Pursuing an Indigenous Platform: Exploring Opportunities and Constraints for Indigenous Participation in the UNFCCC

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Abstract

Despite growing consensus that Indigenous peoples, knowledge systems, rights and solutions should be meaningfully included in international climate change governance, substantive improvements in practice remain limited. An expanding body of scholarship examines the evolving discursive space in which issues facing Indigenous peoples are treated, with a predominant focus on decision outcomes of the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC). To understand the opportunities and constraints for meaningful participation of Indigenous peoples in international climate policy making, this article examines the experiences of Indigenous participants in the UNFCCC. We present findings from semistructured interviews with key informants, showing that material constraints and the designation of Indigenous peoples as nonstate observers continue to pose challenges for participants. Tokenism and a lack of meaningful recognition further constrain participation. Nevertheless, networks of resource sharing, coordination, and support organized among Indigenous delegates alleviate some of the impacts of constraints. Additionally, multistakeholder alliances and access to presidencies and high-level state delegates provide opportunities for international and national agenda-setting. The space available for Indigenous participation in the UNFCCC is larger than formal rules dictate but depends on personal relationships and political will. As the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform established by the Paris Agreement formalizes a distinct space for Indigenous participants in the UNFCCC, this article outlines

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existing opportunities and constraints and considers potential interactions between the evolving platform and existing mechanisms for participation.

> Despite the recognition of our role in preventing global warming, when it comes time to sign international conventions like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, once again, our right to participate in national and international discussions that directly affect our Peoples and territories is denied.
>
> —*Declaration of the First International Forum of Indigenous Peoples on Climate Change*, September 2000

The rights, knowledge, and solutions of Indigenous peoples (IPs) are critical to the formulation of effective and equitable responses to climate change (Brugnach, Craps, and Dewulf 2017; Ford et al. 2016a, 2016b; Maldonado et al. 2016; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). To date, however, inclusion of IPs[1] in environmental governance remains limited across scales and regions (Brugnach, Craps, and Dewulf 2017; Maldonado et al. 2016; Raffel 2016; Ramos-Castillo, Castellanos, and McLean 2017). While increased participation of nonstate actors in climate change policy making has been historically championed (Bäckstrand et al. 2017; Nasiritousi, Hjerpe, and Bäckstrand 2016), these broader movements risk ignoring critical differences between IPs and nonstate stakeholders, most notably the recognized right to self-determination. Indeed, as Brugnach, Craps, and Dewulf (2017, 28–29) note, "Indigenous communities can be excluded by the knowledge, structures and procedures that are used to include them." Moreover, IPs are doubly impacted by environmental governance processes. On one hand, climate change will disproportionately and uniquely affect Indigenous communities (de Coninck et al. 2018; Smith and Sharp 2012). On the other hand, responses implemented unilaterally by non-Indigenous actors may perpetuate colonial practices and exacerbate conflicts over Indigenous rights (Ford et al. 2016b; Lemaitre 2011; Ludlow et al. 2016; Phelps, Webb, and Agrawal 2010). For instance, Dunlap (2017) describes a counterinsurgency effort to forcefully establish a wind park on Indigenous lands in Juchitán, Mexico. Yet, IPs are not passive recipients of these processes: as they continue to defend and reclaim livelihoods and sovereignty on local to national levels, there is increasing attention to the limited and contested spaces for IPs in international environmental governance regimes (Comberti, Thornton, and Korodimou 2016; Corntassel 2007; Doolittle 2010; Lightfoot 2012; Paulson et al. 2012; Schroeder 2010; Suiseeya 2014; Wallbott 2014; Witter et al. 2015).

Despite a growing body of literature examining the strategic engagement of Indigenous participants[2] in environmental governance processes, long-term understanding is lacking of how IPs experience their participation in these processes, in particular in the UNFCCC. As the central component of international

1. Terminology and acronyms in this article are explained in Table S1-2.
2. Throughout this article, we use *Indigenous participants* to refer to self-identified Indigenous individuals who are actively participating in the UNFCCC process (Table S2).

climate change governance, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a critical forum for engaging with state-centered decision-making processes (Ayers, Alam, and Huq 2014; Ford et al. 2016b; Gupta 2010). After more than two decades of strategic Indigenous involvement within the UNFCCC (Doolittle 2010; Powless 2012; Wallbott 2014, 2016), engagement with Indigenous voices, needs, and priorities in decisions and work streams is slowly expanding (Ford et al. 2016b; Havemann 2016; Lesnikowski et al. 2017), culminating most recently in the establishment of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) under the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC 2015). However, inequities of power and resources persist, and basic financial and technical constraints continue to hinder efforts to access and navigate the UNFCCC process (Comberti, Thornton, and Korodimou 2016; Paulson et al. 2012; Raffel 2016; Schroeder 2010). Despite growing recognition of the importance of Indigenous participation and inclusion in decision texts, the extent of participation in the UNFCCC remains uneven across bodies and work streams and is constrained by the state-centered nature of negotiations (Comberti, Thornton, and Korodimou 2016; Paulson et al. 2012; Raffel 2016; Schroeder 2010). As the UNFCCC moves to establish the LCIPP platform, the already-existing conditions that challenge or support full participation remain understudied (Paulson et al. 2012).

