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"INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. . .LIKE THE ROOTS OF THE REDWOOD TREE"

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On a misty morning in August, I joined hands with 30 indigenous and community leaders, civil servants from subnational governments and civil society representatives in front of an ancient redwood tree in Northern California to say *Wokhlew*—meaning "thank you" in the centuries-old language of the Yurok tribe based in Klamath, California.

This gratitude ceremony came at the end of a four-day inaugural meeting of the Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Working Group of the Governors' Climate and Forest Task Force (GCF)[1]. This group's goal is to find a better, faster way of recognizing indigenous peoples and forest communities' land rights and human rights, and replicating the government-community partnerships that have been pioneered in the States of Acre, Brazil and California, US.

Indigenous peoples and local communities are the guardians of huge swaths of tropical forests that they often must defend from outsiders seeking land, timber or minerals. While these forest communities are increasingly recognized as key partners for forest conservation, governments often struggle to recognize their rights, consult them properly, and help them improve their livelihoods, as we summarized in our recent report.

Cándido Mezua, a member of the Embera tribe in Panama and representative of the Mesoamerican Alliance of People and Forest, stated, "The opportunity for representation by indigenous peoples in the working group is an opportunity to influence climate change policies. The Working Group initiative is one that recognizes rights, recognizes participation, builds capacities and promotes joint actions—not just between indigenous peoples and subnational governments but also with the rest of society."

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During the meeting, participants from South and Central America, Indonesia and California shared stories of successful partnerships between indigenous peoples, local communities and subnational governments for sustainable, inclusive development. We learned firsthand from the Yurok Tribe about

their successful partnership with California via the state's cap-and-trade program, which allows the tribe to sell carbon credits from sustainably managed forest lands. The tribe is using the profits gained through the program to re-acquire ancestral land as well as cultural artifacts, such as ceremonial baskets.

We drafted a preliminary strategy for collective action, joining efforts for climate change mitigation with the goals of rights recognition for indigenous peoples and forest communities, greater participation in decision-making processes and a fair share of climate change finance to recognize their role as "forest guardians". To guide these actions, we drafted a set of fundamental principles of collaboration between subnational governments and indigenous and community authorities, including core elements such as respect and recognition of rights, and respect and implementation of international agreements that recognize and safeguard indigenous rights, cultures and self-determination, such as the Paris Accord, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Cancun Safeguards.

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> Magaly Medeiros, GCF delegate for the state of Acre, Brazil and President of Acre's Institute for Climate Change stated, "This meeting between governments and indigenous peoples, together with civil society representatives, is a moment to bring us closer together so that the GCF and its pledges will come out stronger and it can help us to solidify and follow through with the commitments we've made to traditional communities and indigenous peoples."

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Credit: Matt Colaciello, multimedia storyteller, The Global Workshop.

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Around the redwood, we thanked each other for the opportunity to come together as partners in a shared mission to protect the world's forests, improve the well-being and health of the communities in which we live, and foster equitable and just societies. And we thanked the Yurok Tribe for welcoming us and for sharing their struggles and successes.

Before we parted, Rukka Sombolinggi, Secretary General of Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN), reflected, "This work is not just for indigenous peoples, but for all of us. Our goal is to reach the point where we will leave the world for the next generation in a better way. I see this group starting to reach that point--where indigenous peoples, local communities and governments

work together, because that is the real work. I hope that we have lit a candle, that we inspire others…that we rely on each other, that we work together, hand in hand, like the roots of the redwood tree.”

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[1] Over the past several years, Earth Innovation Institute has been working with the GCF, network of 35 subnational governments dedicated to mitigating climate change and advancing sustainability, and major indigenous organizations in the tropics to integrate indigenous and local community representatives into discussions, strategies and innovations within the GCF and their member regions.