



Widening the Path: An Overview of Philanthropy's Role in Supporting Indigenous Peoples

A report coordinated by the Caribbean Central American
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This report is closely related to three regional reports (Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean) on the relationship between philanthropy and Indigenous Peoples. You can find these regional reports and other publications on the following website: <http://entrepovos.org/es/publicaciones>. Entrepovos is an initiative of dialogue, exchange and mutual learning between Indigenous, Afro-descendant and traditional peoples' organizations.

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Executive Summary

Despite good intentions, only a small fraction of the global philanthropic community works with Indigenous Peoples. Research shows that philanthropists do not venture into this funding because they believe they lack the expertise and knowledge to work with Indigenous Peoples' organizations. Many have the good will but do not know where to start. There is also a lack of appreciation of the need for their funding and the impact that it can have.

Research also shows that individuals and organizations tend to take their cues from their peers in similar institutions. Foundations that are already supporting Indigenous organizations can play a catalyst role in signaling other funders to enter this area of work – providing information about grantmaking to Indigenous Peoples, clarifying the needs it fills, and helping to overcome the resistance to getting involved.

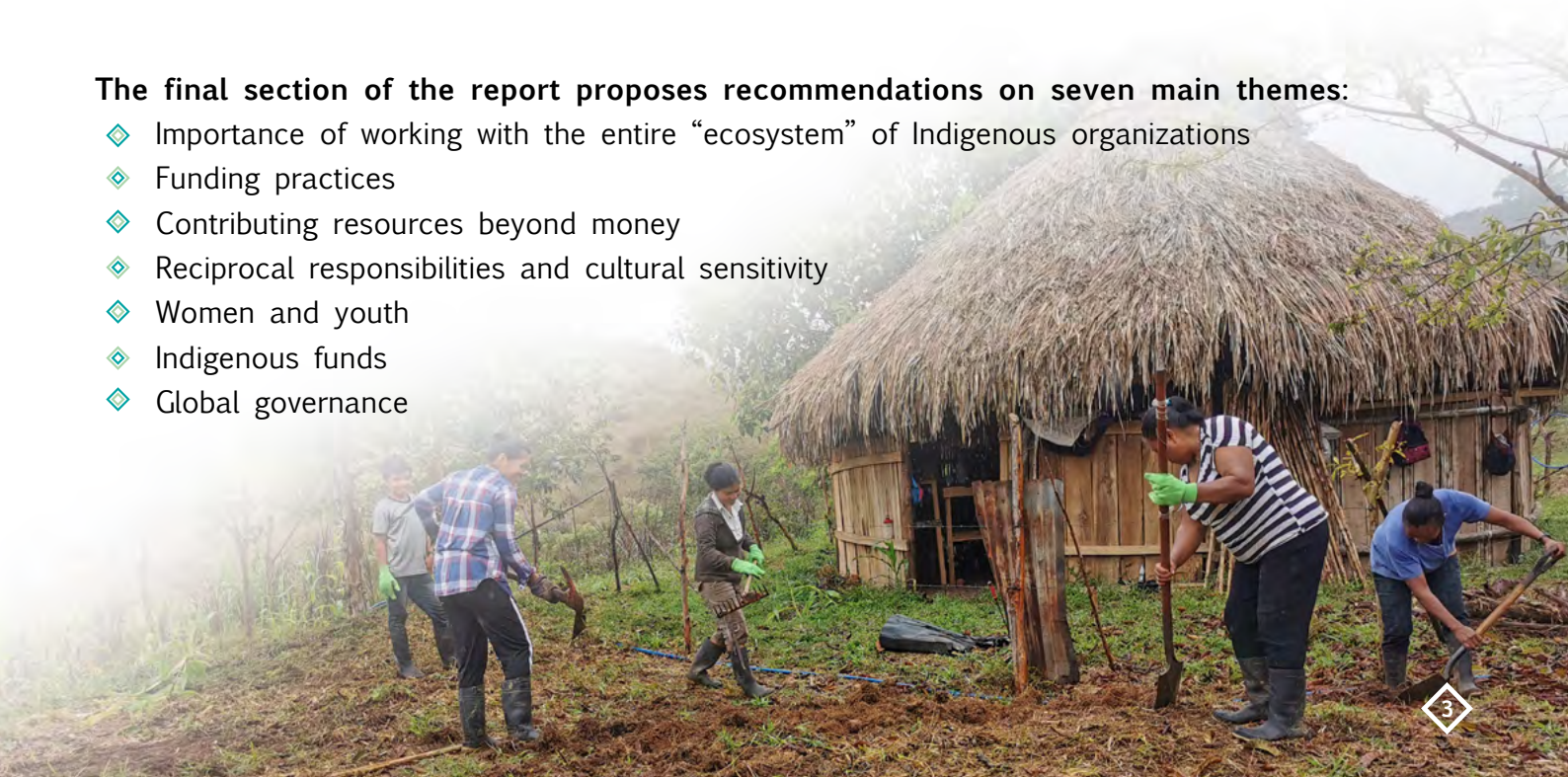
This report aims to contribute to these outreach efforts by providing arguments and suggestions for encouraging more foundations and individual philanthropists to engage with Indigenous Peoples. The report focuses on Indigenous

Peoples in the Global South because they often have less access to funding while at the same time facing particularly dramatic experiences of criminalization, violence and dispossession of their lands.

Why is it important for philanthropy to step up support for Indigenous Peoples? The report presents and discusses four main reasons. First, Indigenous organizations are central allies in making progress towards the mission of many philanthropic institutions. Second, the diversity of Indigenous organizations offers nearly endless opportunities for engagement. Third, private philanthropy is well situated to work with Indigenous Peoples and the time is right – encouraging more charities and individual philanthropists to get involved will help to scale up proven best practices and promote more available channels to fund Indigenous organizations directly. The fourth main reason presented in the report focuses specifically on global governance: funders can have significant and cost-effective positive impact on global governance by investing in Indigenous Peoples.

The final section of the report proposes recommendations on seven main themes:

- ◆ Importance of working with the entire “ecosystem” of Indigenous organizations
- ◆ Funding practices
- ◆ Contributing resources beyond money
- ◆ Reciprocal responsibilities and cultural sensitivity
- ◆ Women and youth
- ◆ Indigenous funds
- ◆ Global governance



“Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.”

