



## REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Submitted to the 2025 session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on  
Indigenous Issues  
United Nations, New York

### **Executive Summary (500 words):**

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global authority on the environment. UNEP's mission is to inspire, inform, and enable nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. UNEP has been actively engaging Indigenous Peoples in its work, guided by the Major Groups and Stakeholders modality as outlined in [Agenda 21](#). Recognizing Indigenous knowledge as integral to sustainable ecosystem management, UNEP works closely with the Indigenous Peoples Major Group, which includes [23 accredited organizations](#) and their respective networks and other Indigenous experts in our mission to protect people and the planet.

Since the twenty-second session of the UNPFII, UNEP has made significant progress in responding to recommendations made by the Permanent Forum. One example is the systematic inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge into the 7<sup>th</sup> Global Environmental Outlook. Four Indigenous Knowledge dialogues and a separate task force are being organized to this end.

Another example is the development of the **Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management (GISTM)**. Through a multi-stakeholder International Advisory Panel, UNEP integrated the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples into the global standard.

In 2024, UNEP also supported the UN Secretary General's **Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals**, which worked to safeguard Indigenous rights in the energy transition. The Panel engaged Indigenous experts to contribute to a set of principles and recommendations.

Additionally, UNEP's **Youth Taskforce on the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration** has prioritized Indigenous youth engagement. A representative from the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, was included in the Taskforce's selection committee to ensure Indigenous perspectives are considered at all points of decision-making. Indigenous youth representation will remain a key focus in the Taskforce's future work.

UNEP also facilitated Indigenous youth participation in high-profile events such as the Summit of the Future, where Indigenous Xicana youth leader, Niria Alicia Garcia, delivered opening remarks.

UNEP is working towards the establishment of a **UN inter-agency working group** focused on Indigenous Peoples' issues in the Congo Basin. This initiative aims to support the sustainable management of forest ecosystems by ensuring Indigenous participation in environmental governance.

Furthermore, UNEP, alongside Indigenous Peoples' organizations, developed [Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders](#). These principles, which were published in December 2024, aim to prevent human rights abuses and promote Indigenous rights in conservation efforts.

UNEP has made strides to ensure the participation of Indigenous Peoples in international decades declared by the General Assembly. The **Decade on Ecosystem Restoration** has three Indigenous women on its Advisory Board and is working to support Indigenous land rights in some regions and countries. Furthermore, UNEP's **Water for Sustainable Development Decade** emphasizes the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in water quality management through the **World Water Quality Alliance**.

UNEP's efforts underscore a commitment to embedding Indigenous perspectives in environmental governance, aligning its initiatives with the recommendations of the UNPFII, and fostering greater inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in global environmental processes.

## **A. Recommendations of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and input to the 2024 session**

### **i. Please provide information on measures taken since your last update to the Forum on the implementation or planned implementation of the recommendations of the PFII.**

10 recommendations listed in the report of the twenty-second session of the UNPFII were either directly or indirectly related to the work of UNEP.

**In response to recommendation 13.** UNEP co-convened an international process which led to the development of the Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management (GISTM). A process that was initiated together with the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) and the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) following the January 2019 Brumadinho

tailings dam disaster. One key recommendation of GISTM was the need to create an Independent Institute to manage an assurance framework for tailings dams to be audited and certified against the Standard. Based on this, PRI and UNEP convened a multi-stakeholder International Advisory Panel whose members represented a diverse set of interests in effective mine tailings management. This included representatives from affected communities, civil society as well as Indigenous Peoples through the participation of Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, former Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. This engagement has allowed the incorporation of perspectives of Indigenous issues in the recommendations for the establishment of the Independent Institute.

To date, 53% by market capitalisation of listed mining companies are implementing the Standard and a further 17% are reviewing implementation. The number is expected to grow with the establishment of the Independent Institute which is planned for 2025.

Furthermore, in April 2024, the UN Secretary General established a Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals comprising 24 state actors and 14 non-state actors. UNEP and UNCTAD provided secretariat support to the Panel, with the Climate Action Team of the Executive Office of the Secretary General coordinating overall support to the Panel. From May to September, the Panel worked to develop a set of Principles and Actionable Recommendations to safeguard environmental and social standards and embed justice in the energy transition. Concerted efforts were made to embed the rights of Indigenous Peoples across all the Principles including through the engagement and expert inputs of two Indigenous Peoples Panel members, Dario Mejia Montalvo and Sara Olsvig both of which are also UNPFII members. A dedicated consultation was also convened by the two co-chairs of the Panel, South Africa and the EU, with Indigenous Peoples, with the support of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the preparation of the Principles to take into consideration Indigenous-led initiatives, concerns and contributions on critical energy transition minerals.

