

BLUEBELLS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025



**UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL
PROGRAMME**

**AGENDA: Deliberation upon Knowledge sharing
and Fostering Traditional Knowledge to Combat
Climate Change and Ecological Loss**

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear Delegates,

It gives us great honor and immense pleasure to welcome you all to the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) committee at Bluebells International School MUN 2025**. As representatives of member nations of the UNEP, you are tasked with debating, deliberating, and reaching a consensus on the agendas at hand.

This background guide has been designed to help you get started on your research. However, this document should not be your only source of research. Building upon the outlook presented by this guide, you are expected to conduct your own research through authentic sources and make sure to engage in comprehensive and pragmatic debate throughout the sessions. The Executive Board will not interfere in the flow of debate unless absolutely required. Therefore, the onus to ensure that the committee does not stagnate lies with the delegates. We strongly believe that with good research, the delegates will be able to steer the committee in the right direction.

We kindly ask delegates to approach this conference as a collaborative effort rather than a zero-sum game. Model UN conferences thrive on cooperation, and we hope to foster this spirit within our committee. Our objective is not to resolve the world's challenges in just three days but to deepen our understanding of them, ensuring we emerge as a generation of informed leaders ready to contribute positively to our world. With that in mind, we wish you all the best and eagerly anticipate the conference.

With warm regards,

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About the Committee

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** is the leading global authority on environmental issues within the United Nations system. Established in 1972 following the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, UNEP's mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment. It sets the global environmental agenda, promotes sustainable development, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment. With its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, UNEP works closely with governments, civil society, the private sector, and other UN bodies to address pressing environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and ecosystem degradation.

UNEP plays a vital role in the development of international environmental law and treaties and supports the implementation of the United Nations' environmental goals through science-based policy guidance and capacity-building programs. It is also responsible for producing the Global Environment Outlook (GEO), a comprehensive assessment of the state of the environment. In MUN simulations, UNEP provides a dynamic platform for delegates to explore solutions to global environmental crises, engage in meaningful discussions, and collaborate on drafting actionable resolutions that balance ecological sustainability with economic and social development.

Mandate of UNEP

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972 with the mandate to promote international cooperation in the field of the environment and to provide policy guidance for environmental efforts across the UN system. UNEP is responsible for reviewing and coordinating environmental programmes carried out by various UN agencies, monitoring the global environmental situation, and identifying emerging environmental issues to bring to the attention of governments and the international community. It is also tasked with supporting countries, particularly developing nations in developing and implementing environmentally sound policies and practices. Through its work, UNEP serves as a catalyst, advocate, educator, and facilitator, aiming to inspire nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.



Powers of UNEP

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) does not possess legislative or enforcement powers like some UN bodies but holds significant soft power through its ability to influence international environmental policy and cooperation.

UNEP has the authority to convene global forums, such as the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), which brings together member states to set the global environmental agenda and adopt non-binding resolutions and strategies.

It can propose and facilitate the negotiation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), such as the Montreal Protocol and Minamata Convention, which are then adopted and enforced by member states. UNEP also has the power to assess and report on the state of the environment, using scientific data to shape policy recommendations.

Additionally, it can mobilize financial and technical assistance, especially for developing countries, to help them meet environmental targets and commitments. While UNEP cannot impose sanctions or compel state compliance, its influence lies in agenda setting, norm building, and fostering international cooperation on environmental governance.

INTRODUCTION TO AGENDA

The impacts of climate change and ecological degradation are being felt worldwide, from rising sea levels and extreme weather events to biodiversity loss and desertification. These phenomena not only threaten ecosystems and species but also undermine food security, public health, and socio-economic stability. The urgency of the crisis demands a multifaceted approach that combines technological innovation, policy frameworks, and community-driven practices. While modern science and international cooperation have produced important milestones, traditional knowledge (TK) systems, cultivated by indigenous peoples and local communities over centuries, remain an underappreciated yet vital resource.