Article 4, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007

“Indigenous peoples have the right to have access to financial and technical assistance from States and through international cooperation, for the enjoyment of the rights contained in this Declaration.”

Article 39, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007

1. Introduction

The [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP) is the application of the human rights frame to the specific social context and reality of Indigenous Peoples. It is fundamentally reparative in nature, in view of histories of colony and empire and their impact on Indigenous Peoples (UN 2008). The two Articles that start this report underscore the central role of funding for the fulfillment of the rights enshrined in the Declaration. Like UNDRIP, the transfer of philanthropic resources to Indigenous Peoples has a profound reparative potential that aligns with the goals of many philanthropic organizations.

Indeed, recent years have seen a growth in funding of Indigenous causes and organizations. The trend has become more plain to see in 2021, with a series of headline-grabbing pledges by governments and philanthropists announcing their commitment to fund Indigenous Peoples, citing their proven role in preventing deforestation that fuels climate change and biodiversity loss.

Yet, Indigenous Peoples’ organizations (IPOs) continue to face huge challenges in accessing financial resources. Despite good intentions, only a small fraction of the global philanthropic community works with Indigenous Peoples. Research shows that philanthropists do not venture into this funding because they believe they lack the expertise and knowledge to work with IPOs. Many have the good will but do not know where to start. There is also a lack of appreciation of the need for their funding and the impact that it can have.

Research also shows that individuals and organizations tend to take their cues from their peers in similar institutions. Foundations that are already supporting IPOs can play a catalyst role in signaling other funders to enter this area of work – providing information about grantmaking to Indigenous Peoples, clarifying the needs it fills, and helping to overcome the resistance to getting involved. There is also a need to dispel misperceptions about providing support to IPOs.



In writing this report, our aim is to give a modest contribution to these outreach efforts by providing arguments and insights for encouraging more foundations and individual philanthropists to engage with Indigenous Peoples. The report focuses on the Global South for two main reasons. First, while Indigenous Peoples across the world continue to face discrimination, criminalization, violence and the invasion of their lands, these experiences are particularly dramatic in many parts of the Global South. And second, despite a recent growth in philanthropic giving for Indigenous Peoples in the Global South, there remains a significant gap in their relative political power, self-determination, and access to resources when compared as a whole to their relatives in the Global North.

The report begins by explaining why we focus on private philanthropy. It proceeds with a

discussion of who Indigenous Peoples are. The following two sections describe the importance of funding IPOs and philanthropy's comparative advantages in doing so. The report continues with a brief description of key features of Indigenous organizations. The subsequent section reviews the opportunities for strengthening global governance by supporting Indigenous Peoples. The final section summarizes the main messages and provides recommendations.

The study draws on three regional reports (Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean) and a careful literature review that included studies and documents authored by Indigenous Peoples. The views presented have also benefitted from the insights of a recent Ford Foundation funded project (titled "Recognizing our practices and knowledge from different perspectives, interests and learning") coordinated by CCARC between 2019 and 2021.



2. The Unique Role of Private Philanthropy in Supporting Indigenous Peoples

Despite its global dimension, private philanthropy is a small actor when it comes to supporting Indigenous Peoples (Figure 1). A recent report by Rainforest Foundation Norway shows that Indigenous Peoples and local communities received less than 1 percent of total international funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation between 2011-2020; and private foundations contributed only 3 percent of that 1 percent (RFN 2021). According to [Candid](#), an information service specialized in reporting on US nonprofits, grantmaking to Native communities in the United States amounts to only 0.4 percent of all annual US philanthropic giving. Outside the US, Indigenous Peoples received just 1.2 percent of total US philanthropic funding between 2011 and 2015; and only a tiny fraction went directly to Indigenous organizations as most were channeled through intermediaries (Foundation Center 2018).

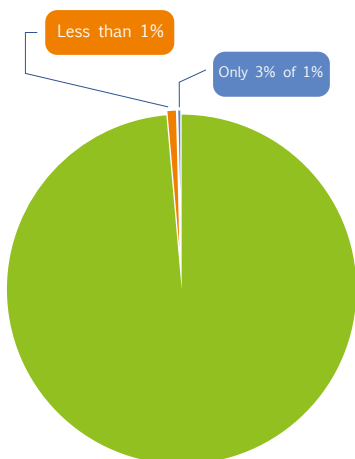
These minute percentages are the main reason for focusing this report on private philanthropy. Since Indigenous Peoples continue to be largely left out of philanthropy, there is a vast potential to increase the support of foundations from the US and other Northern industrialized countries. It has been argued that home-grown philanthropy in the Global South could also

play a significant role in filling the gap. Axelrad (2011) suggests that domestic philanthropic initiatives in developing countries are emerging from the national context in which they focus their efforts, making them more likely to respond positively to suggestions received from their peers about supporting civil society, including IPOs, in their own countries.

There is another crucial reason why we think it is important to focus this report on private philanthropy. Research shows that philanthropists are often less constrained by internal regulations and policies than government agencies. That has allowed them to pioneer innovative practices in making direct, flexible and less bureaucratic grants to IPOs. Their smaller bureaucracy, closer relationship and strategic advice can directly benefit IPOs and win their trust (when respectfully engaged). These features of private philanthropy have led to stronger partnerships with many associated advantages for both partners (IPOs and foundations). They have also laid the groundwork for increased direct support to IPOs from both private and public sources (RFN 2021). Encouraging more charities and individual philanthropists to get involved will help to scale up proven best practices and promote more available channels to fund IPOs directly.

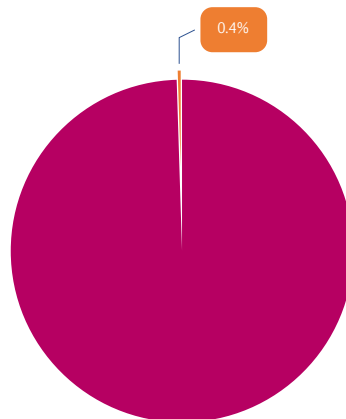
Figure 1. Philanthropic funding for Indigenous Peoples

Percentage received by IPLCs of total international funding for climate change between 2011-2020 (left), and percentage provided by foundations (right)



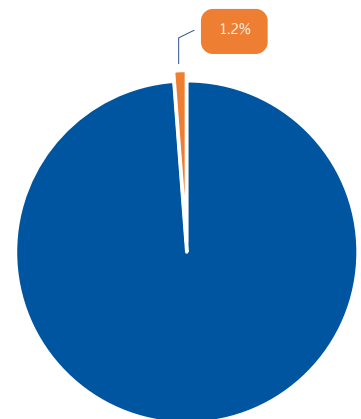
Source: RFN 2021.