Accordingly, this research examines the pathways to inclusion and experiences of exclusion encountered by Indigenous participants in the UNFCCC over the past decade. Building on interviews with key informants, we illustrate and engage with ideas found in the literature, asking (1) what are the opportunities and constraints that delimit participation of Indigenous peoples in the UNFCCC? and (2) what strategies are used to navigate and alter this context? We begin by establishing the institutional context in which IPs operate, briefly reviewing major structural factors and developments in international climate policy fora.

The Evolving Role of Indigenous Peoples in International Climate Policy Making

As an increasingly complex and multifaceted institution, the UNFCCC provides multiple channels for engagement in decision-making processes (Hale 2016; Figure A1, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/suppl/10.1162/glep_a_00489/suppl_file/Belfer-online%20APPENDIX.pdf). The supreme decision-making body, the Conference of the Parties (COP), provides a critical forum for nonstate actors to engage directly with state actors (Parties) and other stakeholders (Ayers, Alam, and Huq 2014; Gupta 2010). Between COPs, intersessional meetings of subsidiary and expert groups, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), regularly occur. Despite the uneven access of nonstate actors to these fora (Ford et al. 2016a; Green Climate Fund 2012), these meetings provide opportunities for engagement in different stages and aspects of decision-making processes (Kuyper, Linnér, and Schroeder 2018). The proliferation of side events

and nonnegotiating mechanisms provides additional opportunities to raise awareness and engage with diverse stakeholders (Bäckstrand et al. 2017; Hale 2016; Schroeder and Lovell 2012).

Since the *Declaration of the First International Forum of Indigenous Peoples on Climate Change* in 2000, Indigenous participants have petitioned for special status and dedicated funding to participate effectively in UNFCCC processes, akin to mechanisms that exist within the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) (Claeys and Delgado Pugley 2017; Corntassel 2007; Schroeder 2010).[3] Though IPs can attend through various channels, including as members of state delegations, most Indigenous participants are formally accredited as nonstate observers (Comberti, Thornton, and Korodimou 2016; Havemann 2016). In response to a growing Indigenous presence, the UNFCCC recognized the Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) as an official constituency in 2001; this formalized resources offered to all nine constituencies within the UNFCCC, including limited speaking rights and designated office space (Kuyper and Bäckstrand 2016). In 2008, the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) was established to facilitate unified negotiation positions for IPs in the UNFCCC (Claeys and Delgado Pugley 2017).

Despite a general trend of growing civil society participation in the UNFCCC, members of the IPO constituency continue to represent a tiny fraction of overall participation, making up approximately 2 percent of nonstate observers at COP22 (UNFCCC 2017). Though IPs hold a formal standing equivalent to researchers or industry, there is increasing recognition within the UNFCCC of the distinction between IPs and civil society organizations (CSOs). For instance, the Indigenous Pavilion provides material and symbolic visibility, despite limited interaction with negotiators in this space (Comberti, Thornton, and Korodimou 2016; Foyer and Dumoulin Kervran 2017; Schroeder 2010). The LCIPP, though still in development, is expected to create a formal and distinct space for IPs within the UNFCCC (UNFCCC 2015).

Advancements in the status of IPs within the UNFCCC have been reinforced by advocacy and engagement in other fora (Burger 2016; Claeys and Delgado Pugley 2017; Lightfoot 2016; Smith and Sharp 2012; Suiseeya 2014). Key international victories include the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and the UNHRC Declaration 10/4 on climate change and human rights (2009). Despite limited implementation and their nonbinding nature (Lightfoot 2016), these agreements are directly referenced in several UNFCCC decisions (UNFCCC 2010, 2015). Additionally, there is growing acknowledgment that Indigenous and traditional knowledge

3. In the UNCBD, IPs have a voluntary fund to support attendance and designated advisory status through the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) (Betzold and Flesken 2014; Schroeder 2010). The UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples provides financial support for IPs to attend the UNPFII. However, chronic underfunding constrains its capacity to do so adequately (Corntassel 2007).

should be better represented in scientific assessments like the IPCC (Ford et al. 2016a; Raffel 2016; Smith and Sharp 2012).

Yet acknowledgment is not enough to advance fuller participation for Indigenous delegates (Paulson et al. 2012). Barriers to Indigenous participation and factors supporting Indigenous involvement in multiactor environmental governance regimes have been explored at local to international scales (Paulson et al. 2012; Reo et al. 2017; von der Porten and De Loë 2013). The literature on improved participation in environmental decision-making predominantly focuses on procedural justice: increasing fairness in who gets to participate, and to what extent, in decision-making processes. Yet critics have argued that mainstream participatory approaches are overly narrow, failing to consider the social context in which these programs exist, for instance, underlying social and environmental injustices, power imbalances, and the diversity of actors involved (Paulson et al. 2012; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). Writing about Indigenous engagement with environmental governance regimes, Whyte (2011, 200) proposes an additional dimension, recognition justice, which "requires that policies and programs must meet the standard of fairly considering and representing the cultures, values, and situations of all affected parties"; Whyte argues that it is precisely where Parties come together, in traditional or nontraditional participatory processes, that recognition justice is either affirmed or denied. The factors influencing these two elements—procedural and recognition justice—for Indigenous participants in the UNFCCC are examined in this article.

