

Virtual consultation with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples on:

**Indigenous Women and the Development, Application, Preservation
and Transmission of Scientific Knowledge**

**March 14, 2022
8:00 am – 9:30am MST**

Register [here](#) by March 9, 2022

The [Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples](#) will hold a virtual consultation to inform his annual report to the Human Rights Council on **Indigenous Women and the Development, Application, Preservation and Transmission of Scientific Knowledge**, to be presented at its 51st session in September 2022. The report will focus on the role of indigenous women as scientific and technical knowledge keepers in the context of international human rights law and identify current threats and challenges that indigenous women face, both internally and externally, for being women and indigenous. The report will provide recommendations for ensuring and protecting indigenous women’s ability to develop, apply, maintain and transmit knowledge and propose best practices for State and international support as well as for indigenous women-led initiatives.

Indigenous women play a vital role as holders of scientific and technical knowledge related to medicines and foods, conservation and the preservation of language, culture, and generational histories. Their knowledge is critical in creating solutions to conflict through indigenous justice; in addressing climate change and the preservation and protection of biodiversity; to maintaining indigenous identity and knowledge; achieving sustainable development; and building resilience in the face of pandemics and other extreme events. The terminology “scientific and technical knowledge” is used in lieu of the more common “traditional knowledge” to underscore that indigenous knowledge is contemporary and dynamic, not static and fixed in time. It further emphasizes that indigenous knowledge is a sophisticated set of understandings of no less value than other kinds of knowledge and often forms the foundation of “Western” science.

Indigenous women reproduce and protect indigenous identity, culture, and societal roles on the lands and territories they have historically used and occupied. Because of their relationship with the land and natural environment and the marginalization they face for being women and indigenous, indigenous women are disproportionately affected by the loss of territory due to climate change, the development of megaprojects, and occupation of their lands. Patriarchal norms in indigenous communities, created by colonization, have increased discrimination. In many cases,

this has hindered equal access to land rights and resources, limiting development opportunities and women’s participation in decision-making processes.

In the absence of culturally appropriate legal frameworks that conform to international human rights standards, indigenous women's knowledge can be exploited or misused by external interests including the tourism, pharmaceutical and fashion industries. Likewise, indigenous women's knowledge can be lost or stolen, as in the case of misappropriation of traditional plants, human remains, and other cultural artifacts taken from burial/cultural sites by collectors, anthropologists, curators, or biologists. Finally, excluding women's knowledge from the design of programmes and policies can limit the full enjoyment of indigenous women's fundamental rights, for example through exclusion of indigenous medicine from State health care systems. Indigenous women are often excluded from decision-making processes, as international and national institutions overlook their contributions. To protect and recognize the role of indigenous women knowledge keepers as active participants rather than beneficiaries, States, international organizations and indigenous peoples must adopt a culturally appropriate human rights-based approach in accordance with the standards set out in United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 31 in particular.

Previous UN studies have examined the topic of indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge and (E/C.19/2015/4, [E/C.19/2014/2](#), [E/C.19/2013/5](#), [E/C.19/2007/10](#)) and cultural heritage ([A/HRC/30/53](#)), which was the theme of the 18th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2019. Despite increasing attention by international bodies to the issue of indigenous knowledge and culture, to date, no UN study examines the topic from a gender-based perspective. While recognizing and not diminishing the contributions of men in developing and perpetuating knowledge, such a study is necessary to highlight the unique challenges faced by indigenous women in retaining and revitalizing their role as knowledge keepers.

AGENDA

8:00 am MST	Welcome
8:10 am MST	Remarks from the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples
8:25 am MST	Open discussion with participants: 1) indigenous women as scientific knowledge keepers 2) current threats to indigenous women’s knowledge - barriers and challenges 3) best practices led by indigenous peoples, States and international organizations in supporting indigenous women’s knowledge
9:20 pm MST	Closing statements and next steps

The Special Rapporteur requests inputs from Member States and inter-governmental entities, UN agencies, indigenous peoples and organizations, civil society actors, women rights organizations, humanitarian and development organizations, national human rights institutions, business representatives and other stakeholders, to contribute to the preparation of the report. Submissions can be made to ohchr-indigenous@un.org by 22 March 2022 in English, French or Spanish. Kindly indicate in the subject of your email “Submission to 51st HRC session report.” Please limit inputs to 10 pages.

Submissions will be published as received on the mandate’s webpage. Kindly indicate if you DO NOT wish your submission to be made public.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The Special Rapporteur is particularly interested in receiving inputs on **any or all** of the following issues, including case studies and specific examples of best practices led by indigenous peoples as well as initiatives taken by States to protect the role of indigenous women as knowledge keepers and that promote the vision and approaches of indigenous peoples.

Indigenous women as knowledge keepers

1. What areas of indigenous scientific and technical knowledge are specifically within the primary or sole purview of women in your communities? (for example, textiles, food preparation, midwifery, healthcare and medicine, education, conservation, and agriculture, among others)
2. What role do indigenous women play in developing, applying, maintaining, and transmitting to future generations both women-specific indigenous knowledge and indigenous knowledge more generally, including through political and environmental decision-making inside the community and at the national and international level?
3. How has indigenous women’s scientific and technical knowledge contributed to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in particular on the following issues:
 - a) treatment and prevention of Covid-19 or other health concerns
 - b) climate change solutions and environmental protection
 - c) peace and conflict
 - d) food security
 - e) development of indigenous-led business enterprises
 - f) security of land tenure and resources
 - g) women’s empowerment within their communities

Current threats to indigenous women’s knowledge

4. What are the main obstacles, both external and internal from within their communities, that indigenous women face in retaining or revitalizing their role as knowledge keepers?

5. What are the challenges faced by indigenous women in transmitting their scientific knowledge and are there any mechanisms in place to ensure that indigenous women remain in control over the manner in which their knowledge is transmitted?
6. How has indigenous women's knowledge, notably through the legal concept of intellectual property, been misappropriated and exploited for the financial gain of others?
7. What can indigenous peoples, States or international organizations do to support indigenous women's participation in the market economy as it pertains to their scientific knowledge and genetic resources (for example, through intellectual property rights protections)?

Best practices led by indigenous peoples, States and international organizations

8. What are indigenous peoples, States or international organizations doing to support indigenous women in developing, applying, transmitting, and preserving specialized scientific, cultural and environmental knowledge or to invest in indigenous women-specific initiatives? Has indigenous women's knowledge been integrated into any governmental systems and/or policies (e.g., school curricula, healthcare systems, conservation efforts, etc.)? If possible, please share your personal experience with indigenous women's knowledge being acknowledged, respected, preserved and/or protected? (Personal information and details will not be included in the report.)
9. In what ways are States or international organizations acknowledging indigenous women's contributions or impairing the ability of women to preserve, develop, apply and transmit indigenous knowledge?
10. Is indigenous women's knowledge recognized and protected by indigenous legal systems, or by local, national or international laws and policies?
11. What are indigenous peoples and their representative organizations, States and international organizations doing to address impediments to women's participation in political processes, planning and decision-making?
12. Are indigenous peoples, States and international organizations collecting and analyzing disaggregated data on indigenous women as it pertains to their role as knowledge keepers?