**REPORTING FORMAT FOR RAPPORTEURS**

*Rapporteur’s name:* **Muhammad Anique Azam**, **Krisztian Mark Balla**

*Rapporteur’s nationality:* Pakistan, Hungary

**Title of session**: Special Event: Radical Collaboration for Water Resilience: Action with our greatest Allies in the Climate Crisis

**Number of attendees**: More than 100

**Date and Location:** 22nd March, 1500 hrs to 1800 hrs, UN HQ Conference Room 2

**1- Objective(s) of session**:

The importance of including local communities, especially indigenous people, in decision-making processes related to water management. This is in contrast to focusing solely on legal entities. The session's objectives were three-fold: to inspire, collaborate, and enable. The hope was to inspire individuals and organizations to effect change by exploring the journey of water and the role it plays in our lives. Collaboration was seen as a critical component of achieving this change, and the session aimed to bring together voices from various sectors to discuss practical collaborations. The discussion also focused on the enabling conditions necessary to create effective partnerships. Ultimately, the session sought to promote a more inclusive and holistic approach to water management that takes into account not just human needs but also the needs of other species that depend on water.

**2- Key point(s)**:

*Current problem*: The current issues include uninformed decision-making, lack of consent from indigenous communities before using and deciding on their water resources, inadequate representation of indigenous populations, failure to protect indigenous plants and species, misunderstanding of soil and ecosystem fragility, and unsustainability of actions taken for the farming community. The farming community, in particular, has been focused on efficiency until now, which has led to the neglect of water resilience. The session also discussed how mining, oil exploitation, and other industrial activities endanger indigenous communities, and the over-consumption of water resources without adequate re-supply exacerbates these problems.

*Potential consequences and impacts:* To build trust between indigenous communities and the government, it is important to create more opportunities for table talks between indigenous people and the private sector. This will allow for the exposure of greenwashing by the private sector, and a shift towards valuing negotiation skills in sustainability-oriented job-titles, particularly when it comes to interacting with indigenous communities. However, a shared vision for the landscape and catchment is currently lacking, as is a common understanding of water insecurity among stakeholders, even though it affects all of them in different ways. This lack of shared vision and understanding presents a major challenge to achieving water resilience and sustainability.

*Importance of the topic:* The first speech was given by Ms. Haaland, Secretary of the US Department of Interior, a representation of the indigenous people in the Biden administration. During the 2nd panel discussion, the King of the Netherlands attended the session briefly.

*Synergies and trade-offs with other topics:* Private sector may see indigenous people as a risk and process that working on such territories would pose more challenges to their resources, in turn leaving behind the due development in some communities. Some indigenous groups turn to governments to demand protection against exploitation by mining and oil companies. An example: Mariluz Canaquiri demands the Peruvian government to protect their mountains and rivers and control the activity of mining and oil companies in the region.

**3- Key Challenges:**

*What are the knowledge gaps identified during the discussion?*

* There is a lack of an informed indigenous population which is necessary for radical collaboration. The indigenous population see the development by the private sector on their territorially held water bodies, as usury.
* Some tribes and descendants see water as a *sacred* entity apart from only being a manifestation of life. This flips the paradigm of green development and makes negotiations and actions challenging for both governments and the private sector. The community service sector however has a taste of the sensitivity of decisions on water resources in indigenous territories.
* The boldness of decisions is important and often lacking in youth inclusivity and innovation. We need indigenous youth and women, and the solutions they have to provide.
* Rejection of privatization of their lands and their water by indigenous people.
* Knowledge gaps about the value and importance of local and indigenous knowledge in water management. Finding the way to the local communities in the driving seats of change is unclear and stakeholders often communicate sideways when it comes to collaboration. The secret ingredient is: knowledge-based local NGOs that the private sector, researchers and local communities equally trust.

**4- Key recommendations/solutions presented (key actions to address the problem)**:

Panel 1:

Learning the arts of listening to intergenerational knowledge, collaboration with opposing forces, and multi solving keeping in mind that nature is interconnected and everything needs to be tackled at the same time. The discussion focused on the need to understand the complex and intricate relationship between nature and human activities, and how to address the challenges posed by climate change and other environmental issues through collaborative efforts. The speakers highlighted the importance of bridging the gap between different generations and fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

Panel 2:

Share responsibility and accountability openly, including less privileged women in technology, commit to seeing the reality and act now for underrepresented communities.

Panel 3:

Take permission from grandparents of indigenous people and include their women and youth (also recommended by Panel 2) in the process for implementation. Reform design targets to *people-first/community-first* in the private sector for their corporate social responsibility initiatives. Rigorously understand the root cause of the problem before finding the solution.