Methods

Semistructured interviews (n = 14) were conducted with key informants with the aim of assessing participants' experiences navigating the UNFCCC process, including opportunities and barriers that informants faced, their interactions with other groups or individuals at the UNFCCC, and the activities and goals of their organizations (Table 1).

Initially, key informants were identified through the IPO constituency list published on the UNFCCC website, which captures both Indigenous and support organizations whose primary affiliation is with the IPO constituency. After it became apparent that this did not fully capture the Indigenous participants attending meetings (see the section "Accreditation, Funding, and Language"), inclusion criteria were broadened to all Indigenous participants attending to advance community concerns or Indigenous rights issues (Table A3, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/suppl/10.1162/glep_a_00489/suppl_file/Belfer-online%20APPENDIX.pdf). Informants were identified through snowball sampling from the constituency list and through personal connections made at COP23 in Bonn. Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, and on Skype, with the option to retain anonymity in reporting of results.

The small n in this study reflects a low overall population (on average, fewer than one hundred IPO constituency participants in any given COP;

Table 1
Key Themes and Example Interview Questions

Key Theme	*Example Question*
Activities, goals, and tactics	In general, what goals or objectives does your organization have when attending the COP? (For example, what does your organization aim to achieve? Whom do you hope to influence?)
	In general, during the COP, what activities do you partake in?
Delegation composition	How does your organization decide which members will attend the COP conferences? Can you describe any processes, considerations or criteria that guide your organization's decision-making process?
Stakeholder interactions	Can you describe your interactions with UNFCCC officials? With members of environmental or conservation NGOs? With the media?
Opportunities	Have there been particular opportunities that have facilitated or allowed your organization to achieve its goals at the COP? At UNFCCC meetings other than the COP (e.g., workshops, fora, roundtables)?
	In general, is there anything about the COP that you find works well?
Constraints	What would your organization need from the UNFCCC and/or from Party states in order to be able to better achieve its goals at UNFCCC meetings, including the COP?
COP vs. intersessionals	In a few sentences, briefly describe any notable differences between your experience attending the COP and attending other UNFCCC meetings.
Other	Of the COPs that you have attended, was there one that was particularly memorable?

Betzold and Flesken 2014; UNFCCC 2017). In many respects, difficulties in conducting interviews also foreshadow barriers to participation in the UNFCCC: limited time, interviews conducted in English, the researcher's conference accreditation providing limited venue access, and the intensity and duration of the platform negotiations made it difficult to interview informants. Access constraints and the sampling method chosen mean that results predominantly capture experiences of participants attending as nonstate observers; only two participants reported

attending as part of state delegations, though both had mostly attended under non-state accreditation. It is clear that at least some of the opportunities and constraints available to IPs participating in UNFCCC processes through other channels would differ from those outlined in this research, as is partially discussed in the results.

The informants represent six of seven geographic regions identified by the IIPFCC, lacking representation from Asia. The organizations represented by informants are Indigenous federations/councils ($n = 3$), Indigenous-led advocacy and land rights organizations ($n = 4$), Indigenous community support organizations ($n = 4$), funding organizations ($n = 1$), and youth groups ($n = 2$). Six women and eight men were interviewed, and no elders were represented. The chosen informants represent diverse perspectives, experiences with the UNFCCC (Figure A2), positionalities, and local and regional contexts, though they are not intended to be a representative sample.

An abductive approach was used to guide interview design, coding, and analysis of data (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). Accordingly, semistructured interviews were designed to identify opportunities, constraints, and strategies, building on themes identified through a literature review and familiarization with broader developments within the UNFCCC and the major elements of the UNFCCC process (Table 1). Interviews were transcribed, and a codebook was developed through two iterated readings of transcriptions; codes reflect opportunities and constraints as well as newly emerged common themes, actors, institutional structures, and strategies (Table S4 online, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/suppl/10.1162/glep_a_00489/suppl_file/Belfer-online%20APPENDIX.pdf). Throughout the familiarization and coding processes, a research journal was kept for researcher reflexivity; our positionality, as non-Indigenous North Americans and Europeans, and its likely effects on responses and interpretation of results are discussed in the online Appendix (https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/suppl/10.1162/glep_a_00489/suppl_file/Belfer-online%20APPENDIX.pdf). Major themes identified through this abductive coding process are used to structure the results of this article.