Percentage of all annual US philanthropic giving received by Native communities in the US



Source: Candid 2022.

Percentage of total US philanthropic funding outside the US received by Indigenous Peoples between 2011-2015



Source: Foundation Center 2018.

3. Who are Indigenous Peoples?

From a rights-based approach, international jurisprudence recognizes a key distinction between individual citizens and Indigenous Peoples. While individual Human Rights accrue to all individuals, Indigenous Peoples also have collective rights that accrue only to them. As stipulated under multiple instruments of international law, this means that Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-government and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. It also means that Indigenous Peoples can take advantage of international mechanisms (and also national mechanisms in some countries) that individual citizens and other local communities cannot access. These distinctive rights are the result of many decades on successful political and legal campaigning by Indigenous Peoples themselves.

While there is a broad consensus on the above point, there is no single and globally agreed definition of Indigenous Peoples (ILO 2019). That said, the 1989 [ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples](#) provides both subjective and objective criteria for identifying

peoples protected by the Convention (Table 1). At present, these criteria are the only legally binding “definition” of Indigenous Peoples, albeit only for those states that ratified the Convention. But they have been voluntarily adopted by numerous countries, international instruments and IPOs.

Crucially, though, the notion of Indigenous Peoples is interpreted in different ways in different parts of the world. In most Latin American countries, Indigenous Peoples have achieved legal recognition as distinct groups and are widely acknowledged by the broader national society. On the other hand, in Asia and Africa the notion remains controversial. Many national governments in these two continents have resisted the recognition of Indigenous Peoples in their countries on the grounds that the great majority of their citizens are “indigenous” to the country, so either everybody is or nobody is. In 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples acknowledged this argument in regard to Asia – in a literal sense, the vast majority of the population may indeed be considered “indigenous” to the region. However, he also argued that in Asia there are

Table 1. Identifying Indigenous and Tribal Peoples

	Subjective criteria	Objective criteria
Indigenous peoples	Self-identification as belonging to an Indigenous people.	Descent from populations who inhabited the country or geographical region at the time of conquest, colonization or establishment of present State boundaries. They retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, irrespective of their legal status.
Tribal peoples	Self-identification as belonging to a tribal people.	Their social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community. Their status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.

Source: ILO 2019.

many particular groups that distinguish themselves from the wider population and fall within the scope of the international notion of Indigenous Peoples (UN 2013). Asian countries use different terminologies to identify these distinct groups of peoples, including “ethnic minorities”, “hill tribes”, “Indigenous nationalities”, “scheduled tribes”, “Adivasi” and “Masyarakat Hukum Adat”.

In the context of Africa, there was no widespread acceptance of the existence of Indigenous Peoples until 2001, when the Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) decided to prepare a report to discuss the issues related of Indigenous Peoples in Africa and highlight their specific human rights problems (ACHPR and IWGIA 2005). The report discouraged the introduction of a strict definition that could introduce exclusivity affecting certain groups, stating that it was neither necessary nor desirable. It also categorically rejected the common argument that “all Africans are indigenous” by emphasizing that groups identifying themselves as Indigenous Peoples have cultures and ways of life that differ considerably from the dominant society and their cultures are under threat, in some cases to the point of extinction (Ndobe and Durrell 2012). According to the report, most Indigenous Peoples in Africa are hunter-

gatherers and pastoralists but they also include some small-scale farmers and fishermen (e.g. the Ogoni in Nigeria).

As a result of these arguments and the increased recognition in the international arena, a growing number of regional bodies and governments in both continents have begun to variously recognize the existence of Indigenous Peoples. Many national constitutions and laws make reference to ethnic minorities or tribal communities, usually stressing their discrimination and vulnerability, economic disparities, and/or their unique relationships with their natural environment. These ongoing recognition processes are hugely important given that the vast majority of the world’s Indigenous Peoples live in Asia and Africa (see Box 1).

In the context of UN processes and global debates, the notion of Indigenous Peoples is often used in a broader sense to encompass also ethnic minorities, tribal peoples and other traditional populations. The logic behind this more general use of the term is that all these groups have in common that they have been, and continue to be, discriminated and marginalized as the result of colonialism and postcolonial processes of building and developing modern nation states.



“Indigenous Peoples and local communities” (IPLCs) is an umbrella term that has gained usage in international fora such as the [IPCC](#), [CBD](#) and [IPBES](#), among many others, due to IPLCs’ crucial role in fighting climate change and safeguarding our planet. Tying together Indigenous Peoples and local communities underscores that there are many rural communities that, similarly to Indigenous Peoples, have a long association with, and depend on, the lands and waters that they have traditionally lived on or used. Sometimes such communities are also referred to as “traditional communities”. Examples include riverine or coastal populations dedicated to traditional fishery and rural communities with forest-based livelihoods (e.g. rubber tappers and fruit extractors), as well as Afro-descendant communities in the specific case of Latin America.

While the term tends to conceal the diversity within and between both groups, its usage is helpful to denote that there are commonalities and shared concerns of Indigenous Peoples and local communities that are important to address in international fora and national policies. Besides, many local communities descend from Indigenous communities that were forced to distance themselves from their Indigenous identity in an attempt to reduce discrimination and racism against them.¹

This report focuses specifically on Indigenous Peoples; however, many considerations and arguments also apply to local communities as described in the previous paragraph.

Box 1. The world’s Indigenous population

There are approximately 480 million Indigenous Peoples worldwide, speaking 4,000 different languages and living in more than 90 countries. Overall, they represent 6.2 percent of the world’s population – exceeding the combined population of the United States and Canada. Asia and the Pacific is the region where the highest proportion of Indigenous Peoples live (70.5 percent), followed by Africa (16.3 percent), Latin America and the Caribbean (11.5 percent), Northern America (1.6 percent) and Europe and Central Asia (0.1 percent).