Traditional knowledge offers context-specific solutions that are grounded in an intimate understanding of local ecosystems. It is rooted in sustainable living,

spiritual connections to nature, and intergenerational learning. The relevance of TK in addressing climate change is especially pronounced in areas such as sustainable agriculture, forest management, water conservation, and disaster resilience. For example, indigenous crop varieties often demonstrate higher climate resilience, while ancient water harvesting systems provide models for modern adaptation in arid regions. Moreover, TK is not static; it evolves continually through observation, adaptation, and experimentation.

However, despite its immense potential, TK is threatened by globalization, environmental degradation, and cultural assimilation. If not documented, safeguarded, and shared responsibly, vast amounts of this knowledge risk being lost forever. This agenda therefore calls for deliberation on how UNEP and the international community can foster the sharing of TK, ensure the equitable involvement of indigenous peoples, and integrate such practices into global strategies to combat climate change and ecological loss. The challenge lies in promoting knowledge exchange while safeguarding intellectual property, cultural rights, and the sovereignty of the communities who hold this wisdom.

Importance of Traditional Knowledge

Over the years, the international community has developed a wide range of frameworks, conventions, and agreements that address the role of traditional knowledge in combating climate change and ecological loss. These instruments vary in scope from biodiversity conservation and intellectual property rights to climate adaptation and sustainable development but collectively they provide an evolving legal and policy architecture for integrating TK into global governance.

The **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, adopted in 1992, remains the cornerstone for safeguarding traditional knowledge related to biodiversity. Article 8(j) of the CBD specifically calls on Parties to respect, preserve, and maintain the knowledge, innovations, and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The **Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (2010)**, which supplements the CBD, provides mechanisms to ensure that communities benefit from the use of their knowledge and genetic resources, thereby protecting against exploitation.



The **Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (2000)**, another supplementary agreement to the CBD, also indirectly relates to traditional knowledge by regulating the safe use of genetically modified organisms that may threaten ecosystems traditionally managed by local communities.

The **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** and its subsequent agreements have also recognized the importance of traditional knowledge. The **Kyoto Protocol (1997)** emphasized adaptation, laying the foundation for TK integration into resilience strategies, while the **Paris Agreement (2015)** highlights the value of indigenous and local knowledge in adaptation planning and actions. In 2015, the UNFCCC established the **Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP)**, a dedicated mechanism to strengthen the knowledge, practices, and engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities in climate action. This platform fosters knowledge exchange, capacity building, and policy integration. The **Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage** and its work on non-economic losses also recognize cultural heritage and knowledge as part of climate-impacted assets.

Another key instrument is the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**, adopted in 2007. While not legally binding, it establishes global standards affirming the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain, control, and protect their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. UNDRIP reinforces the principle of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), which is critical when external actors seek to access or utilize TK. The **International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989)** is legally binding for ratifying states and specifically protects indigenous peoples' rights to maintain and control their institutions, ways of life, and cultural identities, including TK.

The **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)** has ongoing initiatives to address intellectual property issues related to traditional knowledge, genetic resources, and traditional cultural expressions. Through its Intergovernmental Committee (IGC), WIPO has sought to



develop international legal instruments to safeguard TK holders against misappropriation, biopiracy, and unauthorized commercialization. Parallel initiatives by the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**, particularly in discussions around the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), have raised debates about whether TK should be explicitly protected within global trade law.

Within the broader UN system, frameworks such as the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also underscore the role of traditional knowledge. Goals on climate action (SDG 13), life on land (SDG 15), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), and sustainable consumption (SDG 12) all implicitly recognize the contributions of indigenous knowledge systems. Similarly, the **UNESCO**

Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) highlights the importance of traditional practices, rituals, and skills in sustaining cultural and environmental resilience, while the **Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB)** integrates TK into site-based ecosystem management. The **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971)** has acknowledged the role of local and indigenous knowledge in maintaining the ecological character of wetlands.