Results and Discussion

The opportunities, constraints, and strategies identified by informants inform and shape one another; many of the opportunities available to Indigenous participants today are themselves the product of years of tactical maneuvering at prior COPs and intersessionals. These findings do not aim to capture the entirety of Indigenous experiences of the COP, nor do they present a set of fixed and absolute constraints and opportunities that exist within the UNFCCC.

Accreditation, Funding, and Language: Material Constraints and Networks of Support

> To navigate the COP, it's the badges. Having a yellow badge and pink badge, then they have a secondary badge, and many small meetings, many

> informal, and all of them going [on] in English, and every year there is a new topic, a new acronym, a new item, all those are very complicated. There are so many we cannot follow everything, and then a small thing you didn't follow you find yourself out because it can have a big consequence in your life, your people's lives.
>
> —Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, Co-Chair of IIPFCC, Coordinator of the Association des Femmes Peules Autochtones du Tchad (AFPAT)

For most Indigenous delegates, simply attending UNFCCC meetings is no trivial task; every informant described material challenges of attendance, from funding to visas and travel documentation. Funding was the most consistently cited constraint, and dedicated funding for attendance is one of the longest-standing demands made by IPOs and the IIPFCC[4] (First International Forum of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities on Climate Change 2000). With this demand still unmet, informants described pursuing a diversity of funding sources each year—including the United Nations Development Programme and UNESCO, private foundations, government funding, and even crowdsourcing—with time spent fund-raising limiting some participants' capacity to work on other projects. Given funding constraints, meeting locations impact the constituency's regional composition (Hjerpe and Linnér 2010). Furthermore, one informant, a technical adviser, argued that responsibility for supporting Indigenous attendance has been implicitly "delegated" from the UNFCCC to an assortment of public and private institutions, notably, one-time state donations (e.g., Norway and Germany) to facilitate Indigenous attendance and support the Indigenous Pavilion. These state donations were identified by multiple informants as having substantial impacts on the size, diversity, and capacity of the Indigenous constituency. Donor restrictions—limiting the number of attendees, prohibiting international travel, or only funding participants from developing countries—were identified by several informants as an additional hurdle. One informant from a funding organization noted that participants may rely on an external nongovernmental organization (NGO) for funding and accreditation but find that their time at the COP is spent promoting the organization's agenda rather than their own objectives. The impacts of "delegation" of responsibility to Western NGOs have been raised elsewhere (Paulson et al. 2012). From year to year, delegation size differs in response to the perceived relevance of the meeting (by participants and donors); for instance, one informant described sending fifteen delegates to COP21 in Paris but only being able to afford to send two to COP23 in Bonn. On average, informants reported attending their most recent COP with a team of three to five others; however, multiple informants noted that the overall number of Indigenous delegates attending both COPs and intersessionals has increased over time.

4. First International Forum of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities on Climate Change. 2000. Lyon, France: Lyon Declaration.

Securing badges to attend UNFCCC meetings requires advance registration through an organization already recognized by the Secretariat, with badges granting access to negotiations more limited in number (UNFCCC 2017). Underlying this formal and restrictive registration process, informants describe an intricate web of informal support networks: participants regularly pool and redistribute badges once organizational allocations have been made, supporting those who have missed registration deadlines and conducting regional and organizational consultations about which leaders and participants would most benefit from badges to the negotiation space. These discussions draw on preexisting regional networks and connections made in local, regional, and international fora; likewise, support organizations regularly distribute all but one or two badges to Indigenous partners.

Language poses an additional constraint to full participation in all elements of the UNFCCC process. First, though simultaneous translation into the UNFCCC's official languages—English, Spanish, and French—is provided in the negotiation space, capacity for translation in working groups, contact meetings, and the Indigenous caucus is limited, and evolving draft texts from negotiations are released only in English. Within the Indigenous constituency, representatives and supporters report addressing this gap through informal translation but face time constraints. Even for those fluent in English, scientific and bureaucratic jargon is difficult to follow and replicate in statements and interventions, hindering the ability of actors to effectively participate (Comberti, Thornton, and Korodimou 2016; Roger and Belliethathan 2016). Informants described a variety of methods used to navigate these hurdles: at an organizational level, teams bring representatives and technical advisers who can navigate language barriers, while the technical team appointed by the IIPFCC provides broader capacity to the Indigenous constituency. However, when funding and badges for attendance are limited, it raises difficult questions of how to balance a team's composition and how to adequately support delegates attending. Moreover, these initiatives fail to address fundamental power imbalances and knowledge biases embodied in language: "Sometimes it's different to speak the colonist's language. . . . This is a challenge because of how you interpret concepts, how you interpret words or worldview. We're getting better and better at this, because we don't want to be on the outside of the game."

The major material constraints named by informants—funding, badges, and language—mirror those faced by many CSO representatives. However, equality of opportunity obscures inequity of outcome. First, legacies of colonialism and ongoing discrimination continue to have tangible impacts on IPs' access to funding sources, both directly and through social networks (Cameron 2012; Nakashima et al. 2012); the availability of badges does not ensure procedural justice. Second, funding restrictions reflect normative understandings about the "correct" method of Indigenous engagement in international fora: principally, that Indigenous concerns are fundamentally "domestic" and best addressed at a national level (Corntassel 2007; Ford 2009; Lightfoot 2016).