**In response to recommendation 42 and 123**, UNEP in its Youth Taskforce (YTF) on the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration is working on including Indigenous Youth in decision-making. To this end, the YTF has included a representative from the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, Ms. Lahela Kamehanaokala Mattos in the selection committee for new members to partake in the second term of the YTF. The second term of the YTF will prioritize Indigenous representation among its members to re-enforce the voices of Indigenous youth in shaping the Decade's initiatives and activities.

During the Summit of the Future, UNEP facilitated the participation of 2020 winner of the Young Champion of the Earth Award, Niria Alicia Garcia, to deliver opening remarks during the adoption of the Pact for the Future. Niria, an Indigenous Xicana youth, was selected, following UNEP's nomination, among several hundred nominees to join the opening panel and delivered opening remarks in a Panel alongside the UN Secretary General, the President of the General Assembly and other speakers. Niria also participated in additional engagements during the preceding Youth Action Days, organised by the UN Youth Office, and other events, including the Youth Forum on the Future of the Environment (organised by the Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP) and media moments in the SDG Media Zone and at the Earthrise Studios, where she highlighted her work as an Indigenous environmentalist.

Furthermore, UNEP is building a new youth for nature initiative, which will be designed with and for youth - particularly Indigenous youth – to be acting in support of the delivery of the goals of the [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (GBF). Inspired by the [Tide Turners programme](#) which for the last 5 years has reached almost 1 million youth in 61 countries, this new project expected to move towards implementation in early 2025 aims to empower particularly Indigenous youth, to be agents of change within their communities and active co-creators and contributors to the fulfilment of the GBF.

Finally, UNEP has a long-standing tradition of collaborating with the [Children and Youth Major Group \(CYMG\)](#) and have recently extended an invitation to the Indigenous Youth Caucus to join and engage with CYMG activities. These connections have been established, and UNEP is witnessing increased representation of Indigenous youth in meetings and key initiatives, including the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, GEO Outlook 7, and other relevant programs.

**In response to recommendation 47**, UNEP, through its Congo Basin Programme, has committed to establishing a United Nations inter-agency working group focused on Indigenous Peoples' issues in Central Africa. This collaborative effort aims to bolster the strategies set forth by the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) and the Network of Indigenous and Local Communities for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (REPALEAC). By fostering a coordinated approach among various UN agencies on Indigenous Peoples' issues in Central Africa, UNEP seeks to ensure that the voices and rights of Indigenous Peoples are recognized and integrated into environmental policies and conservation efforts within the region. The establishment of this inter-agency working group will be a vital move towards achieving sustainable development while respecting the cultural and ecological knowledge of Indigenous communities. It not only aims to strengthen the relationship between these communities and environmental governance but also emphasizes the importance of their involvement in decision-making processes that affect their lands and resources. Through this initiative, UNEP is reaffirming its commitment to supporting biodiversity conservation and promoting human rights, thereby creating a more inclusive framework for addressing the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples in Central Africa.

**In response to recommendation 54**, UNEP, in partnership with several Indigenous Peoples' organizations, has developed [ten Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders](#). These Principles, which are based on existing international human rights norms and standards, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, outline the responsibilities of private actors in conservation. They provide guidance on how to prevent human rights abuses and promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples and others involved in conservation efforts. The Principles were published and launched in December 2024, along with a list of supporters. This list includes the UN Special Rapporteurs on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, on the Human Right to a Healthy Environment, and on Human Rights and Climate Change, as well as several Indigenous leaders and organizations.

**In response to recommendation 117 and 137**, UNEP, through the Major Groups and Stakeholder modality has a consistent mechanism for engaging Indigenous Peoples at every stage of decision-making across UNEP. The Indigenous Peoples and their Communities Major Group is co-facilitated by Prem Singh Tharu, from Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, and Frankie Orona, from Society of Native Nations. The [23 organizations accredited](#) to UNEP under the Indigenous Peoples Major Group are able to attend UNEP meetings as observers and take the floor after Member States at the discretion of the Chair. Additionally, the organizations can access meeting documents and submit written statements on the same line as Member States in meetings that follow UNEA rules of procedure. UNEP notes that 4 additional Indigenous Peoples organizations have become accredited since the organization's last report to the Forum. UNEP would like to encourage more Indigenous Peoples and their organisations to become [accredited](#).

