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**Commonwealth Secretariat COP 29-Side Event:  
Indigenous and local knowledge systems for Climate Action:  
Delivering Together a Resilient future for All**

**November 2024  
Baku, Azerbaijan**

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## **Introduction**

Over 3.3 billion people live in regions that are highly vulnerable to climate change. Socioeconomic factors such as gender, poverty, race/ethnicity often exacerbate this vulnerability. This is particularly the case for groups such as women, children in low-income households as well as Indigenous People and local communities. Yet as the global community steps up the fight against climate change it is critical that an all-of-society approach to mitigating and adapting to the impacts of a changing climate is enhanced.

Historically Indigenous groups have been excluded from discussions and actions on climate despite their intimate connection to their natural environment. As a result, their concerns, knowledge and capacity as agents of system transformation have been either missed or under-utilised. However, this is changing with growing calls to integrate indigenous, local, and traditional knowledges and elevate their diverse voices in the policy discourse, thereby reducing vulnerability, deepening adaptive capacity, and the ability to implement climate resilient development. A growing number of Commonwealth countries recognize this, as reflected in the adaptation components of NDCs.

There are about half a billion indigenous people in the world, encompassing a vast tapestry of cultural diversity from the Bejas in Namibia and the Maasai of East Africa to the Aborigines of Australia. Economically speaking, they are disproportionately represented amongst the poorest segments of society. However, when it comes to natural capital, indigenous groups are the world's wealthiest. Representing just 5% of the global population, indigenous people protect over 20% of the earth, and steward over 80% of the planet's remaining biodiversity. Their lands intersect with about 40% of all terrestrial protected areas and ecologically intact landscapes. Intact forest landscapes, which constitute just 23% of global forests, can provide over 30% of the mitigation action needed by 2050 to keep global warming below 2°C. At least 36% of intact forest landscapes are within Indigenous Peoples' lands.

Indigenous peoples' (and local communities') unique and exceptional traditional and ancestral knowledge is an invaluable resource when it comes to addressing the intertwined challenges of land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change. For example, indigenous agricultural practices promote biodiversity. Rather than denying indigenous and local peoples' agency, access rights, and knowledge in conserving their territories, evidence suggests that indigenous and community conservation areas must be legally recognized and supported to avoid maladaptations and enable socially just, empowering and resilient future for all. The full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities as longstanding stewards of nature is critical to addressing these challenges and paving the way for a more sustainable development model. The Paris Agreement acknowledges that

adaptation should be based on and guided by ‘traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems’ in Article 7.5.

At the same time, there is a need to build the resilience of indigenous groups and local communities, including through livelihoods diversification and social safeguards. Indigenous people are disproportionately dependent on natural resources and ecosystems. As such, they are most vulnerable to impacts on this resource base due to land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change. Their vulnerability is exacerbated by historical patterns of socioeconomic exclusion, such as the fact that traditional land tenure systems may not be formally recognized, putting the land rights of indigenous groups at risk. Further development proposals, including infrastructure, are often insensitive to their preferences and emerging climate changes. As such, there is a need for inclusive decision-making that allows for flexibility, local input, multistakeholder engagement and co-management to promote sustainable, bottom-up and place-based solutions.

The Commonwealth Secretariat acknowledges the role of indigenous (and local) communities and in the recently adopted Living Lands Charter highlights the importance of their role in addressing the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation. A thematic area focussed on accelerating equity, justice and support for their participation among other actions has been created. This support is additional to the ongoing work under the complementary flagship programs of the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH), the Commonwealth Blue Charter (CBC) and the Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Transition (CSET) Agenda as well as Human Rights. Efforts to support indigenous people must centre and protect, promote and respect their dignity, knowledge and practices.

This high-level side event will focus on highlighting the role of indigenous people especially their knowledge, practices, traditions and other ways of life in the fight against climate change. The event will seek to amplify their voices and concerns and chart a path forward that is inclusive of indigenous communities. At this event, a special film will be launched showcasing the Commonwealth’s indigenous people’s heritage, contributions, knowledge and potential as agents of change on the pathway to a more resilient future.

The event is organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat in collaboration with the Governments of Namibia and Seychelles. It will also provide an opportunity for partner countries, agencies, and youth groups to share experiences and lessons learned.

## Objectives

The main objectives of this side event are as follows:

- Establish a clear understanding of the role indigenous people, especially their knowledge and practices, play including as key agents of transformation in climate action, biodiversity conservation and land restoration;
- Amplify the voice of indigenous people for a resilient future highlighting their concerns like access to finance, capacity building, and technology, knowledge and rights;
- Launch “Voices of Indigenous People” film and showcase exemplar projects, research and engagement the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth indigenous people are undertaking across the Commonwealth;
- Share experiences and best practices on involvement of indigenous people in the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) implementation process including in relation to the ocean-climate nexus; and,

- Raise awareness of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s programmes and commitments to youth engagement including the delivery of scalable climate finance, capacity building, and technology to member countries.