Furthermore, material constraints stymie recognition justice: there is scarce funding for orientation, translation, or support needs, while the predominance of jargon within the UNFCCC reflects an ongoing need to further "translate" Indigenous knowledge into data that conform with existing institutional decision-making structures (Ford et al. 2016a; Nadasdy 1999; Smith and Sharp 2012). For Indigenous communities and organizations who lack overseas travel experience, fluency in English, or prior linkages to organizations attending UNFCCC meetings, the constraints to participation are even higher. Indigenous networks work to redress these issues by acting as a hub for coordination and redistribution of resources and a source of technical support. However, these initiatives can only temporarily redress the underlying issue of a lack of permanent, recurring, and easily accessible funding and badges for attendance and support of Indigenous delegates.

Shifting Access in the Negotiation Space

Limited institutional openness—defined by both formal rules of access and the extent of recognition of IPs as stakeholders (Betzold and Flesken 2014)—establishes the "rules of the game" for Indigenous participants. Notably, in the negotiation space, the plurality of working and contact groups, each more or less open to observers, creates both opportunities and challenges for observers. Though not all informants agreed, some noted that the practice of closing meetings made it impossible not only to participate in discussions directly but also to follow state positions, a constraint echoed in the literature (Nasiritousi and Linnér 2016). One informant argued that seemingly mundane shifts in the organization of contact groups can have drastic repercussions for access to observers; the decision to combine debates on forestry (a relatively fruitful space for discussion between IPs and Parties) with agriculture (a contentious topic between Parties) into a contact group on land use would likely extinguish the space available to Indigenous participants to intervene in ongoing discussions.

Despite the COP's status as the central decision-making forum, several informants who are longtime participants in the UNFCCC process identified other meetings as more influential on final outcomes. Year-round, a smaller number of Indigenous representatives attend intersessionals, workshops, and meetings with the past and current COP presidencies. The time commitment of this level of involvement is substantial: one technical adviser noted, "We were going to pre-COPs every two months at some point." Though far more specific and technical, the smaller size and preliminary nature of intersessionals provide key advantages: informants well versed in the UNFCCC process identified opportunities to intervene in agenda-setting and to more easily access government delegations and determine their positions in advance of the COP. Similarly, having a presidency that was perceived as "open" to Indigenous interests could facilitate the development of a broader common agenda more inclusive of IPs, the creation of channels of engagement outside of the negotiation space, and

the organization of informal meetings between government representatives and the Indigenous constituency to develop common understanding before negotiations began.

Elsewhere, it has been argued that "closed" meetings are rarely fully opaque to observers—through friendly state delegates on the inside, observers can maintain informal methods of following negotiations (Nasiritousi and Linnér 2016). Indeed, a strong network of champions can generate a vastly improved—if tenuous—access to the negotiating space. Nowhere is this more evident than in the discussions on the LCIPP: one informant described how, at the forty-seventh meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA47) at COP23, the chair invited local communities and IP representatives to affirm support or express concerns for each paragraph of the LCIPP dialogue report (FCCC/SBSTA/2017/6); when the chair would forget, friendly Parties intervened with a reminder. In this instance, a preexisting network of champions built by the Indigenous caucus enabled Indigenous representatives to directly participate in negotiations—conditional, as always, on the approval of the moderators and Parties present. Likewise, Indigenous informants noted that invitations to "informal informals"—closed informal groups developed to draft a subsection of text or resolve a particular problem (Ramos-Castillo, Castellanos, and McLean 2017; Reo et al. 2017)—allowed for open dialogue with Parties; these, along with informal meetings, were identified as key opportunities to directly discuss in plain language positions and address misunderstandings: in essence, to promote a fairer exchange of positions.

Strong personal relationships and a sense of unity and solidarity were often named as integral by informants to progress at the COP; as a physical site of meeting, a hub for networking and awareness raising, a locus for coordinating demands and strategies, and a place to invite supportive and skeptical decision makers, the Indigenous caucus is central to the constituency. Many informants discussed the immense importance of having a physical space to connect with other Indigenous peoples. These connections stretch outside of the UNFCCC, with informants reporting visits to other Indigenous governments and organizations throughout the year. However, the many different functions of the caucus space can come into competition given limited time and capacity. Notably, the emphasis on coordination of Indigenous demands (see the "Crossing Scales" sections) raises the stakes of public disagreements and debates between participants, and several informants spoke of tensions over the presence of non-Indigenous observers when strategic positions are being debated between Indigenous delegates.