Regionally, initiatives like the African Model Law on the Protection of the Rights of Local Communities, Farmers, and Breeders, the Andean Community's Decision 391 on Access to Genetic Resources, the Arctic Council's Indigenous Peoples Secretariat, and the Pacific Regional Framework for Climate Resilient Development (FRDP) provide platforms for recognizing and strengthening traditional knowledge within specific contexts. In Asia, mechanisms under the ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change and the South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) have begun incorporating TK in resilience and biodiversity policies.

Additionally, international scientific and environmental bodies have increasingly incorporated TK into their assessments. The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** has progressively acknowledged the value of indigenous knowledge in its assessment



reports, particularly for climate adaptation. The **Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)** has also emphasized indigenous and local knowledge in biodiversity assessments and conservation strategies. Reports by the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**, particularly on agroecology and forest management, highlight TK as a pillar of sustainability.

Together, these frameworks represent a growing consensus on the importance of integrating traditional knowledge into global environmental policy. However, their effectiveness depends on robust implementation, cross-sectoral coordination, equitable benefit-sharing, and genuine respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Environmental and Societal Impacts of Traditional Knowledge in Combating Climate Change and Ecological Loss

The integration of traditional knowledge (TK) into environmental governance has profound environmental and societal benefits that extend beyond immediate ecological management. Traditional practices have evolved as adaptive responses to climatic shifts and ecosystem dynamics over centuries, ensuring a delicate balance between human development and environmental sustainability.

Environmental Impacts

Traditional ecological knowledge has contributed significantly to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem resilience. Community-managed forests, sacred groves, and customary fishing practices ensure the sustainable use of resources while maintaining ecological balance. For instance, rotational farming and shifting cultivation in many parts of Asia and Africa prevent soil exhaustion, allow for natural regeneration, and maintain habitat diversity. In the Amazon, Indigenous agroforestry systems interweave multiple plant species, enhancing biodiversity while supporting food security. These systems embody principles of circularity, waste minimization, and ecosystem restoration long before such ideas entered modern sustainability discourse.



In the realm of climate change adaptation, TK plays a crucial role in enhancing natural resilience. Practices such as wetland preservation, mangrove protection, and terraced farming provide natural buffers against floods, landslides, and sea-level rise. Indigenous fire management in Australia and North America reduces the risk of catastrophic wildfires by controlling underbrush through low-intensity burns. Furthermore, TK has direct implications for carbon sequestration. Indigenous peoples manage roughly 25% of the world's land surface, which stores an estimated 80% of global biodiversity and significant carbon stocks. When these lands are protected through customary governance systems, they serve as carbon sinks that complement international mitigation strategies.

Societal Impacts

The societal impacts of TK are equally significant, shaping not only ecological outcomes but also social cohesion, cultural resilience, and adaptive governance. At the community level, TK systems provide food and water security through seed-saving traditions, rainwater harvesting, and soil fertility management. These systems ensure self-reliance and reduce dependency on external inputs such as chemical fertilizers and genetically modified seeds, thereby promoting sovereignty over resources.

Culturally, TK serves as a repository of collective identity, oral heritage, and spiritual connection to the environment. Sacred groves in India, for example, are not merely biodiversity hotspots but also cultural spaces where communities reaffirm their ties to land and tradition. In Arctic regions, Inuit knowledge of ice patterns not only supports survival but also reinforces a deep cultural relationship with the natural world. Such knowledge strengthens intergenerational bonds, as elders pass on wisdom to youth, thereby ensuring continuity of cultural practices alongside ecological stewardship.

From a governance perspective, TK contributes to participatory and inclusive environmental decision-making. Community-led forest management or coastal stewardship initiatives often function as localized governance systems that embody principles of equity, consensus, and



long-term sustainability. These systems offer alternatives to top-down development models, proving especially effective where state capacity is limited or extractive industries dominate.

Gender dimensions of TK also play a critical role. Women in many Indigenous and rural communities act as custodians of agricultural biodiversity, medicinal knowledge, and water management practices. Their role as primary knowledge holders underscores the importance of gender-sensitive approaches to environmental policy, as sidelining women would mean the loss of critical adaptive knowledge.