## **Desired Outcomes**

The desired outcomes for the event are:

- Enhanced call for urgent action towards supporting indigenous people and creating an enabling environment, conditions and incentives required to facilitate their full participation in climate action, biodiversity conservation and land restoration;
- Heightened awareness and understanding for member countries and partners on effectively tapping into the existing knowledge, practices and potential of indigenous people and local communities;
- Recognition of the Commonwealth programs working together to continue providing technical assistance to countries for institutional strengthening, capacity building support, and advancing readiness and engagement for enhanced delivery of clean energy, land and ocean climate finance flows with the most vulnerable at the centre, especially indigenous people, women and youth.

## **Expected Participation**

This event is expected to bring together indigenous people from across the Commonwealth, government ministers and officials, agencies and organisations that represent indigenous people and are actively involved in advocating the cause of indigenous people.

## Agenda

TIME	ITEM
Event Moderator: <b>Dr. Ruth Kattumuri</b> , Senior Director, Economic, Youth and Sustainable Development Directorate, the Commonwealth Secretariat	
(8 mins)	<b>Welcome and Opening Address</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland KC</b>, Secretary General of the Commonwealth</li> </ul>
(12 mins)	Launch of “Indigenous voices” film
(40 mins)	<b>Indigenous voices:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Maasai, Pastoralist from east Africa</b></li> <li>• <b>Himba, Tribe from Namibia</b></li> <li>• <b>Amerindian, Guyana</b></li> <li>• <b>Pasifika</b></li> <li>• <b>Panellist</b></li> </ul>
(12 mins)	<b>High-level Messages of Solidarity:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD (2 countries)</li> </ul>
(30 mins)	<b>Panel Discussion: Pathways to an inclusive common resilient future</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Unnikrishnan Nair</b>, Head of Climate Change, the Commonwealth Secretariat - moderator</li> <li>• 3 panellists (including OHCHR)</li> </ul>
(5 mins)	<b>Closing Remarks and Way Forward</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dr. Ruth Kattumuri</b>, Senior Director, Economic, Youth and Sustainable Development Directorate, the Commonwealth Secretariat</li> </ul>
	<b>Networking event with canapes &amp; drinks</b>

## Speaker Bio's



**The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC**

### **Secretary-General of the Commonwealth**

Patricia Scotland was born in the Commonwealth of Dominica. She is the tenth of twelve children and grew up in London. She completed her LLB (Hons) London University at the age of twenty and was called to the Bar at Middle Temple at the age of twenty-one.

Her career has been marked by achieving a number of extraordinary firsts, not least of which was to be the first woman in the more than 700-year history of the office to serve as Her Majesty's Attorney-General for England and Wales and for Northern Ireland.

While holding these and other senior ministerial office she was given responsibility, inter alia, for gender equality, domestic violence, forced marriage, and international child abduction, and from these positions promoted diversity and equality of opportunity, particularly for women and girls.

As the only woman to have been appointed Secretary-General of Commonwealth she is placing special emphasis on mobilising the 56 nations of the Commonwealth to tackle climate change - including its disproportionate impact on women - and, through women's enterprise, to build the resilience of smaller or more vulnerable countries. Eliminating domestic violence and violence against women and girls is another area of focus.



**Prof Ruth Kattumuri**

### **Senior Director, Economic, Youth and Sustainable Development Directorate, The Commonwealth Secretariat**

Prof Ruth Kattumuri is Senior Director of the Economic, Youth and Sustainable Development Directorate at the Commonwealth Secretariat; and provides vision, technical and thought leadership across economic development, debt management, climate change, and development of small states, including mainstreaming youth and gender.

Prof Kattumuri is an expert on international development including climate change engaged in enabling resilient development and strongly committed to protecting people and planet. She led the design and development of the Commonwealth universal vulnerability index (UVI) in 2021, which is a precursor to and has integrally informed the proposed UN- Multidimensional Vulnerability Index.

Prof Kattumuri has been involved in high-level policy engagement and influence across several countries toward enabling achievement of a range of their Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the development and achievement of their Nationally Determined (Climate) Contributions (NDCs). She has been involved at the early stages of the New Development Bank and collaborates closely across Multinational Development Banks (MDBs). She has been engaged throughout her career in building bridges between the global South and North and is committed to South - South co-operation.

Prof Kattumuri has formerly been Director of Asia Research Centre, as well as Founder of the IG Patel Chair and India Observatory at the London School of Economics. She is Fellow of Academy of Social Sciences, is a Cambridge Commonwealth Fellow and has her PhD from the London School of Economics. She received the Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Samman Award for her work on sustainable and inclusive development, and her commitment to education, training, mentoring and empowering scores of young people.