Alliances with trade unions, the women and gender constituency, and a broader human rights coalition were credited by multiple informants as providing a strengthened front to push for human rights considerations in decision outcomes (Claeys and Delgado Pugley 2017). Increasingly, informants describe efforts to mobilize at the intersections of struggles with other constituencies; for instance, one informant described promoting an Indigenous youth working

group within the Youth NGO (YOUNGO) constituency, while others noted the work of Indigenous women within the women and gender constituency. Almost all the informants had also attended other international fora—most commonly the UNPFII—an indication of the multifaceted pursuit of Indigenous rights internationally.

The nonstate observer status of Indigenous participants poses the risk of inequality in access within the UNFCCC. Parties maintain the power to decide whether meetings are "relevant" to Indigenous participants; whether to approve changes in procedure; and, on a state-by-state basis, whether national positions should be developed in consultation with IPs. This power imbalance puts Parties in the position of deciding unilaterally which issues are "relevant" for participation. Across the UNFCCC as a whole, unevenness in formal rules for access—for instance, only two CSO representatives actively participate in Green Climate Fund meetings (Green Climate Fund 2012)—risks replicating this siloing at an institutional level. While these limitations are true for all observers, there is a unique risk for Indigenous participants: non-Indigenous interpretations of Indigenous knowledge may constrain participation, particularly where these notions conflict with those articulated by Indigenous participants. For instance, Indigenous participation may be seen as relevant to adaptation but not mitigation (Ramos-Castillo, Castellanos, and McLean 2017; Reo et al. 2017). In the absence of procedural justice, participants seek recognition through personal relationships and appeals to "open-minded" participants in the UNFCCC and other international fora; indeed, open-mindedness has been cited as a condition for improved participation in similar research (Paulson et al. 2012; Reo et al. 2017). Much as the extent of participation is formally delineated by UNFCCC protocol, it is also fluid, shifting in response to a complex web of interventions made by Indigenous participants seeking greater recognition.

Combating Disrespect, Tokenism, and Legacies of Colonialism

Under the Fijian presidency, Fijian traditions were central to the high-level ceremonies at COP23;[5] during what was in many respects an unprecedented formal inclusion of Indigenous cultural traditions into UNFCCC processes, several informants discussed the delicate balance between the importance of visibility and the perils of being seen without being heard. In particular, the two youth informants in this study, both first-time attendees of the COP, discussed the challenges of navigating tokenism. Maia Ratana, a member of the Māori and Pasifika youth group Te Ara Whatu, pointed to this contradiction in discussing pressure to perform the haka at COP23: "As young people, we wanted to do things differently and change the expectation and say, 'We're not here for that, we're here for other reasons. We're not here to dance and show ourselves off, we're here to try and make some change.'"

5. https://cop23.com.fj/cultural-items-cop23/, last accessed December 19, 2018.

Likewise, Michael Charles, part of a delegation of youth climate justice leaders, noted, "We know that if we show up, we become tokenized and people think that's an adequate voice, but if we don't show up, we also recognize that there will be no voice and no one else to step in."

The presence of IPs and Indigenous ceremony, spirituality, and culture has long been contested within United Nations fora (Lightfoot 2015, 2016). While the sanctioned inclusion of Indigenous cultural elements into high-level ceremonies offers unprecedented visibility, it risks conveying an aura of greater "inclusivity" despite little fundamental progress. Well aware of these dynamics, delegates from the Indigenous caucus strategically engage with the double-edged sword of visibility, simultaneously participating in formal processes and disrupting the status quo through actions.

Experiences of tokenism are one instance of a lack of recognition repeatedly raised by informants. Several informants described the closing ceremony at COP21 in Paris, where IPOs were the last constituency to deliver their allotted three-minute statement. After hours of Party speeches (unlimited in duration), the IPs' representative delivered a statement to a room devoid of state representatives; several informants described this moment as a sharp reminder of the lack of respect for their role in the negotiation of the Paris Agreement. Likewise, in the lead-up to COP23 in Bonn, one informant noted that a report summarizing the outcomes of submissions and the dialogue during SBSTA46 was published online without soliciting the IIPFCC's review, undermining their ability to weigh in on the synthesis of key discussion points. Furthermore, participants noted experiencing interpersonal disrespect from non-Indigenous participants—informants highlighted non-Indigenous researchers sitting in on Indigenous caucus meetings without announcing their intentions, while other research has described Indigenous leaders being openly treated like a novelty at the COP (Comberti, Thornton, and Korodimou 2016). Characterizing her exhaustion at having to constantly engage with apathy and disrespect within the UNFCCC, one informant noted, "The COP negotiation looks like a machine: they do not have a face; they are not human."