Additionally, UNEP sponsored and facilitated the participation of UNPFII Member Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim to UNEA-6, where she delivered a statement on behalf of the Permanent Forum in the high-level segment of the Environment Assembly. Finally, through nominating focal points for resolutions, Indigenous Peoples representatives were actively involved in the negotiations of the resolutions tabled and finally adopted at UNEA-6 and were given the opportunity to exchange views with resolution proponents and co-facilitators prior to the commencement of negotiations.

UNEP takes note of **recommendations 118 and 119**, and highlights that UNEP responded to the request to not conflate the terms "local communities" and Indigenous Peoples in a letter by Executive Director Ms. Inger Andersen to the three special mechanisms on 30 September 2023.

In response to **recommendation 140**, UNEP's seventh [Global Environment Outlook](#) (GEO-7) has, for the first time, undertaken to systematically address and draw upon Indigenous Knowledge as well as local knowledge (IK & LK). Previous editions of the GEO assessed IK & LK as new and possibly useful information and knowledge source for future assessments. Incorporating IK & LK into GEO was requested by Member States during the Scoping Meeting in October 2022. IK & LK may offer a contrasting world view that could support a custodian approach and lead to better stewardship of the environment. This narrative could also support the solutions-focused approach that GEO-7 hopes to successfully present. Providing this alternative mind-set to policymakers could lead to more innovative policy solutions (e.g. nature-based solutions).

In order to successfully achieve this, an IK & LK Taskforce was established to facilitate this process. The taskforce is composed of 18 Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and knowledge holders. Following various meetings and discussions with the IK & LK Taskforce, Co-chairs and Secretariat, it was decided that there will be four dialogues to elevate and inform IK & LK's role in GEO-7.

The GEO-7- Indigenous Knowledge as well as local knowledge (IK & LK) *dialogue* is a participatory approach that builds upon previous successful experiences of working with Indigenous Peoples as well as local communities to inform global environmental

assessments. The design of this *dialogue* draws upon the experiences of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which has used a *dialogues* approach to recognize and value plural Indigenous Knowledge and local knowledge in providing new perspectives for its assessments.

In order to inform the GEO-7, four dialogues were planned to ensure IK & LK issues are conceptualized in the GEO-7 report and are properly captured not only through peer reviewed literature but also through the shared knowledge of Indigenous Peoples. These dialogue workshops are important in recognizing the important role of including the issues of Indigenous Peoples are captured throughout the GEO-7 process.

**ii. The theme of the 2025 PFII session is "Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples within United Nations Member States and the United Nations system, including identifying good practices and addressing challenges." Please include information on any publications, projects, reports, or activities relevant to this theme.**

UNEP consistently integrates the rights and principles of UNDRIP across its programmes, projects, and actions. See B i) for more information.

**iii. Please provide information on efforts to ensure the participation of Indigenous Peoples in the international decades declared by the General Assembly, such as the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development" (2018-2028), the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022 - 2032) and other relevant international decades and processes, including CEDAW General recommendation 39 on Indigenous women and girls.**

### **Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030)**

Together with FAO, UNEP is the primary coordinator of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030). The Decade on Ecosystem Restoration is making significant efforts to ensure meaningful and effective participation of Indigenous People as well as local communities in its work. At the strategic level, Indigenous Peoples' perspectives, voices and knowledge are well-represented at the Decade's [Advisory Board](#) by three Indigenous women members, namely [Lucy Mullenkei](#), [Hanieh Moghani](#), and [Gladys Lorena Terrazas Arnéz](#).

The Decade's [Action Plan](#) has a specific Challenge focusing on securing land and resource rights for Indigenous Peoples as well as local communities, while recognizing them as key

stewards of ecosystem restoration. This work has recently started, with the objective of identifying restoration initiatives led by Indigenous Peoples, as well as local communities in order to provide proper visibility, networking opportunities, enhance recognition and ensure support to scale up and advance these initiatives.