The Combined Impact

The environmental and societal dimensions of TK are deeply intertwined. Strong ecological outcomes reinforce social stability, while cohesive and resilient communities are better positioned to conserve ecosystems. Together, they create a feedback loop of sustainability healthy ecosystems support thriving communities, which in turn act as stewards of the environment. This holistic perspective challenges the compartmentalized approaches of modern governance and highlights why integrating TK is not merely a matter of cultural recognition but an ecological and social necessity

Challenges and Gaps in Harnessing Traditional Knowledge for Climate Action

Despite its immense potential, the integration of traditional knowledge (TK) into global climate and ecological governance faces a range of institutional, legal, social, and practical challenges that limit its full recognition and application.

Lack of Legal Protection and Risk of Misappropriation

One of the foremost gaps lies in the weak legal protection for TK at national and international levels. Many countries lack comprehensive legislation that ensures free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) of communities before



their knowledge is accessed or shared. Intellectual property rights regimes largely built around individual ownership and innovation do not easily accommodate collective, intergenerational, and orally transmitted forms of knowledge. As a result, communities often experience biopiracy, where their practices, genetic resources, or medicinal formulations are patented by corporations without consent or benefit-sharing. This undermines trust and discourages knowledge exchange.

Fragmented Implementation of Frameworks

While global conventions such as the CBD, Nagoya Protocol, and UNDRIP provide recognition of TK, their implementation at national and local levels remains inconsistent. Bureaucratic hurdles, lack of capacity in government agencies, and insufficient resources often prevent effective enforcement of ABS (Access and Benefit-Sharing) provisions. Furthermore, different treaties operate in silos biodiversity conventions rarely intersect with climate finance frameworks, and intellectual property discussions in WIPO remain detached from UNFCCC climate negotiations. This fragmentation dilutes the effectiveness of TK-related safeguards.

Marginalization of Indigenous and Local Communities

Socio-political marginalization continues to obstruct the full participation of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs). Historical discrimination, land dispossession, and exclusion from national policymaking undermine the ability of these groups to claim space in climate governance. Even where policies recognize TK, the voices of IPLCs are often tokenized rather than meaningfully incorporated into decision-making. The lack of tenure security further exacerbates this, as communities without legal rights over land, forests, or waters struggle to enforce traditional practices against extractive industries or state-driven development projects.

Conflicts Between Scientific and Traditional Knowledge Systems

Another persistent gap is the epistemological tension between scientific frameworks and TK. Traditional knowledge is often place-based, holistic,



and transmitted orally, whereas scientific institutions demand standardized, quantifiable, and peer-reviewed data. This mismatch has led to skepticism or undervaluation of TK in formal policy arenas. Without co-production approaches—where scientists and communities collaborate as equals—there is a risk that TK will either be ignored or selectively appropriated in ways that strip it of cultural and ecological context.

Limited Financial and Technical Support

Although TK-driven solutions are cost-effective and ecologically grounded, they rarely receive sufficient financial backing. Climate finance mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund (GCF) or Global Environment Facility (GEF) have high entry barriers for community-based initiatives, which often lack the technical expertise to navigate proposal systems. This leads to a paradox where large-scale, top-down projects receive funding, while smaller community-led interventions—which may be more sustainable—remain underfunded. In addition, limited access to technology and capacity building hampers communities' ability to document, defend, and adapt their knowledge systems.

Intergenerational Erosion of Knowledge

Globalization, urbanization, and cultural assimilation are contributing to the erosion of TK. As younger generations migrate to urban areas or adopt modern lifestyles, fewer individuals engage in traditional ecological practices such as rotational farming, seed saving, or oral storytelling. This intergenerational rupture risks not only the loss of climate-relevant practices but also the weakening of cultural identity, social cohesion, and resilience mechanisms. Without deliberate intergenerational transmission programs, much TK may disappear within a few decades.