In the midst of well-publicized, intentional changes explicitly characterized as including the voices of IPs in the UNFCCC process, participants still report a need to constantly defend and reaffirm the basic legitimacy of their presence and demands to other Parties; in part, this is a manifestation of continuing conflicts between Western and Indigenous systems of knowledge (Ford et al. 2016a; Nadasdy 1999; Nyong, Adesina, and Osman-Elasha 2007). These instances continue to remind participants that are not fully recognized in global environmental governance processes. On one hand, Indigenous ceremonies are trumpeted as a sign of inclusiveness, without serious respect for the culturally specific knowledge that these ceremonies may represent (Reo et al. 2017). On the other, Indigenous knowledge is still viewed narrowly through the lens of Western knowledge: one support member pointed to the growing body of academic literature as one effective avenue of communication with Parties. This

observation mirrors broader debates about the extent to which Indigenous knowledge is meaningfully incorporated into technocratic institutions (Ford et al. 2016a; Smith and Sharp 2012) and underscores the risk of Indigenous knowledge only being valued where it directly supports existing scientific knowledge and worldviews (Comberti, Thornton, and Korodimou 2016), constraining the potential for meaningful participation.

Crossing Scales: From Local to International

While each Indigenous organization has particular demands, the international scale and the limitations of observer status demand the creation of a relatively unified Indigenous negotiating bloc. The work of coordinating the highly diverse IP constituency is spearheaded by the IIPFCC and by organizations at regional and local scales throughout the year. At the UNFCCC, delegates face the challenge of responding to ongoing developments in the negotiation space, while reflecting the results of local and regional consultations *and* considering the needs and demands of colleagues with vastly different circumstances. The overall paucity of Indigenous representation can force participants into a more globally representative role, a Sisyphean task given the incredible diversity of communities, with distinct understandings of climate change and political, social, and environmental circumstances. One informant described the reluctant assumption of the role of "an Indigenous diplomat" when meeting with state parties—representing one's own community *and* the international Indigenous rights movement—while a youth delegate noted a pressure to act on behalf of *all* Indigenous youth. At intersessionals and smaller UNFCCC meetings in particular, several dozen delegates face the challenge of making on-the-spot decisions with potential widespread implications on IPs. In navigating UNFCCC processes, several informants stressed that a sense of solidarity among Indigenous delegates is central to the process of synthesizing local and regional demands into a coherent, global set of demands, a sentiment that is echoed across the broader international Indigenous rights movement (Lightfoot 2015).

Crossing Scales: From International to Local

Even at the international level, informants participate with an eye toward local implications. For many groups, the mere act of attending the COP opens the possibility of accessing high-level government officials who are otherwise inaccessible. In discussing attending the COP, Cindy Dickson, executive director of the Arctic Athabaskan Council, noted,

> [Our leaders] wanted to hear, "What's the point, how's it going to benefit us here in the Yukon?" . . . What we used to say is some of the biggest benefits are that you get to interact with people that you would not normally interact with, those would be heads of Canadian departments, . . . you get to have

> access to the minister, you can meet with different people, let them know what's happening, and sometimes I think that it really had an influence on our programming here in Canada for climate change funding. So, I think it's very important.

However, as another informant noted, the ministry attending the negotiations may not be the same as the officials or ministers responsible for implementation.

When UNFCCC meetings end, and Indigenous delegates return to their respective contexts, a new set of challenges emerges, including results-sharing, agenda-setting, and implementation. For instance, while the framing of "Indigenous solutions" to climate change is being adopted across the UNFCCC, there remain fundamental questions about how knowledge can be shared while respecting the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent; how these solutions will relate to existing initiatives; and who will have ownership over these projects. Though engagement at the local level was not explicitly addressed by the interviews, several informants noted the challenge of bridging their community-based work and short, intensive periods of engagement with the UNFCCC. For delegates who follow negotiations at a more in-depth level, there is a trade-off between time needed to intervene in and follow the negotiations of the UNFCCC and other international bodies and time spent engaging at the local level. As the Paris Agreement shifts the locus of action toward the national level, and countries pursue their nationally determined contributions, it remains to be seen how developments for IPs at the international level will impact circumstances at national, regional, and local levels.

Conclusions

Indigenous participants in the UNFCCC have long demanded meaningful participation in decision-making processes. This article captures some of those participants' experiences navigating the UNFCCC process, outlining opportunities, constraints, and strategies developed in response. Informants outlined material constraints (funding, badges, orientation and support needs, and lack of translation), procedural constraints (closed meetings, uneven access, routine turnover and scientific/technical jargon), and recognition-based constraints (lack of political will, disrespect, tokenism, and the physical/emotional toll of attendance), underscoring the negative impact of nonstate observer status on Indigenous delegates. Despite these constraints, important opportunities motivate participants to continue to engage in these fora: opportunities for agenda-setting, the ability to access high-level ministers and influence both international and national policy, the opportunity to meet and collaborate with other IPs through the caucus, alliances with CSOs, and the ultimate goal of working toward climate solutions that are both effective and equitable.

The strong network of champions that Indigenous participants in the UNFCCC have developed over the past decade creates opportunities for

participation in the UNFCCC beyond what procedures dictate. However, this fluctuating, informal space, created through advocacy and strategic engagement, is vulnerable to regime change, shifting political will, and the built-in rotation of the COP presidency. Aware of these challenges, Indigenous participants have broadened their outreach to a wide array of actors. The growing size of the Indigenous caucus and increasing recognition of the importance of Indigenous voices strengthen these efforts. Still, deep-seated procedural inequities within the institution privilege the voices of non-Indigenous actors in delimiting the extent of Indigenous participation in the UNFCCC.

