working Groups

To support the effective contribution of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, cultural practices and expertise to the work of the Convention, the Indigenous Peoples Caucus may establish thematic and technical working groups.

These working groups may be established on an ad hoc or standing basis to address priority issues relevant to Indigenous Peoples within the framework of the Convention. These may include, inter alia:

- Land tenure and governance;
- Drought resilience and early warning systems;
- Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems and community-based monitoring;
- Gender equality, youth engagement, and intergenerational equity;
- Finance, safeguards, and implementation mechanisms.

Functions

The Thematic and Technical Working Groups may:

- Provide technical inputs and analysis;

- Support Indigenous Peoples' representatives engaged in UNCCD processes;
- Develop recommendations, submissions, and knowledge contributions for consideration by the Indigenous Peoples Plenary Caucus and engagement with Parties.

IX- Decision-Making

Decision-making within the Caucus Consultative Body shall be guided by Indigenous Peoples' customary practices, prioritising consensus-based approaches. Where consensus cannot be reached, decisions may be taken through agreed procedures defined by the members.

X- Relationship with the UNCCD

The Caucus Consultative Body operates as an autonomous, self-organized entity.

The UNCCD Secretariat, may provide logistical and facilitative support, subject to available resources, without interfering in the Caucus' internal governance or positions and encourage Parties and other relevant partners to actively participate to the caucus Consultative Body activities.

XI- Resources and Support

Participation in the Caucus is voluntary. Efforts shall be made to mobilise resources and support from Parties and others partners for :

- Travel and participation of Indigenous Peoples, particularly from developing countries, particularly regions affected by desertification, land degradation and drought;
- Capacity-building activities;
- Regional gathering;
- In person and virtual meetings;
- Interpretation, translation and accessibility.

XII- Review and Amendment

These Terms of Reference may be reviewed and amended by the Parties in coordination with the Indigenous Peoples every 4 years in accordance to the UNCCD COP decision review period.

XIII- Entry into Effect

These Terms of Reference shall take effect upon the adoption of the decision by the Parties to the Convention.