

## **QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **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)

In Nepalese context, the Indigenous women exhibit their knowledge and skills in several areas that include, but not limited to, food preparation, conservative agriculture, midwifery, textiles, craftsmanship, and small scale entrepreneurial ventures. The Indigenous peoples' whole life-cycle, including their productive and cultural activities centres round agriculture which is one of their main occupations as well. One of the crucial aspects is Indigenous women's contribution to sustainable resource management. Indigenous women from different Indigenous identities use their skills and knowledge in different activities.

Indigenous women from all communities have expertise at food processing based on ecology and the types of agricultural yielding. This can be manifested in daily life and/or festive times. For example, most of the Indigenous women are expertise at producing home-made local liquor that is significant at various rites of passages and cultural occasions. Indigenous women make various dried food to mitigate the conditions of food scarcity. Kirant women are known for Kinema that is produced by fermenting soybeans. Gundruk is dried fermented leafy vegetables made generally from mustard green leaves or radish leaves. They preserve food for dry or winter season in an environmentally friendlier and scientific ways. Among the Dhimal Indigenous Peoples, it is believed that the herb used in colouring their traditional dress after weaving protects them from certain diseases. Traditional Allo farming and processing techniques underline the Indigenous Kulung women's <sup>1</sup>intricate traditional knowledge and skills in the use of natural and renewable resources. The cultivation and processing techniques of the Allo plant are sustainable and environmentally-friendlier. Be it a collection of tubers or food processing from stinging nettles, indigenous women display scientific knowledge and sustainable approach.

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?

There are some organized efforts by indigenous women who have set up entrepreneurial ventures. They have applied indigenously imbedded knowledge and skills into commercial enterprise. Engagement of indigenous women in entrepreneurial ventures contributes to preservation and transfer of indigenous knowledge and skills, and also enhance economic prosperity. Indigenous women from northern frontier have experience of sheep shearing, making wool and knitting clothes. Many indigenous peoples have traditional occupation of craftsmanship such as pottery, carpentry, bamboo craft and even carpet and garment making. Indigenous Women organisations like National Indigenous Women Forum (NIWF) have conducted several capacity strengthening trainings and environmentally friendlier trainings about farming.

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<sup>1</sup> [Research on the Roles and Contributions of Indigenous Women in Sustainable Resource Management in Asia - Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact \(aippnet.org\)](https://www.aippnet.org/)

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:
- treatment and prevention of Covid-19 or other health concerns
  - climate change solutions and environmental protection
  - peace and conflict
  - food security
  - development of indigenous-led business enterprises
  - security of land tenure and resources
  - women's empowerment within their communities

A study conducted by NIWF shows that during the pandemic, women were at the forefront in organizing and performing rituals to be protected from the pandemic, and their capacities to respond to the stress show that they were more resilient than their male counterpart.

The following case study adapted from a research shows how Thakali indigenous women are contributing to environmental protection.

#### Use of natural resources by Thakali women

Suraja Gauchan, 39 years old, a resident of Kalopani, Lete, Thasang Village Development Council ward no-3, Mustang. She is temporary teacher of Ganudaya Higher Secondary School, Lete. She teaches up to 5 class in English subject. She is also handling Hotel business in support of her Husband. She was involving hotel business for the past 29 years since she was very young. She is also a very success entrepreneur; she has knowledge about the traditional forest product processing and bring it in market as an income initiation in her community.

She got this knowledge from her mother about the Thakali food processing process. Mustang is very cold and snowy place for more than 6-month long. So, they have a very good knowledge to preserve food for the winter season. They have good knowledge to dry the fruit, vegetables and medicinal plants for long term preservation. She has used this knowledge to convert it into income generating sources. She collects Jimbu, Dhokayako sag, Jibre ko Sag, Jagali Lasun, Phalu phool, different types of mushroom etc. She dries the mushroom at home, pack in the different size with the information about the food with processing process. Mustang is a tourist area where many domestic and foreign tourists visit in the peak season. Because she has been in this business for a long time, she is aware that tourists prefer locally produced products. She earns two lakh Nepali Rupees per year. She is very happy with her traditional knowledge, but she disclosed that only traditional knowledge is not enough for the expansion of her earning activities. If the Government introduces subsidy in Dry machine, and market linkages to other districts she could continue and expand in bigger quantities. Her current problem is of manufacture and expiry dates in her product. Many tourists asked her about the manufacture and expiry date of the product, and she had no answer.

Only traditional knowledge is not enough to promote and sustain the market, so she requests for training on the expiry date for her products. She is only a success entrepreneur in her community, she is visioning to promote such products and involve more Indigenous women who have such knowledge in this sector.

She said that if the Government supports and promotes such knowledge creation and provide incentives, loan grant and trainings, many Thakali women can boost themselves by getting involved in such processes. There is a big opportunity in Mustang for the women to get involved in income generating activities, however, the government should play an important role to strengthen and create a friendly environment to secure them with economic activities.

