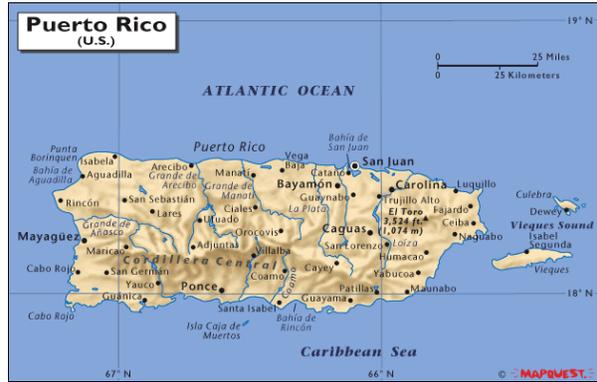


Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change Caribbean Region Report



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A special thanks to delegates who contributed to this Regional Report:¹

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Dominica	Charles Williams Pearl Williams	Carib Chief Youth Representative Carib Council
Puerto Rico	Naniki Reyes Ocasio	Taíno Representative, United Confederation of Taíno Peoples, and Areito Jara Guatukan Orocovis Boriken (Puerto Rico)
St.Vincent	Melford Pompey	Indigenous Peoples of St. Vincent
Surinam	Cylene France Hayette Vreedzaam	Indigenous Youth Representative Indigenous Representative

I. **Geography and Social Economic make up of the Caribbean**

The Caribbean Caucus comprises representatives from as far south as Surinam, all the way up north to Boriken (AKA Puerto Rico) and west to Belize.

¹ *Special appreciation is also extended to Roberto Mukaro Agueibana Borrero of the United Confederation of Taino People for his contributions to this report.

In the middle of that triangle we will find Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados and Dominica. Dominica, St Vincent and the Grenadines forms part of the Windward group of islands, while expanding the circle to include Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago who form part of the Lesser Antilles. Boriken (Puerto Rico) is part of the major Antilles. The Caribbean island chain starting from Trinidad in the South to Cuba and the Bahamas in the North is known as the Caribbean Archipelago, while Belize is part of Central America, Guyana, and Surinam are located on the South American main land bordering the Caribbean Sea.

We in the Caribbean are located between 5 - 30 degrees north and 59 to 85 degrees west.. In the tropical Caribbean our economic base ranges from Tourism, Agriculture, fishing, and to a lesser extent some light manufacturing.

The Caribbean has a diverse population made up of Indigenous Peoples, descendants of Africans, Portuguese, East Indians, Asians, and Europeans. Some of these peoples were introduced to the region during the early colonial period.

During the pre colonial period the Indigenous Peoples inhabited the Americas, North South and Central America and the Caribbean.

We lived in communion with Mother Nature understanding, respecting and protecting the environment in which we lived.

With the advent of the European colonizers bringing across a different culture, one of greed and hunger for wealth and power and little or no regard for human life spread like a disease through out the Americas. They destabilized, demoralized, and invaded the whole of the land mass of the Americas, here we refer to the Spanish, the British the French the Dutch and the Portuguese, who all came and wanted their share of the pie.

Most representative from the Caribbean Caucus are English speaking with the exception of Surinam where English is also spoken but the official language is Dutch, and Boriken (Puerto Rico) where the official language is Spanish.

1. [Climate Change in the Caribbean Demands Urgent Mitigation and Adaptation](#)

II. Threats posed by climate change to the societies and Economies of the region in general and in particular to Indigenous Peoples

The Caribbean region is located right in the center of the Tropics and every year we prepare for the passage of wider and more powerful hurricanes that threaten the entire region. We suffer from flash floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, intensified hurricane force winds, coastal erosion, coral bleaching, major landslides and volcanic eruptions, and, in many instances heavy loss of life and property.

As a result, we suffer extensive infrastructural damage to roads and bridges, our agricultural crops, homes, farm houses, machinery, residential and commercial housing and the list goes on.

We are also experiencing longer drought periods and serious loss of crops and live stock, impacts on food security and economic decline. The water levels in all our rivers have dropped significantly and year after year the situation gets worse and worse.

We are more and more vulnerable to the impact of climate change as the sea level rises and coral reefs are bleaching are ever present reminders of how modern day societies misuse and abuse the resources of the world that we live in.

We know of the widening of the rupture in the ozone layer and realize that Mother Earth is in fact heating up faster and faster. We know of the melting of the ice at both poles - the Arctic and the Antarctic - and that the threats of new diseases threaten our very existence.

These diseases may not only be costly in treating but also costly in researching their behavior and treatment. There is always cause for concern, for example, the fear that we can be used as the guinea pigs for experiments in finding cures for these diseases.

III. A Description of any negative Climate change impacts that are experienced and how indigenous people are being affected.

The Indigenous Peoples of the Caribbean suffer the loss of lives, homes, property, and infrastructure due to the intensification of hurricanes, tsunamis, landslides and flooding caused by climate changes; severe droughts and heavy rains cause crop losses, and a decline in clean water supplies threaten our food security. Indigenous Peoples of the Caribbean are especially vulnerable to climate changes because we are less prepared to face the challenges posed by these conditions.

