

What role does indigenous knowledge play in addressing climate change? Quite a lot and the participatory web can be the space where to collaborate around it. Nowadays world challenges cannot be solved through science alone. Indigenous knowledge not only offers a wealth of wisdom, but also the foundations upon which to develop an approach to sustainable development.

Indigenous communities - the guardians of biodiversity

The highest density of biodiversity on this planet is found in places such as rainforests, which are the home to many indigenous communities. "In the Western world these experts of biodiversity are considered illiterate and uneducated. In the world of science they are in fact holders of vast, complex and interlocking systems of knowledge" ([IPACC Report](#)). Now, not only many of their native languages are in danger of extinction – if not already extinct, but also, a limited amount of their wisdom has been documented and too little has been done to preserve it. Indigenous peoples (e.g. nomadic herders) are often affected by climate change.

Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and climate change

On 18 November 2009 at the opening of a roundtable discussion on Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change, the [President of the World Bank, Dr. Robert B. Zoellick, stated](#) that Indigenous Peoples carry a "disproportionate share of the burden of climate change effects." He further elaborated on the fact that Indigenous communities, with their "long experience in managing natural resources, and adapting to climate change, can also add to our knowledge and understanding of how best to cope with this complex challenge ... learning from Indigenous Peoples will make our discussions richer and our actions more productive."

In a related context, CTA is supporting the [IPACC](#) network in [an initiative aimed at supporting Indigenous Peoples in Africa](#) in finalising their communication strategy and related media products (including - among others - online videos) in preparation of the 15th Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, due to take place in Copenhagen, Denmark.

A wide gap: Indigenous knowledge and the participatory web

[John Liebhardt writes](#) : “At first glance, the relationship between indigenous knowledge and the Internet seems fraught. Indigenous knowledge provides a distinct set of beliefs, practices and representations avidly tied to place; the Internet lauds itself for erasing boundaries and borders. () More challenging [Ken Banks argues that](#) “We have so much to learn from traditional, indigenous societies, yet technology and knowledge transfer is almost universally one way – “us” to “them” (North-South). So far there is still a predominance of some languages on the Internet, but [thanks to social media this is gradually changing](#)

The gap: Indigenous knowledge and social media

There are various interesting initiatives trying to empower indigenous communities and document their cultural heritage and wisdom, but also documenting the vast impacts of climate change. One such initiative is spearheaded by the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee ([IPACC](#)). This video documents IPACC's work in the context of the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) and how their members use ICTs and media to document biodiversity.

{youtube}T2z-Dff2MqU{/youtube}

Video

Video can play an important role in empowering non-savvy web users to participate more easily in social media. Video is a helpful instrument to present indigenous knowledge otherwise not easily documentable in written format.

Back at the 2007 web2fordev conference. There was also a nice example on how [participatory video techniques are used](#) to record important cultural practices.

Mapping

Also Google engages in this field and offers its mapping services to indigenous communities in the Amazon to help forest conservation. Accurate maps and latest geo data is essential to advocate their goals to the government. The results are fascinating maps from community activities, which are often just drawn with pencil on paper and cannot easily be digitalized. But Google also has had to experience that their search results were often of little help in such a local context. Check out the presentation by Rebecca Moore on "Indigenous Mapping: Emerging Cultures on the Geoweb."

{youtube}a32FrSpg6CI{/youtube}

A different, albeit fascinating initiative is the [Honey Bee network](#) in India, which gathered over 11,000 grassroots innovations across India. It is interesting to further tap on that potential and experiment how Web 2.0 tools can grasp these innovations.

Challenges

[Shiva Kanaujia Sukula, highlights in a presentation](#) the potential of multimedia content to share indigenous knowledge. But she also questions the role of ICT, when experiences can be easier documented by paper and pencil or shared through mouth to mouth communication. Nevertheless in her presentation she describes an attempt to capture indigenous knowledge in digital format. Caution is needed about how indigenous knowledge is treated. It needs to be [legally protected](#) against piracy and exploitation and many other threats.

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