Due to bad road access and negative impact of ACAP policies related to the forest-based income generation activities. Thus, she suggested that ACAP need to revise the policies towards Indigenous women friendly policy and the Government should focused public service facility for the economic empowerment.

Most of the Indigenous women who have benefitted in terms of getting training, loans, scholarship and allowances have achieved this through various government agencies, donors, (I)NGOs and UN agencies. With such support, some Indigenous women have run business enterprises based on their traditional knowledge and skills that has strengthened their socio-economic status and empowered many fellow Indigenous women.

### 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?

Due to development aggression, the expansion and promotion of corporate business, and industry-based products, the traditional knowledge, technology and skills of Indigenous women are threatened. While market is dominated by factory-made products, indigenous products such as household items made from bamboo and wood are losing their utility and market.

The historical exclusion of Indigenous peoples by the state itself has not yet ended. Even though the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 declares Nepal as multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural country, 11 articles of the Constitution are against the rights of Indigenous Peoples (IPs), 23 are discriminatory to the IPs, 49 are exclusionary to them and 5 tend to establish the supremacy of ruling caste groups<sup>3</sup>. The laws including Aquatic Animal Protection Act, 1960, Lands Act, 1964, National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1973, Forest Act 1993, Water Resources Act, 1992 and many such legal provisions restrict Indigenous peoples' access to natural resources. Consequently, the knowledge associated with the nature is dying out. For hundreds of years, the education system has failed to appreciate Indigenous knowledge and skills.

During the last couple of decades, Indigenous peoples are losing their fertile land due to unprecedented rise of real estate business. While many male members prefer foreign soil to earn bread and butter, young people stay in urban or semi-urban areas for education or jobs. Such a change in the societal composition has also problematized in retaining indigenous women's 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?

Firstly, some of aforementioned laws and articles from the Constitution do not recognise and promote Indigenous women's knowledge, technology and skills. When the state itself restrict Indigenous women from exercising their knowledge and skills, the transfer of such to young generation is inherently undermined. A study<sup>4</sup> reports at least 29 wild food species used by Chepang indigenous people, however, through nationalisation of forest, ban on shifting cultivation and the process of 'modernising' them, the state vehemently discourage(d) them practising their culturally imbedded practices, resulting the break in

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<sup>2</sup> [Economic Empowerment of Indigenous Women in Nepal | UNDP in Nepal](#)

<sup>3</sup> LAHURNIP (2016) Adivasi Janajati Adhikar ko Sandarbha ma "Nepal ko Sambidhan" ko Adhyayan tatha Bishleshan (Study and analysis of the Constitution of Nepal from the perspective of indigenous peoples), Kathmandu: Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples.

<sup>4</sup> Limbu, Prakash & Thapa, Keshab. (2011). Chepang Food Culture: Contribution of Wild Edible and Neglected Plant Species.

the transfer of knowledge and skills. The production of tobacco and local liquor by indigenous women and men has been banned in an attempt to welcome multinational corporations.

Nepal is a signatory to UNDRIP, ILO 169, CERD and CEDAW which provide a clear human rights framework for the inclusion of IPs and IW with respect for both individual and collective rights. There is a clear linkage between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UNDRIP. The new constitutional arrangements have provided extensive autonomy to local government units, complete with legislative and executive powers. The new constitutional arrangements have provided extensive autonomy to local government units, complete with legislative and executive powers. Schedule 8 of the Constitution allocates 22 areas of exclusive jurisdiction to local governments that includes utilization of forests, mountains, forest conservation areas and waters stretching in inter-State form. Nepal as a signatory to abovementioned mechanisms for IPs and IW, and in the spirit of the Constitution should implement its commitment in regard to the IPs and IW. Only through this, accompanied by amendment of certain Articles in the Constitution, the Indigenous women will be able to transfer their knowledge and skills.

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?

There have not been apparent cases verified independently about the financial gains by others through taking control over intellectual property. However, it is obvious that the multinational corporations and enterprises are promoted at the cost of the indigenous knowledge and skills. While the state is neglecting such knowledge, skills and practices, and promoting liberal economy, who and how the intellectual rights have been misappropriated is a matter of intensive study and revelation. And, Indigenous products are not entitled any patent rights.

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)?

Firstly, the state should recognise Indigenous knowledge and skills. The state should promote enterprises based on sustainable and environmentally-friendlier use of materials from the nature. At this point, the state is responsible to create a competitive and favourable market for Indigenous entrepreneurs, at least on the domestic market. Banning on Indigenous practices like brewing local alcohol should be uplifted, and patent rights should be given to each Indigenous groups based on rational judgement.

International organisations' interventions can seek the state implement ILO C. 169, UNDRIP, CERD and other UN mechanism to which Nepal is a signatory.