Over 73.4 percent of the global Indigenous population lives in rural areas, but there are substantial regional variations. The highest proportion of Indigenous Peoples residing in rural areas is found in Africa (82.1 percent), followed by Asia and the Pacific (72.8 percent) and Europe and Central Asia (66.4 percent). In contrast, in Latin America and the Caribbean and in North America, most Indigenous Peoples are urban dwellers (52.2 percent and 69.0 percent respectively). The data show that the higher the level of income, the lower the share of Indigenous Peoples residing in the countryside.

Source: ILO 2019.

Note: We recognize that Indigenous Peoples may contest these figures. Demographic data on Indigenous populations is notoriously problematic given their historic invisibilization by dominant societies.

¹ All that being said, it is important to highlight that Indigenous Peoples have specific collective rights to self-determination that do not accrue to local communities.

“Affirming also that all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind,”

Third Preambular Paragraph, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007

4. Why Is It Important to Fund Indigenous Peoples?

There are compelling reasons for philanthropic organizations to start or expand their collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and their organizations. The following paragraphs summarize six main ones.

Cultural heritage – Indigenous Peoples contribute extensively to humanity’s cultural diversity and richness. They are the holders of unique languages, knowledge systems, traditions and worldviews. At least 5,000 distinct Indigenous Peoples are believed to exist and the 4,000 different languages they speak represent two thirds of all the languages spoken across the world (ILO 2019, IFIP 2014). Threatened Indigenous languages now only spoken by a handful of elders may be lost in less than a generation.² Since languages embody the distinct beliefs, culture and traditional knowledge that make up Indigenous identity, when an ancient language dies, crucial ways of thinking for humanity’s future are lost with it (Peredo et al. 2019). This is the point of departure for us: the recognition that Indigenous communities have something unique and invaluable to offer to humanity and the philanthropic community, starting with who they and their contribution to the cultural heritage of all humankind.

Learning together – Grantmaking to Indigenous organizations can greatly help funders understand Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, develop a positive learning environment, acquire new skills in grantee communication and partnership management, manage complexity, and identify key features of grantmaking that contribute to positive change. Of course, this is not a one-way learning process but a shared journey. If rooted in a culture of sharing and respect,

experimentation and joint learning, grantmaking to Indigenous organizations also helps these organizations in attaining knowledge for greater impact, seeing new opportunities, broadening the range of tools and skills available to them, and building leveraging capacities to coordinate strategies and work closer with other Indigenous organizations as well as with government agencies and philanthropic institutions.

Crucial partners – Indigenous Peoples are vital allies in achieving the program goals of many foundations. The rights and voices of historically marginalized Indigenous communities are crucial to the mission of philanthropic organizations focused on human rights and social justice. Foundations with environmental programs find them invaluable partners in solving many of today’s complex environmental problems, such as climate change, biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources. Indigenous Peoples are key partners for funders interested in global governance initiatives because they offer more holistic alternatives to mainstream paradigms of economic development. Funders focused on working in specific geographic areas have powerful motives to partner with Indigenous Peoples when they are the majority of the population and yet are still the most invisibilized and neglected. In the Global South, domestic foundations working on education are increasingly recognizing that they need to work with Indigenous communities in order to achieve their goals. In addition to helping achieve program goals, aligning philanthropic goals with the aims and struggles of Indigenous Peoples can create helpful feedback loops from the impacted communities.

² Which is why the United Nations declared the period between 2022 and 2032 as the [International Decade of Indigenous Languages](#) to draw global attention on the critical situation of many Indigenous languages and to mobilize stakeholders and resources for their preservation, revitalization and promotion.

The capacity is there – Concerns regarding IPOs’ technical and administrative capacity have been a significant deterrent in providing direct funding to Indigenous Peoples. Although such capacity varies greatly and challenges persist, it is important to recognize that many IPOs have greatly improved their organizational capacities and financial systems in recent years. Moreover, while many IPOs may be weak in one sense, they can also be extremely strong in others. Many of these organizations are rather effective at influencing policies, managing large territories, and mobilizing their communities – all at a surprisingly low cost. Often, they can deliver more results than some large international NGOs, even if the latter can produce better grant proposals and reports.

Putting philanthropy’s growing interest into practice – While global headline announcements of increased financial support for Indigenous Peoples represent important steps forward in the right direction, they have rarely translated into improved access to financial resources. As already noted in the second section of this report, small amounts actually reach Indigenous Peoples to support local priorities and self-determined collective action (RFN 2021, Candid 2022, Foundation Center 2018). In November 2021, a webinar on Indigenous Peoples and climate finance at the [UNFCCC COP26](#) in

Scotland starkly captured this paradox, with one speaker highlighting ever-growing funding opportunities and another speaker pointing out the persistent inaccessibility of financial mechanisms established to fund Indigenous Peoples.³ Philanthropy’s growing interest has yet to deliver tangible funding possibilities.

Persistent needs – Despite the world’s increased attention to their concerns and priorities, there is overwhelming evidence that Indigenous Peoples continue to face discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization. As pointed out in a recent [ILO report](#) (2019), in terms of monetary income Indigenous Peoples are nearly three times more likely to be living in extreme poverty than their non-Indigenous counterparts; Indigenous women face multiple forms of discrimination due to their ethnicity and gender, as a result they are consistently at the bottom of all social and economic indicators; and Indigenous youth have fewer educational and job opportunities than non-Indigenous youth. The COVID pandemic greatly amplified the many inequalities they continue to face globally (IWGIA 2021). Funding needs span areas as diverse as conservation, health, women’s rights, youth, education, housing, economic development, poverty, world peace, human rights, arts, employment, sustainable development, and social justice.

³ [“Climate Action for Whom? Monitoring climate finance for Indigenous Peoples”](#).



5. Philanthropy's Comparative Advantages in Working with Indigenous Peoples

While Indigenous leaders and organizations are often highly critical of government policies and initiatives related to their communities, they recognize that government programs have a central role in improving the wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples. They are responsible for promoting policies and regulations that protect Indigenous rights and ensuring sustained public investment in health, education, infrastructure, and productive services. Bilateral and multilateral donors are often instrumental in supporting the public sector in these responsibilities. Generally speaking, they are better equipped than private philanthropy in working with government agencies because they have much greater resources and political clout. Some bilateral and multilateral donors have also provided support to Indigenous Peoples for several decades. In the process, they have accumulated a wealth of lessons on engaging successfully with Indigenous communities.