Panel 4:

This session was about collaboration from the perspective of showcasing innovative, new models through collaborative projects from real implemented examples. Example: Colorado River Indian Tribes projects where 50 private companies joined forces to solve the water shortage/scarcity problems in the region. The secret ingredient shared in this example was the presence of collaborative agencies who navigated and led the collaboration between NGOs, local tribes, corporates, the private sector, etc. Example 2: US Farmers Union comes with a perspective of inclusion and argues that real change happens not only if policymakers bring on new decisions but also if these decisions include the long-term interest and goals of those who are in business/industry. Example of a farmer who will not implement solutions which affect him negatively and opposing interests.

Panel 5:

This session was about scaling collaborations, i.e., bridging the finance gap. Funding is one of the key “unlocks” for radical changes that are enabled through inclusive collaboration. Science is key to providing proof of return on investments. Breaking out of the silos adaptation and mitigation finances is key. Bringing down the level of finances and investment programs to the lowest levels, i.e., local communities and indigenous people are the beneficiaries and they make the decisions on who to grant, how to grant and how much.

General notes:

Acknowledge that indigenous people already hold the designations of sustainability officers and that *their* water resources are sacred to them. Produce model frameworks beyond capacity-building programs to incentivize farmers on the field and make them profits.

**5- Quotes from speakers**:

Adam Met: “*Research and advocacy can bring clear and clean solutions to water problems*”

Ezgi:“*We might not have all the answers but we have to ask the questions.*”

Mary: “*Most farmers have no spare capacity to learn more.*”

Woke: “*If Water does poorly … we do poorly.*”

Mariluz Canaquiri: “*It is a spiritual thing … for Kukama people the rivers are sacred … I ask Peru for the holding right of Kukama people … we have been solicitly defending for 30 years*”

Rochelle Diver: “*UN cannot give everybody enough space for talking everybody. Abundance is not the issue in Minnesota, it is the industrialization that is going to reduce the water, (and pollute water with) pesticides, heavy metals. … We reject privatization… Pledge to stand with indigenous people. … What is water that is not clean?*”

Todd Reeves: “*Give back to the watershed more than we take from it, reduce demand and increase supply!*”

Musonda Mumba: “*We need to listen because water has memory. We have lost memory of what was there before. Keep intergenerational knowledge by including indigenous people.*”

Brook Thompson: “*Renewable energies affect indigenous people disproportionally. To enable water change, we need climate justice - we need indigenous youth and women - need a change and mentorship.*”

**6- Notes from the speakers’ talk**:

Melissa Ho, Senior VP, Freshwater and Food WWF-US started off with an activity for the *inspiration* section, by closing eyes and imagining and reflecting favorite body of water. It was then asked to think how the absence of it would feel like. WWF’s freshwater ecosystems documentary was briefly played, called “the river”. 2/3rd rivers lost (dammed or not connected from source to sea), 90% wetlands lost since previous years. Trailer of a documentary on the journey of water in the Newyork city, was premiered at the DK embassy/Water house titled “Journey of Water” produced by WWF and SIWI.

Dr. Priscilla, moderator for the *enabling* section ran a mentimeter and asked for keywords which comes into mind when we talk about radical collaboration.

Heated discussion between Michael Kobori, the Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) of Starbucks and Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim representing the Association of Indigenous Women and Indigenous Peoples, Chad:

Michael: “*We should not be afraid of finance people. But we often are. We do not speak the same language but finance people deal with an extreme amount of money. Lets not be afraid of our finance folks, lets learn to speak their language, because it is another lever in our toolkit to influence change.*“

Hindou: “*Indigenous people do not have a Chief Sustainability Offices (CSO) because it is a part of our daily job, so what we have instead is a CEO (Chief Ecological Officer). Indigenous people apply the best technology (tradition, experience) and the cheapest ones. Because they do not make the company for the profit, but to save humanity and protect the nature. We are not afraid of the big money, they are afraid of us! Finance people should collaborate with us, the problem is not with us, the problem is the trust from those who have the money.*”

**7- Relevant stakeholders and organizations present or mentioned**:

* Biden Administration for official statement
* Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI)
* WWF International
* Indigenous Peoples’ Major Group (IPMG)
* Women’s Major Group (WMG)
* World Farmers’ Organization (WFO)
* Wetlands International (WI)
* Indian Water Authority
* Kukama Kukamiria nation in Peru
* Coca-Cola company
* Ministry of Water and Environment in Uganda
* Meta
* Saami Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic
* Starbucks
* Water Resources Planning and Regulation, Ministry of Water and Environment, Uganda
* Colorado River Indian Tribes Project
* US Farmers Union
* Association of Indigenous Women and Indigenous People - Chad
* Sustainable forests - Climate Investment Funds
* Ecolab

**8- Innovative ideas and/or approaches from the session** *(What was new and novel from your perspective?)*

The session shed light on the sacredness of water for indigenous people, which was expressed vividly by a group of passionate female representatives. These representatives stressed the importance of respecting the rights of water on their land and demanded informed consent before any decisions were made. They also strongly condemned the "green" initiatives of private companies that pollute their water resources.