### **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.)

There are various efforts from Indigenous (Women) organisations and other international organisations that support indigenous women in regard to their knowledge. National Indigenous Women Forum, for

example, made a documentary<sup>5</sup> about the transfer of skills and knowledge from parent generation. We have also conducted several intergenerational dialogues between elderly peoples and young generations in matters concerning their knowledge, skills, Indigenous identity, cultures, national policies and so on. We have been conducting Integrated Pest Management trainings with Indigenous women that promotes the use of naturally available herbs and plants which are culturally imbedded in the knowledge system of IPs and IW. There are publications about Indigenous women's sustainable efforts of applying their knowledge and skills. The government has not done significantly to protect and preserve Indigenous knowledge, technology and skills.

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?

International organisations working for Indigenous Peoples and women have acknowledged the significance of women's contribution in terms of their knowledge through research, publication and advocacy. In the context of Nepal, the state has denied indigenous women's knowledge and skills in its programmes and policies despite being a signatory to various international mechanisms that uphold the rights of IPs and IW.

10. Is indigenous women's knowledge recognized and protected by indigenous legal systems, or by local, national or international laws and policies?

Customary practices prevalent among Indigenous communities recognise women's knowledge. A documentary<sup>6</sup> from Gatlang, Rasuwa of Nepal records that the making of yeast used for fermentation during the making of local alcohol was limited to an old woman of the community. No particular indigenous legal systems exist there. Yet the authority to make yeast is customarily defined. In the context of Nepal, laws and policies of the state do not recognise and protect indigenous women's knowledge in particular and indigenous peoples' knowledge in general.

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?

Indigenous peoples' and women organisations and international organisations are implementing various programmes to address barriers to women's participation in political processes, planning and decision-making. To mention a few, our organisation conducted Capacity Development Support Programmes for Women MPs from Seven Provincial Assemblies under Parliament Support Project (PSP), 2018-2022 of UNDP Nepal from October – November 2021. We have recently provided leadership and advocacy trainings to IW/G from endangered, highly marginalised and marginalised communities. We have even demanded the amendment of the Constitution especially in conjunction with Articles 7, 10 and 11 for which we have been submitting memorandum to various ministries, and commissions, and have launched a digital signature campaign<sup>7</sup> as well. We have been advocating and empowering for women's meaningful participation both in collaboration with other partner organisations and individually.

We also prepare and submit CEDAW Shadow Report. A major highlight of it submitted on 14 Nov 2018 reads

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<sup>5</sup> <https://youtu.be/809Rcif7nC8>

<sup>6</sup> <https://youtu.be/809Rcif7nC8>

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[https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=DQSIKWdsW0yxEjajBLZtrQAAAAAAAAAAAAAN\\_\\_htj5ctUQTVYNVQzQjI0TTFP-UjFONVYyOUc5Tk9MWC4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=DQSIKWdsW0yxEjajBLZtrQAAAAAAAAAAAAAN__htj5ctUQTVYNVQzQjI0TTFP-UjFONVYyOUc5Tk9MWC4u)

## **Disadvantaged groups of women**

40. The Committee is, however, concerned at: (a) The lack of recognition of the rights of indigenous women in the Constitution, and the general lack of recognition of the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination; (...) (c) Persistent inequalities in the State party's economic development and poverty indicators, which indicate poor outcomes for indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi* and *Tharu* women, women of "oppressed classes", widows in the Hindu community and rural women, and that the earthquake in 2015 exacerbated food insecurity, lack of access to natural resources, housing, safe water and credit facilities for these groups of women.

41. The Committee recommends that the State party, in line with its General Recommendations No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women and No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change:

(a) Amend the Constitution to explicitly recognize the rights of indigenous women, as well as their right to self-determination, in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; (...) (c) Adopt affirmative action measures with clear timelines, in line with Constitutional provisions on "special opportunities", to enhance access of women facing intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination, including indigenous, *Dalit* and rural women, women with disabilities, widows of the Hindu community, as well as women affected by conflict and natural disasters, to health services, education, safe water and sanitation services, food, fertile land, natural resources, housing, credit and income-generating opportunities, including through the Presidential Women Upliftment Programme.

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?

In addition to the studies<sup>8</sup> conducted by the Central Department of Anthropology, Tribhuvan University that emphasised on the theme of social inclusion in Nepal in terms of caste, ethnicity and gender, there are several studies and publications in relation to political inclusion of IPs and IW. However, there are not sufficient and significant works that present IW as knowledge keepers. Nevertheless some of the works<sup>9</sup> by AIPP and other organisations are relevant in this matter.

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<sup>8</sup> [STATE OF SOCIAL INCLUSION IN NEPAL | Central Department of Anthropology \(anthropologytu.edu.np\)](http://STATE%20OF%20SOCIAL%20INCLUSION%20IN%20NEPAL%20|%20Central%20Department%20of%20Anthropology%20(anthropologytu.edu.np))

<sup>9</sup> [Research on the Roles and Contributions of Indigenous Women in Sustainable Forest Management in Mekong Countries - Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact \(aippnet.org\)](http://Research%20on%20the%20Roles%20and%20Contributions%20of%20Indigenous%20Women%20in%20Sustainable%20Forest%20Management%20in%20Mekong%20Countries%20-%20Asia%20Indigenous%20Peoples%20Pact%20(aippnet.org))