In terms of actions in the ground, the UN Decade has recognized the Indigenous-led restoration project, [Acción Andina](#) as a [UN World Restoration Flagship](#) for its good example of a large-scale and long-term ecosystem restoration initiative. It is a social movement to save the Andean forests, home to one-sixth of all plant life on the planet, breaking through an impasse in protecting a critical ecosystem and championing community-led restoration of nature.

In addition, the [UN Decade Task Force on Best Practices led by FAO](#), has developed multiple efforts to ensure meaningful involvement of Indigenous Peoples in its products including:

i) The publication of the UN Decade [Standards of practice to guide ecosystem restoration \(Standards of practice\)](#) which was subject to a targeted consultation with Indigenous Peoples, facilitated by the Indigenous Peoples Unit of FAO. Under this consultation, a drafting committee was established with eight members of the Global-Hub on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems. Their substantial inputs were then integrated into the final version to enhance the recommendations that need to be considered when restoration efforts involve or affect Indigenous Peoples and their territories. As a result, the *Standards of practice* highlight the importance of the meaningful involvement of Indigenous Peoples, as well as best practices for engaging them, within breakout boxes and throughout the main text throughout the whole restoration process;

and ii) A dedicated capacity development initiative focused on Indigenous Peoples' Restoration Approaches which was included in the UN Decade [Capacity, Knowledge and Learning Action Plan](#). This initiative aims to generate greater knowledge and evidence-based information on the contribution of Indigenous Peoples' food, knowledge and territorial management systems to ecosystem conservation and restoration, by building on the [Indigenous Peoples' Biocentric Restoration initiative](#) led by FAO, which promotes the restoration of Indigenous Peoples' territories, using Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems that have been developed through centuries of observation and passed down from generation to generation, for sustainable territorial management. The initiative is currently under implementation, ensuring synergies and coordination with the related challenges from the UN Decade Action Plan referred above.

### **“Water for Sustainable Development” (2018-2028)**

The [World Water Quality Alliance \(WWQA\)](#) is a global network of organizations, experts, and stakeholders focused on improving water quality around the world. It operates under UNEP and brings together scientific, governmental, and non-governmental organizations to share knowledge, provide assessments, and recommend actions to address water pollution and quality issues, playing a key role in the UN Decade of Action on Water for Sustainable Development.

There is a continued effort to include and engage Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and skills to the WWQA platform to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are part of the solution to overcoming the immense data gap where [ambient water quality](#) is concerned.

Furthermore, the [UNEA-6 water resolution \(Res6/13\)](#) recognizes the importance of traditional, local and Indigenous knowledge as part of possible solutions for sustainable water management and addressing water scarcity. The resolution calls upon member states and members of specialized agencies and invites relevant international organizations and relevant stakeholders to take into account Indigenous and traditional knowledge and approaches, but also requests UNEP in collaboration with UN system entities and other stakeholders to promote dialogue and collaboration on water-related traditional, local and Indigenous knowledge.

WWQA participated as UNEP in the thematic session "Successful water and ecosystem management through Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK)" convened by UNESCO at the 10<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum in May 2024 to introduce the UNEA-6 resolution and how this emphasizes incorporating traditional and Indigenous knowledge in water management.

WWQA, together with GEO AquaWatch, the Geo-Indigenous Alliance, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Aquawatch Australia and the International Association for Great Lakes Research have so far convened 2 webinars in 2024<sup>1</sup> on the topic of harnessing Indigenous knowledge on water quality management. There are plans for a third one, to keep this an ongoing webinar series to continue building awareness through the global platform that WWQA offers. Other means of awareness raising has included profiling Indigenous Peoples in WWQA monthly newsletter Yemaya.

**iv. Has your entity responded to the 2022 UNPFII recommendation<sup>2</sup> paragraph 85... *The Permanent Forum urges all United Nations entities and States parties to treaties concerning the environment, biodiversity, and the climate to eliminate the use of the term "local communities" in conjunction with indigenous peoples, so that the term "indigenous peoples and local communities" would be abolished.***

UNEP responded to the 2022 recommendation in paragraph 85 through a letter sent by UNEP's Executive Director, Ms. Inger Andersen, on September 30, 2023, which reiterates the organization's commitment to advancing the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

## **B. System-Wide Action Plan to achieve the ends of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

**i. The Permanent Forum will follow up on progress made on the SWAP implementation as part of its discussion on the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous**

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<sup>1</sup> [The contributions of Indigenous People's Earth Observations to Water Quality Monitoring Indigenous Data Sovereignty of Indigenous People's Earth Observations](#)

<sup>2</sup> E/2022/43-E/C.19/2022/11



**Peoples during its 2025 session. Please provide an analysis of actions taken by your agency, fund and/or programme on the six key elements of the SWAP, since your last update to the Forum<sup>3</sup>.**

UNEP consistently integrates the rights and principles of the UNDRIP across its programmes, projects, and actions (PPA), aligning with the 2030 Agenda's core principle of "leaving no one behind." UNEP's Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework further emphasizes the protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights.