In addition, animals used for food that are already scarce due to the introduction of commercial animal farming now face the threat of extinction because of climate changes.

Our natural food supplies fall short as wild life, fish, and traditional agriculture are increasingly affected by climate changes. The future looks very, very uncertain as world economic and social conditions worsen; climate change is on our doorsteps.

Just recently we went through the experience of rising oil, fuel and food prices, and those who suffered the most from the escalating prices are indigenous peoples who have the least economic resources. In most instances indigenous peoples have little or no power on the economies of the state.

Moreover, in light of the negative impacts of climate changes, the introduction of genetically modified foods and seeds further threaten our food security.

“...unregulated single-trait GE crops are a threat to food security in a changing climate. The prospect of large monocultures of GE plants failing completely under unforeseen weather events is a recipe for disaster.”

“Climate change has critically changed the relevance of the traditional knowledge of indigenous groups. Pressures on land from commercial agriculture, including bio-fuels, and carbon

sequestration projects could also cause major land cover changes.”² Consequently, it is necessary to reevaluate, existing governmental policies and be ready to steps necessary, including moratoriums to change policies that already impact on our fragile ecosystems and food security, before they exacerbate further the impact of climate changes and our ability to respond and adapt to these changes.

The potential of Traditional Knowledge, innovation and practices to contribute to the discourse on proposed climate change solutions are not considered, and, our rights and concerns have been “... *invisible in the climate change discussions at the national, regional and international level*”.³ Existing threats to Indigenous Peoples and the environment, from inappropriate government policies and the impact of climate changes must be viewed within the context of the lack of, recognition of our human rights protected in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

IV. A description of ways and means by which indigenous communities are coping with climate change impact.

As indicated above climate change does not affect some of us - climate change affects all of us. The purses of the impoverished are not as strong as the purse of those who are more able or capable.

However indigenous peoples believe strongly in the power and authority of the Creator and the love of our Mother Earth. In many areas we are feeding ourselves with the foods that are naturally produced and producing our foods on a sustainable level rather than a commercial level. For example, in the Carib Territory in Dominica, as well as in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, we are conducting training on housing retrofitting so as to prepare residents to build with the intention to prepare for the hurricanes that we envisage.

In Boriken (Puerto Rico) and Belize, many indigenous peoples are returning to traditional agricultural practices. In Belize indigenous peoples are also moving to higher ground.

V. An Indication of support that indigenous communities would need to build their resilience and capacity to adopt to climate change.

While it is clear that we need to learn to adapt to climate changes, it must be on our terms. We have all experienced adaptation as the other face of assimilation which has only served to further erode our cultures, traditions, spirituality, and customs and devastate our natural resources. Government policies and programs related to climate change adaptation and mitigation should be developed with the full effective participation of Indigenous peoples and implementation of any policy or program should be with our free prior informed consent.

Climate change studies indicate that the most effective long-term solution to climate change globally is to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases worldwide. The cost of inaction is devastating to all. For that reason, the greatest support governments can give to Indigenous and all Peoples confronting climate changes is to significantly reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases. Signing on to regional and global initiatives such as the Kyoto Protocol, implementing the Barbados Plan of

² www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/climatechange/docs/IUCN.pdf

³ **Ibid at 13 page 5 item 15**

Action and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are steps that Governments are obligated to take.

Further support that indigenous communities need are:

- access to educational and capacity building opportunities so that we can build our community resilience to face the day to day challenges of climate change impacts that confronts us.
- We need a dedicated and committed legal team to work with us.
- We need the developed countries to contribute directly to indigenous communities in aid packages to bring existing and new homes that can with stand intensifying hurricane and flooding related to climatic changes.
- We need to have early warning systems for the different regions and in the interiors of certain countries and capacity building so that these systems are fully operated by indigenous peoples.
- There is a need for cooperation between government and local communities for the transfer of technology to combat, reduce, adapt, mitigate and prepare for the impact of climate changes.
- There is definitely need for capacity building and training in integrated Landscape Management, and Small and micro enterprise development for alternative livelihoods.
- We need resources to build our food security by utilizing and reintroducing Traditional Plant Varieties and repopulation of traditional animal species that have been extinguished or reduced by the introduction of large scale meat farming. Resources need to be provided for the development of community seed banks and re-localizing traditional food production
- evaluate existing housing to determine their resistance to intensifying hurricanes, flooding and the threat of landslides so we can make them able to resist/withstand intensifying hurricanes, the risks of flooding and landslides.
- localize energy production after evaluating what local resources, wind and sun or small local water energy production systems lend themselves to the safe, efficient and just locally-driven production of energy
- provide resources to hold Regional capacity building workshops and meeting to prepare ourselves for discussions, to address strategies to inform our communities on issues that impact on every aspect of our lives, encourage community action and participation to work as a team and gather their recommendations well beforehand to present at relevant international meetings and to our colleagues in other regions.
- A needs assessment survey needs to be conducted

Together, Indigenous Peoples with the support of governments and partners can move the discourse on climate change to implementation of adaptation strategies and mitigation practices that address the impact of impending global climate changes.