Ethical Dilemmas and Consent Issues

Documentation and digitalization of TK—such as through databases or registries—raise ethical questions. While these tools can safeguard against misappropriation, they can also expose sensitive or sacred knowledge to misuse. In some cases, communities may feel pressured into sharing



knowledge due to financial incentives or state mandates, undermining the principle of voluntary consent. Balancing the need for accessibility with the protection of community sovereignty remains an unresolved dilemma in TK governance.

Conclusion

Traditional knowledge represents not only a reservoir of ecological wisdom but also a living system of cultural identity, resilience, and sustainability. For centuries, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities have safeguarded biodiversity, managed natural resources responsibly, and adapted to climatic shifts through practices rooted in reciprocity with nature. As climate change accelerates and ecological loss deepens, these systems of knowledge are no longer peripheral—they are central to humanity's collective ability to respond.

However, while international frameworks and conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Nagoya Protocol, and UNDRIP acknowledge the value of TK, significant gaps persist in their enforcement, protection, and integration into mainstream climate policies. Misappropriation, marginalization, and the erosion of intergenerational transmission continue to threaten not only the survival of traditional knowledge but also the ecosystems and societies it sustains.

The challenge before the international community, therefore, is twofold: to ensure that TK is recognized and safeguarded as a legitimate and equal partner to scientific knowledge, and to empower Indigenous and local communities with the rights, resources, and representation needed to continue their stewardship of the planet. Bridging these gaps requires genuine commitment—legal protections against biopiracy, financial access to climate funds, participatory governance models, and respect for free, prior, and informed consent.

The United Nations Environment Programme, as a global leader in environmental governance, is uniquely positioned to facilitate this process by fostering cross-cultural dialogue, promoting co-production of knowledge,



and ensuring that TK holders are not treated as passive stakeholders but as equal architects of climate solutions. In doing so, the global community can transform traditional knowledge from a vulnerable heritage at risk of disappearance into a cornerstone of a resilient, equitable, and sustainable future.

GUIDING POINTS FOR DELEGATES

Importance of Traditional Knowledge

- Passed down through generations, tested by time
- Uses natural, eco-friendly methods
- Helps conserve water, soil, and forests
- Supports biodiversity and prevents overexploitation
- Provides disaster prediction and adaptation techniques

Challenges in Sharing Knowledge

- Often ignored or undervalued by governments
- Language and cultural differences create barriers
- Risk of exploitation by companies or outsiders
- Lack of legal protection for indigenous rights
- Younger generations moving away from traditions

Role of UNEP and Delegates

- Create safe platforms for communities to share practices
- Combine traditional knowledge with modern science
- Protect intellectual property of indigenous groups

- Fund community-led climate projects
- Promote regional and South-South cooperation

Benefits of Knowledge Sharing

- Builds trust between communities and policymakers
- Low-cost and sustainable climate solutions
- Preserves culture, traditions, and languages
- Encourages equity and inclusivity in climate action
- Strengthens global climate resilience

NATURE OF SOURCES/EVIDENCE

This Background Guide is meant solely for research purposes and must not be cited as evidence to substantiate statements made during the conference. Evidence or proof for substantiating statements made during formal debate is acceptable from the following sources:

1. **United Nations:** Documents and findings by the United Nations or any related UN body is held as a credible proof to support a claim or argument.
2. **Multilateral Organizations:** Documents from international organizations.
3. **Government Reports:** These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country. However, a nuance is that a report that is being denied by a certain country can still be accepted by the Executive Board as a credible piece of information.



4. **News Sources:** Any Reuters article that clearly makes mention of the fact or is in contradiction of the fact being stated by a delegate in council.
5. **State Operated News Agencies:** These reports can be used in the support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any country as such but in that situation, may be denied by any other country in the council. Some examples are– RIA Novosti⁸ (Russian Federation), Xinhua News Agency¹¹ (People’s Republic of China), etc.

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