Yet, private philanthropy has some comparative advantages that make it different from other giving sources. As mentioned in section 2, research shows that foundations usually face less political and spending constraints which position them to be more creative and flexible (Anheier and Leat 2006). Lourie (1999) highlights that the higher level of freedom from political and economic ties gives philanthropy the opportunity to apply a stronger change-focus approach and invest on issues that require more time to show results.

More flexibility and longer-term commitment have also been documented by Smyllie and Scaife (2010) in their research on Indigenous philanthropy in Australia. Their work shows

that Indigenous grantees appreciate that foundations have the ability to provide more direct grants with less restrictions and build lasting relationships; Indigenous grantees also recognize that foundations often support projects that governments or donors would not (Smyllie and Scaife 2010, Smyllie and Scaife 2011).

An additional advantage can be a higher level of “cultural awareness”, which indicates how well a grantmaking organization is equipped with the appropriate knowledge and necessary practices for working effectively with cultural diversity (Smyllie and Scaife 2011, Carjuzaa et al. 2016). While not all foundations have such competency, it is often more easily fostered than in the case of large public agencies with high levels of leadership and staff rotation.

Another characteristic of many philanthropic organizations is that they focus on small grants, which often play an important role in opening the way for Indigenous participation in decision making, overcoming lack of information of this area of funding, enticing new grantmakers to get involved, and encouraging co-funding initiatives. Small contributions can also mobilize voluntary action which can be as important as funding.

Finally, private philanthropy is also well placed to prioritize funding for working in partnership with governments, as shown by the US \$1.7 billion pledge in support of Indigenous Peoples and local communities announced at COP26 in Scotland by five national governments and 17 private funders. This initiative highlights the potential for joint venture approaches in grantmaking to Indigenous causes.

The following box describes one example of a new international funding mechanism that is experimenting with innovative and flexible

approaches to lower barriers and simplify the application process.

Box 2. Making the funding process accessible

The [Global Resilience Fund](#) (GRF) was launched in May 2020 as a participatory rapid-response funding mechanism to move flexible resources to girls and young feminists responding to the COVID pandemic. GRF's point of departure was the recognition that it is possible to move a relatively large number of small grants to local organizations and activists and to do it quickly. But it requires critical analysis of grantmaking practice and a commitment to ceding power to grantees.

Two features that enable GRF to lower the barriers to application and ensure that first-time-funded groups could access resources are:

Simple and flexible application process – The application is kept simple, with minimal background information required. To ensure that young activists can easily access resources and literacy is no barrier to application, in Sierra Leone GRF used WhatsApp as a platform through which applications could be submitted. It also pioneered accepting applications received via voice notes, telephone or in-person meetings.

Trust-based and network approach to due diligence – GRF's due diligence consists of a set of very simple questions, based mainly on asking partners and other funders in their networks to provide information about the applicants. The process is based on trust. It allows GRF to reach under-resourced groups which had often never been funded before due to their lack of official registration and other typically required documents. It also allows the fund to quickly disburse the funding to the groups while still building relationships.

Source: Bransky 2020.



“Welcoming the fact that indigenous peoples are organizing themselves for political, economic, social and cultural enhancement and in order to bring to an end all forms of discrimination and oppression wherever they occur,”

Ninth Preambular Paragraph, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007

6. Indigenous Peoples’ Organizations

The formation of organizations has been a central part of Indigenous Peoples’ struggle for self-determination and the recognition of their rights. As a result, recent decades have seen a proliferation of Indigenous organizations throughout the world. Reference to these organizations in the aggregate conceals an enormous variability among organizational types. In fact, Indigenous organizations can be classified using a range of criteria, including ethnicity (monoethnic versus multiethnic organizations), primary purpose (productive or cultural or political organizations), scale (local, sub-national, national, regional, global), and geography (“lowland” versus “highland” organizations).

At the risk of oversimplification, the purpose of this section is to offer a preliminary understanding of this diversity. In the first instance, we divide the vast field of Indigenous organizations into two groups: customary organizations and more recent movement-based organizations. In his seminal book on Brazil’s Indigenous Peoples, the Indigenous leader and anthropologist Gersem dos Santos Luciano (2006) explains that customary organizations and institutions represent the original forms of Indigenous organizing, intended to respond to the daily needs and internal demands of their communities (e.g. arranging collective works or planning ceremonies). There is no single model. Each community may have its own organizational models, and even in the same community there can be distinct types. Decisions are usually taken collectively or through agreements between sub-groups. Governance rules are unwritten, yet they tend to function effectively because they are based on customary norms and social relations. Most frequently these customary organizations are found at the community level, but they are

also common at the level of entire Indigenous groups or peoples. Sometimes they may have a binational scale when modern national borders between countries divide territories of the same Indigenous people (e.g. the Yanomami of Venezuela and Brazil).

To respond to the growing presence of government programs, NGOs and private firms, Indigenous communities have been driven to establish more Western-style organizational structures. These are usually the representative organizations of Indigenous Peoples that play a crucial role in mediating relations with external actors and interests. Their organizational model is similar to that of modern movement-based organizations like peasant federations, workers’ unions or cooperative associations. Hence, these Indigenous organizations tend to have similar governance structures with a general assembly, elected board, and elected coordinator or president. Many are multi-tier organizations that have community organizations at the first tier, local organizations of multiple communities at the second, sub-national organizations at the third, and so forth up to fifth or sixth tier organizations at the international level.

Most of these representative organizations are legally established and have binding bylaws, but in some cases their members (whether individuals or organizations) purposely make a choice to avoid pursuing official legal status and bylaws. For instance, [AIPP](#) in Asia and [IPACC](#) in Africa are legally established supranational organizations, while [AMPB](#) in Mesoamerica preferred to remain a coalition without legal status. The same happens at the national level. [CONAIE](#) in Ecuador is a legally established organization, while [COONAPIP](#) in Panama decided to remain a coordinating body without legal status.