For example, at the project level, UNEP's Climate Change Division (Climate Mitigation Unit) has supported and mainstreamed the rights of Indigenous Peoples through the Paraguay + Verde Green Climate Fund REDD+ Project (FP121). Key initiatives include the development of a culturally sensitive grievance mechanism and ensuring Indigenous representation on the Project's Governing Board. Furthermore, a Consultation and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) Guide has been developed for the Project, operationalizing a fundamental right under UNDRIP. A forthcoming Climate Change Fund will include dedicated access mechanisms for Indigenous communities, accompanied by financial inclusion strategies.

UNEP has a key role in technical assistance on safeguards within the UN-REDD Programme, working to support countries to enhance environmental and social management in forest and climate change policies and PPAs. In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNEP coordinates a UN-REDD Safeguards and Integrity Working Group, which strengthens capacities on safeguards and tools for FPIC, benefits sharing, gender equality, and other issues. These efforts employ a robust intercultural approach to ensure inclusivity and relevance.

### **C. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

***i. Please describe any activities your entity has organized since the last reporting period to accelerate progress across a range of SDGs, demonstrating the interlinkages across goals and targets and if applicable, providing examples of translating global goals into local actions. In your response, please consider referring to SDGs relevant to the theme of the 2025 session of the Forum, including SDGs 5, 7, 10, 13 and 16.***

UNEP is finalizing the Measuring Progress Special Edition: Disaggregation to be launched in December 2024. The [Measuring Progress series](#) focuses on the interlinkages between the environment-related SDG indicators and economic and social

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<sup>3</sup> The six key elements of the SWAP are: 1) Raise awareness of the UNDRIP; 2) Support the implementation of the UNDRIP, particularly at the country level; 3) Support the realization of indigenous peoples' rights in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; 4) Map existing standards and guidelines, capacity, training materials and resources within the UN system, international financial institutions and the members of the IASG for the effective implementation of the UNDRIP; 5) Develop the capacity of States, indigenous peoples, civil society and UN personnel; and 6) Advance the participation of indigenous peoples in UN processes.

indicators. This special edition focuses on disaggregation needed for national policymaking and impact on the environment, society and the economy. This report covers SDGs 5, 7 and 13.

The forthcoming report is the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of UNEP's [Measuring Progress series](#). It provides updates on the global progress made towards achieving the environmental dimension of sustainable development. As a special edition, it presents proposed disaggregation for the 92 environment-related SDG indicators and their relevance to national and sub-national evidence-based policymaking coupled with its potential impact on society, the economy and the environment. Availability of disaggregated data is crucial for analyzing environmental issues from different angles and for developing evidence-based environmental policies at national and sub-national levels adapted to different contexts and circumstances.

Some disaggregation proposed specify impact of relevant policies on Indigenous Peoples (SDG indicators 1.4.2; 6.1.1; 6.2.1; 6.5.1; 7.a.1; 15.6.1), or the use of Indigenous knowledge (SDG indicators 6.4.2; 11.3.2; 11.4.1) to advance environmental sustainability. All over the report, vulnerable people and groups are highlighted as main beneficiaries of disaggregated data to formulate targeted policies, which include Indigenous People according to the SDG definition.

***ii. Please describe any activities your entity organized in support of the 2024 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and/or reports and activities that supported SDG reporting and monitoring or a VNR process at the national, regional, or global level.***

UNEP reported national, regional, and global data to the Global SDG Database for the 25 SDG Indicators under its custodianship. Stories were submitted for 20 SDG indicators under UNEP custodianship and included in the SDG progress report 2024, which informs HLPF discussions. During the 2024 HLPF, UNEP carried a side event "[Unpacking Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development: Unexplored options for achieving the SDGs](#)".