A novel point from our perspective was the idea that water resources and bodies should be considered as spiritual sources of life. The indigenous people from the Colorado River area and the Amazonas region spoke passionately about their spiritual connection to water and how their historical, memory-based science and solutions could contribute to sustainable water management. This emphasis on the spiritual dimension of water had a significant impact on the NGOs, private companies, and policy makers present in the session, who gained a newfound appreciation for the centuries-old knowledge and experience of these indigenous communities. The session sparked a renewed interest in establishing better communication and listening to the perspectives of these marginalized communities in water management decisions.

**9- How do the session outcomes impact the Water Action Agenda? How to translate the discussion into commitments and actions?**

The outcomes of the session can have a significant impact on the Water Action Agenda by bringing attention to the importance of collaboration, respect for indigenous knowledge, and a holistic approach to water management. To translate the discussion into commitments and actions, some specific actions can be taken, including:

* Establishing a platform for ongoing dialogue between indigenous communities, the private sector, NGOs, and government representatives to foster trust and understanding. This was exemplified during the session by Rochelle Diver, who mentioned that indigenous people organized the indigenous pre-summit. A two-day summit to share traditional knowledge with stakeholders, to discuss threats and the solutions that indigenous people might have to offer.
* Encouraging the private sector to adopt more sustainable practices and commit to respecting the rights of indigenous communities.
* Developing a set of guidelines for engaging with indigenous communities that include informed consent, respect for cultural practices, and a commitment to protecting biodiversity.

**11- How does this session relate water to other SDGs?**

SDG 3 - Good health and well-being. Safe drinking water and sanitation are critical for maintaining good health and preventing the spread of diseases. The many speakers representing local communities all voiced their worries about the water cycle which already is completely out of balance. Pollution, water scarcity and the environmental effects of industrial activity has exposed them to be the subject of SDG 3.

SDG 12 - Responsible consumption and production. Water is an important resource for many industries, and efficient water use is crucial for sustainable production. Many examples were given where the solutions and actions the local communities proposed was about limiting consumption but increasing the re-supply of the water sheds so production and consumption is sustainable.

**12- Short personal analysis of the session.**

**Krisztian Mark Balla:**

Listening to the voice of local tribes and indigenous people firsthand was an invaluable experience that left a lasting impact on me, and I believe on all other stakeholders present in the session as well. It was evident that such an opportunity to share their evidence and experience with other players on this scale is rare for these people. The session aimed to highlight the importance of working with nature, restoring ecosystems, and recognizing local communities in achieving water resilience. The interactive nature of the session allowed speakers and panelists to react to each other's commitments and even improvise in their speeches, in contrast to the UN interactive dialogues.

The private sector and other NGOs often supported the success of their collaboration models with real implemented examples and enabling conditions to scale such projects to other solutions. This was inspiring and instilled confidence in me. However, a critical point in the debate was finance, where the first conflicts arose between the locals and the private sector. In my opinion, the majority of the panelists were speaking at cross-purposes, without supporting their ideas with data, examples, or any numbers. The topic of the "problem of trust" when investing and giving governance to local authorities was hotly debated. People from the finance sector claimed that a lot of money was flowing into projects, while local representatives declined this claim. Unfortunately, there was no consensus on this and no place for further interaction. It would have been invaluable to see reflections on this debate.

**Muhammad Anique Azam:**

There is a gap in how the decision-makers understand the viewpoint of the indigenous population. I went into the session to see various stakeholders debating and advocating for inclusion with, say, regulators. It turned out as a surprise as it seemed a loft-sided demand from the indigenous population to all other stakeholders, be it community service offices, governments, or private sector. This points out the grave mistrust that the indigenous stakeholders have on all sectors, who might be working for their own betterment, but cannot communicate effectively. A lack of communication must have been the reason since on one side we are taking about millions of dollars in investment, while on the contrary, the indigenous stakeholders complain about misinformation, absence of consent, and in some cases, rejection.

The audience, as I perceived, deeply felt the aggression and expression from the representatives of the indigenous communities. We see private sector trying to convince and validate the investments, but none of the community representatives could vet that. Maybe they were not informed before putting the money, or as one panellist said, they want the numbers to be shared with them.

I see a greater position of water with the indigenous people who see water as sacred, not only a commodity for livelihood. They see water, and with emphasis on flowing clean water, as something that gives them life, not only sustains it. I felt a disconnect between starting plenaries, the sections intendended for inspirations, did not quite inspire the dialogues which happened later onwards. The official statement from the Secretary of the cabinet, USA did give a committed start to the session, however, there was a bump in tempo when CSOs tried to justify their toil for radical inclusion from documentaries snaps and promotional videos/music. Maybe the indigenous people have had enough of marketing them, while not actually making them an equal ally for their own development.

After hearing from the indigenous representatives, the impact had so much residue built up for the following panels, that it was expected to receive concrete actions from the private sector, as they were the most criticized for profiting out of the water resources owned by indigenous people, in terms of data sharing, and giving the indigenous people authoritative roles in decision-making.