Indigenous women's and Indigenous youth organizations and networks deserve to be considered as a separate specific group. Like the previous ones, these organizations and networks take many different forms and exist at multiple levels (local, national, regional, international). Some of them are legally established, while others are not. However, they all have a common goal: women's organizations advocate for the welfare and rights of Indigenous women, and youth organizations advocate for the welfare and rights of Indigenous young people. Both organizations have been on the front lines of the response to the COVID pandemic. Women and their organizations played a crucial role in preparing traditional medicines, caring for the sick, and supporting each other against the "shadow pandemic" of domestic violence that increased during the COVID crisis. Thanks to their lower risk of getting severely ill or die if infected, young people and their organizations were instrumental in carrying out humanitarian missions to distribute health equipment and food supplies to remote communities.

In addition to the previous three types, there is a fourth vast group of Indigenous "service" organizations, such as Indigenous funds, Indigenous NGOs, Indigenous enterprises, Indigenous law firms, and Indigenous professional associations. Many of these organizations are rooted in the Indigenous movement and are often the offshoot of Indigenous territorial organizations that created them to strengthen their work. At times, they may share to some degree in the representation of Indigenous communities; however, usually they are not their representative and spokesperson organizations. Instead, they provide services to Indigenous communities and representative organizations and often specialize in specific functions such as sub-granting, research, communications, policy dialogue, litigation, or enterprise development; others focus on particular sub-groups (e.g. women, youth). In order to perform their functions, these service organizations usually conform with regulatory requirements to

be legally established and adopt organizational features typical of non-Indigenous civil society groups or private enterprises.

While the distinction between these different types of organizations is relevant to understanding key differences, it is important to note that while modeled after, and in some sense appearing like, other civil society organizations, Indigenous organizations often retain or incorporate customary practices of their Indigenous groups, for example in consensus decision making processes, recognition of the role of traditional authority, and incorporation of Indigenous worldviews. As structures and organizations of Indigenous Peoples, they become in some way the repository of their collective rights of self-determination and identity. Philanthropic organizations need to be sensitive to this distinctive characteristic of Indigenous organizations, and cultural competency and respect in this area can build trust and lead to sustained and sustainable relationships.



The following wheel diagram attempts to capture the main elements of this organizational complexity, including the area of common

features and values often shared by organizations related to the same Indigenous People(s).

Figure 2. Main types of Indigenous organizations



The relationship between Indigenous organizations and philanthropy has not been easy. On the one hand, grant requirements often cause a significant work burden to Indigenous organizations and leaders. On the other hand, technical and administrative shortcomings of Indigenous organizations have been a constant challenge for philanthropy, causing recurrent difficulties with project and financial management. This issue is partly circular – they receive little funding, so they cannot build their capacity, so they get less funds, and so on in a typical Catch-22 cycle. But there has been significant improvement in recent years. Investment in higher education in remote rural regions and government and philanthropic efforts to support Indigenous

students have produced a new generation of Indigenous professionals in various countries in the last several decades, a substantial proportion of whom are women. That contributed to the emergence of a new generation of better-educated leaders and staff members in many Indigenous organizations. Nowadays, there are many Indigenous lawyers, communications professionals, social scientists, administrators, and foresters/agronomists leading and working with Indigenous organizations. Many of these young professionals actively seek to combine what they learned at university with traditional knowledge. That is a strong positive result of long-term investments in education, which is already having a big impact on organizational capacity albeit it has just scratched the surface of its potential.

Nonetheless, sometimes funders need to acknowledge that the proposals, reporting, and accounting that Indigenous organizations provide will simply not get through their systems. That often implies the need for external support. Traditionally, this support has been provided by non-Indigenous intermediary organizations. However, the rapid increase in Indigenous NGOs and highly-educated professionals means that in many countries Indigenous Peoples are

less dependent than before on non-Indigenous organizations to meet the requirements of funding entities.

Indigenous funds deserve a particular mention due to their relevance for philanthropy. Box 3 provides a brief description of their role and comparative advantages.

Box 3. Indigenous funds

As institutions dedicated to receiving, managing and redistributing financial resources, Indigenous funds can be instrumental for funders that wish to reduce their granting transaction costs and at the same time try to support many local initiatives. While still a relatively new movement, they exist all over the world. Local Indigenous funds like the [Rio Negro Indigenous Fund](#) of Brazil's Rio Negro basin are the best situated to work directly with local Indigenous communities or organizations in their region. On the other hand, higher-level funds such as the [Podáali Fund](#) of Brazil's Amazon region or the global [Pawanka Fund](#) can play a crucial role in providing support to local funds as well as working directly with Indigenous organizations when there are no local Indigenous funds available. Some funds target specific population groups, like FIMI's [AYNI Indigenous Women's Fund](#).

A big advantage of Indigenous funds is that they are closer to communities, often have pre-existing relationships with them, and know the problems being solved. Even though many are still in an early phase of establishment and consolidation, to philanthropists they offer the potential to strengthen self-determination and reduce the dependency of Indigenous communities from outsiders while ensuring reciprocity, mutual accountability and high levels of trust.

Source: IFIP 2020.

7. Strengthening Global Governance by Supporting Indigenous Peoples

In the last two decades, Indigenous Peoples' efforts have had a significant impact on global governance issues. They managed to shift policy narratives. Ensured the inclusion of issues of territorial rights, Indigenous knowledge, free prior and informed consent, environmental damage, and protection against violence into treaties, trade agreements, safeguard policies, certification standards, and national and international law. They inspired the establishment of new international agencies and initiatives. They influenced the policy recommendations of multilateral and bilateral agencies to national governments to make them more favorable to Indigenous rights and participation. They pushed for changes in patterns of international business investments and loans. These achievements often came with significant costs to Indigenous Peoples, in the context of struggles for their rights that involved the ongoing encounter of violence, dispossession, and logics of exploitation.

These achievements indicate, however, that foundations can have a significant and cost-effective positive impact on global governance by supporting Indigenous Peoples. This section is based on this premise. It begins by describing shared challenges that Indigenous Peoples face in international negotiation processes and then describes the different ways and opportunities they are using to mobilize and generate change from the bottom up in global governance spaces. Both challenges and opportunities represent entry points for foundations who want to engage with Indigenous Peoples in this area of work.