The establishment of the LCIPP at COP21 in Paris marks a procedural achievement, establishing the first formal, permanent, and distinct space created for IPs within the UNFCCC. Unlike existing initiatives, the LCIPP is designed to feed directly into the negotiations process as a facilitative working group. Though it is explicitly not a negotiating body, the platform's focus on knowledge, capacity for engagement, and climate change policies and actions has potential to address some of the constraints and heighten some of the opportunities identified by informants, for instance, providing a physical space to debate and discuss best practices, a forum for fostering dialogue between states and Indigenous participants about what inclusive national and international action could look like, and a mechanism for increasing the capacity of Indigenous communities to implement their own projects. Likewise, if the working group can directly submit conclusions and recommendations for consideration by Parties, the LCIPP may provide a channel for Indigenous participants to participate in debates that are politically contentious between states. However, while much is still unknown, one of the fundamental questions is the extent to which the operationalization of a formal mechanism for IPs will inadvertently pressure existing informal spaces. As Estebancio Castro Diaz, adviser and head of the delegation of the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests, noted,

> We are very careful to know that in the future the Parties cannot say, "They have the platform so they can decide things over there," because then we have a different discussion within the UNFCCC, like Loss and Damage, like the Nairobi Working Group.

If the operationalization of the platform is used by Parties to silo Indigenous voices to one body or reduce access to different stages of negotiations, it may have the inadvertent effect of reducing the extent of participation of IPs within the UNFCCC.

This study also illuminates constraints and opportunities that are not reflected during ongoing discussions about the functions of the platform. The disrespect and tokenism experienced by informants point to a need for greater cross-cultural education for non-Indigenous participants; furthermore, rather than paying lip service to inclusivity, Parties and nonstate observers ought to consider expanding informal practices, such as ceding time and space for

Indigenous participants to directly weigh in on ongoing debates. The pressures to function as a homogeneous Indigenous bloc, reflecting the CSO structure of the UNFCCC, may change if the LCIPP increases the size of the overall delegation, or may be reinforced by the process of drafting and submitting reports and recommendations. It remains to be seen whether dedicated funding for the LCIPP will address the material constraints discussed, and to what extent the platform will impact the number or composition of participants who are in the room for decisions.

Suggestions for improving participation emerge directly from the explicitly voiced needs of people interviewed. These include providing secure, recurring, easily accessible funding for attendance and participation in COPs, intersessionals, *and* other UNFCCC meetings throughout the year, which reflects orientation and support needs of delegates; ensuring that the Indigenous constituency has access to badges, particularly to access the negotiation space, considering equitable regional representation of delegates; providing additional translation support, both of dialogue and of draft text, outside of the main plenary; and strengthening formal and informal channels for IPs to directly participate in negotiations. These suggestions are not new: they have been made by the IIPFCC for years and illuminate potential pathways toward expanding the participation of Indigenous participants in the UNFCCC, in addition to the LCIPP.

Still, expanding the notion of participation beyond a narrow and restricted procedural element raises challenging questions about what remains to be done. Indeed, it is important to consider what a system built on procedural and recognitional justice for Indigenous peoples would look like—without a doubt, it would involve developing new and fuller forms of participation, as is called for by Whyte (2011). Meaningful recognition of the many systems of Indigenous knowledge, including the use of Indigenous languages, of diverse understandings of the environment, of different forms of decision-making, and of the right to self-determination, will require deeper institutional transitions. Long-term impacts of disrespect, lack of recognition, and tokenism on the Indigenous participants in these fora also deserve further attention. Undoubtedly, if the UNFCCC wishes to truly pursue more meaningful inclusion of Indigenous peoples, in accordance with the rights set out under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, much remains to be done.

This research points to additional research needs: results do not aim to capture the entirety of perspectives of Indigenous participants in the UNFCCC, nor do they address the perspectives of those unwilling or unable to participate in these fora. Implementation, which was outside the scope of this research, is a critical element in transforming international decisions into real changes for Indigenous peoples. Future research areas include investigating the experiences of IPs participating in the UNFCCC through other channels, examining the implementation of the LCIPP platform and its impacts on communities, tracking the

implementation of international decisions, and investigating the tangible impacts of UNFCCC outcomes on diverse Indigenous communities at local and regional levels.

In the evolving landscape of Indigenous inclusion in the UNFCCC, the impacts of the LCIPP are yet to be seen; however, the impacts of decades of strategic Indigenous mobilization on the opportunities available for IPs within these fora are becoming more evident within the UNFCCC. While the international community hails a step toward fuller participation through the LCIPP, this article highlights the additional work required at the platform's foundation. Echoing Paulson et al. (2012), it is our hope that explicitly highlighting opportunities and constraints to more meaningful participation will support the conversation begun by Indigenous peoples at the first International Forum of Indigenous Peoples on Climate Change.

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