Despite their accomplishments in recent decades, multiple barriers persist that reduce the influence of Indigenous Peoples over global governance. These include financial constraints, nation-state dominance in global governance

processes, formal and informal norms that limit their participation, bridging differences among multiple Indigenous groups, and challenges related to the slow pace with which negotiations take place. Indigenous Peoples also report having to cope with the delicate balance between token participation or meaningful inclusion, given that assertions of Indigenous identities and perspectives are often celebrated in instances of global governance as long as they remain ceremonial and absent of political impact on the outcome of the processes. Another challenge is the need to balance the opportunity to make pressing decisions in international spaces with the responsibility to carry out consultations with their bases and allied Indigenous groups.

While the current political juncture presents various challenges, it also generates numerous opportunities. Decentralized and polycentric policymaking structures of global governance provide multiple points of entry for Indigenous political influence and participation. For instance, under the leadership of [ELATIA](#) Indigenous Peoples from around the Global South are engaging in activism across multiple scales of governance (subnational, national, regional, and global). The example of the [Arctic Council](#) – an intergovernmental forum of eight Arctic states in which six Indigenous Peoples' organizations have been granted Permanent Participants status, which entails full consultation rights in connection with the Council's negotiations and decisions – shows a concrete way to strengthen Indigenous participation in supranational governance structures that other global or regional bodies could adopt.

The rising impacts and worsening projections of the combined global climate change and biodiversity crises have helped to create greater public awareness of the severity of these problems. The IPCC 1.5° C report, emphasizing the

need for negative Green House Gas emissions, not just a decline in emissions, has highlighted that reductions in fossil fuel emissions will not be sufficient to maintain average temperature below global targets; nature-based solutions (NbS) informed by culture-based solutions (CbS) have a central role to play. Given the large percentage of forests and biodiversity managed by Indigenous communities and the positive track record of Indigenous tenure and management rights in reducing deforestation, philanthropy's support could help to push Indigenous Peoples further to the forefront of efforts to address deforestation and biodiversity loss, helping to ensure that state parties and transnational environmental organizations adopt measures aligned with Indigenous demands.

Indigenous activists describe benefitting from augmented support from insiders within UN global processes. This support comes in different forms, including invitations to participate in informal gatherings in which negotiations take place. Nation-state delegates are also engaging more with Indigenous participants from their own countries and from transnational advocacy groups like the [Global Alliance of Territorial Communities](#). Again, ongoing support to Indigenous organizations would further encourage this change in attitudes and help to transform it into concrete outcomes.

The inclusion of language in the Paris Agreement that recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge was a notable advocacy victory. That victory has increased the push for acknowledging the role and value of Indigenous knowledge in other spaces of global governance, including in scientific contexts and bodies (e.g. [Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework](#), [IPBES](#) and ___'s [SBSTA](#)). Philanthropy can encourage these efforts and ensure their success by supporting the broader participation of Indigenous knowledge holders from various backgrounds, including academics and non-academics.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic is also helping to raise awareness on Indigenous issues and global governance. While it has constrained development cooperation budgets and created

major logistical problems for global and regional efforts, it has highlighted the importance of global governance, driven home the need to heed scientific advice and manage risks proactively, and demonstrated how investing in prevention can be much cheaper than trying to contain a crisis once it is out of control. The pandemic has also exposed how forest destruction and biodiversity loss can fuel zoonotic diseases that put human lives at risk, highlighting the importance of maintaining the integrity of Indigenous territories to reduce the risk of future epidemics of zoonotic origin.



8. Conclusions and Recommendations

This overview examined views and ideas for encouraging more foundations and individual philanthropists to engage with Indigenous Peoples in the Global South. The report focused on private philanthropy because many philanthropic organizations from the North and South express interest in working with Indigenous Peoples but feel that they lack the necessary knowledge, so foundations that are already supporting IPOs can play a catalyst role in helping other funders to enter this area of work. Geographically, the report focused on Indigenous Peoples in the Global South because they have less access to funding while at the same time facing particularly dramatic experiences of violence and dispossession.

So why should philanthropy step up support for Indigenous Peoples? The report provides four main answers. First, Indigenous organizations are central allies in making progress towards the mission of many philanthropic institutions. Second, the diversity of Indigenous organizations offers nearly endless opportunities for engagement. Third, private philanthropy is well situated to work with Indigenous Peoples and the time is right – encouraging more charities and individual philanthropists to get involved will help to scale up proven best practices and promote more available channels to fund IPOs directly. The fourth main reason presented in the report focuses specifically on global governance: funders can have significant and cost-effective positive impact on global governance by investing in Indigenous Peoples and their self-determination.

The following points summarize the main recommendations that we heard from Indigenous People during the course of this study and in our previous work with Indigenous organizations. While they are aimed at private philanthropy, we hope that are also helpful for international cooperation agencies.

◆ **Indigenous organizations** – Indigenous leaders emphasize that funders should work with and support the entire “ecosystem” of Indigenous organizations, from traditional authorities and representative political organizations to Indigenous funds, Indigenous NGOs, and other types of Indigenous organizations. They argue that this is important to consolidate all kinds of organizations and contribute to their multiple and complementary functions.

◆ **Funding practices** – Indigenous leaders express strong support for funders that adopt long-term perspectives. While long-term relationships are identified as best practice, such a preference should not deny opportunities to those organizations without existing relationships. Indigenous representatives, especially women and young activists, repeatedly point out that even a one-off project or short-term support can greatly help newer and smaller organizations that are often doing the most innovative work. Hence, the relevance of a mix of different funding styles – big and multiyear grants that help build long-term partnerships and small grants to support emerging opportunities and organizations.

◆ **More than only money, mobilizing other assets of a foundation** – Providing funding is the most effective way to support Indigenous Peoples. With adequate resources they can solve their own challenges. That said, Indigenous organizations often manifest a preference in working with funders willing to contribute resources beyond money, such as expertise, networking and strategic advice. For instance, funders that run programs in multiple geographic areas often have the opportunity to see the work that is happening on the ground from a level that local organizations cannot see.

For instance, funders that run programs in multiple geographic areas often have the opportunity to see the work that is happening on the ground from a level that local organizations cannot see. Being a link between organizations that have an interest in sharing their challenges and successes is a simple and easy way to help them maximize their resources. Outreaching efforts to other funders to become involved are seen as particularly important given the need to disseminate more information about grantmaking to Indigenous communities, raise awareness about the needs it fills, and overcome misplaced impressions about Indigenous organizations. The ultimate goal of this support is empowerment of Indigenous communities and organizations.

Importantly, Indigenous organizations stress that these additional forms of support are important and welcome, but should be provided in a low profile way, not conditional upon achieving predetermined milestones or results, and acknowledging the worth and capacity of Indigenous organizations.

◆ **Reciprocal responsibilities and cultural sensitivity** - Indigenous organizations ask from foundations just the same that is expected of them - do the research, understand the procedures, take into account the criteria, collaborate and learn and improve on the way. They stress the need for cultural awareness but highlight that it should not be equated to political correctness. On the other hand, some Indigenous intellectuals warn that becoming culturally competent should not result in embracing excessively the notion of Indigenous “exceptionalism” - the idea that Indigenous Peoples are so different from other local communities and populations that one cannot replicate anything that was done elsewhere because it will just not work.

◆ **Women and youth** - New institutional spaces have emerged for indigenous women and youth to organize, both in women or youth specific organizations and in mixed-gender or multi-generational groups. Women and youth leaders demand greater focus on their particular needs and concerns because of their proven role as influential forces for change and improvement. They argue that a better approach to systemic change is to invest more in their organizations. They often underscore that alliances between their organizations should be strengthened so that Indigenous women and youth can work together to protect their rights, communities and territories. Many also say that making women’s and youth engagement a condition of funding would encourage organizations and communities to include it as part of their projects.

◆ **Indigenous funds** - Indigenous representatives point out that Indigenous funds are one of the most promising ways towards a more just and equitable approach to philanthropy. These funds are being established to empower Indigenous voices in philanthropy, build an intercultural vision of philanthropy, and put justice and equity at the center of philanthropic operations. They are also more connected to the communities they support and better placed to empower them to enact their own solutions, while respecting their traditions, cultural norms, and spiritual concepts. They offer many concrete advantages to philanthropic organizations that want to reduce the administrative burden of their operations, shift the balance of power inherent in the grantor- grantee relationship, and focus more on social outcomes. For all these reasons, Indigenous leaders urge to work more with and through Indigenous funds.

◇ Global governance – While a failure from the perspective of commitments commensurate to address the climate crisis, UNFCCC COP26 showed that the greater capacity and public profile of Indigenous Peoples have made them key actors in supra-national efforts. By building coalitions and constituencies, disseminating their positions, persuading or advising policy makers, Indigenous Peoples are shaping a reconfiguration of authority in the arena of global governance. Yet, the fiasco of COP26 in November 2021 also shows the limitations of trying to influence inter-governmental processes.

While there is a broad acceptance of the necessity to engage Indigenous organizations in global governance, there is not yet enough acknowledgment of the necessity to reform the mechanisms of global governance to give more power to legitimate non-state actors like Indigenous Peoples. There is still a long way to go and much support needed on this point. In line with this reasoning, Indigenous leaders also remark

that they need to devote part of their focus to influencing more effectively transboundary non-state actors, such as multinational companies, international religious bodies, big international NGOs, international social movements, and the international media and popular culture.

Finally, it seems appropriate to conclude this report with an open question to philanthropists: if you are interested in human rights, in social justice, in global governance, and in protecting the cultural and biological diversity of the world, why not partner with Indigenous Peoples and their organizations?

Philanthropy shares a responsibility for the wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples because in the past it has often promoted blatant assimilation and subtler forms of colonization and contributed dramatically to the destruction of Indigenous cultures across the world. Remedying past mistakes in a manner that embraces present and future challenges of global governance is an instrumental path for philanthropy to walk.



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Bios

Filippo Del Gatto



Filippo has dedicated his entire professional life to working directly with community-based organizations and civil society groups across the Global South and the Global North. An essential part of his work has focused on working with these organizations on strengthening core capabilities identified by the organizations themselves — whether organizational governance, policy advocacy, evaluation and learning, partnerships, conflict management, or capturing revenues from natural resources. He also worked with various international organizations on research and advocacy initiatives related to land tenure and forest governance. Filippo is currently part of a team of activists and researchers working with [Entrepovos](#) in promoting dialogue, exchange and mutual learning between Indigenous, Afro-descendant and traditional peoples' organizations.

Joji Carino



Joji is a member of the Ibaloi-Igorot People of the Philippines and a respected activist on Indigenous Peoples' human rights covering cultural and biological diversity and international standards on extractive industries, forests, water, energy, food and agriculture. Her current focus is on community governance and monitoring systems, as co-lead author of *Local Biodiversity Outlooks 2: The contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and to renewing nature and cultures* and as convenor of a global network of Centres of Distinction on Indigenous and Local Knowledge. She is Senior Policy Advisor with Forest Peoples Programme (FPP). Previously, she also served as a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Secretary General of the United Nations (UNSAB).

Myrna Cunningham



Myrna is a member of the Miskitu Indigenous community of the Waspam in Nicaragua and a medical surgeon, public health worker, and activist linked to political-social processes for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and women. With more than 40 years of experience in accompaniment and research on autonomy processes, discrimination suffered by Indigenous Peoples, especially women and young people, and the establishment of strategies and programs that facilitate access to intercultural education, health, and the establishment of processes of Indigenous and multiethnic self-government. She chaired the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples Affairs from 2011 to 2012. In 2014, she was Advisor to the President of the United Nations General Assembly for the UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. Myrna is currently a Board member of multiple international organizations working with Indigenous Peoples.

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Margaret is the Africa Region Coordinator/Senior Program Officer at The Tenure Facility. Her areas of expertise include land tenure law/policy, land governance, extractives (mining, oil/gas), and community resource rights in conservation and protected areas. Previously, she was Africa Region Program Director at Landesa, and also served as Program Officer at Ford Foundation, Eastern Africa. As founder and member of the Uganda Land Alliance, she coalesced civil society and rural populations into a countrywide coalition and movement for pro-poor land law reforms and contributed to drafting Uganda's National Land Policy 2013. She also supported the inception and set up of donor-working groups for land sector reforms in Uganda and Kenya. Margaret has over 20 land and resource governance publications focused on progressive policy and equity for women, pastoralists, forest dwellers, and ethnic minorities. She is a board member of TROCAIRE – the development arm of the catholic church in Ireland and serves on its International Programs Committee (IPAC).

