

Stone Village Declaration

International Network of Mountain Indigenous Peoples, 23 May 2016

We, over 50 indigenous peoples and traditional farmers, representing 18 mountain communities from China, Nepal, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Peru, together with civil society and research organizations, gathered in the Stone Village, Yunnan, China, from 20 to 23 May 2016, to assess the effectiveness of biocultural heritage-based approaches for climate change adaptation and share experiences and key methods and tools for adaptation, including: community-led landscape management, traditional water management systems, community seed banks, participatory plant breeding, and landscape-based biocultural products and services.

Our mountain homelands are hotspots of biological and cultural diversity that play a critical role as water towers, centers of origin of important food crops, repositories of evolving crop diversity, and places of high spiritual value. Our rich biocultural heritage is rooted in our distinct cultural identities and includes centuries of accumulated knowledge of mountain environments. This provides the appropriate framework for innovation to meet contemporary needs, promote sustainable development and develop ecosystem-based solutions to global challenges.

Climate change is further increasing the vulnerability of indigenous mountain peoples, who are already facing problems of insecure and changing land ownership, environmental degradation, out-migration, extractive industries, market failures and market globalization, and inappropriate policy regimes.

We met in the Stone Village community in the upper-reaches of the Yangzi River. The 220 Naxi families who live in this beautiful mountain valley shared their rich biocultural heritage and ancient traditional water management system, which is the result of 1300 years of creativity. This village, built on a giant mushroom-shaped stone, is the site of a Naxi Biocultural Heritage Landscape.

We used a walking workshop approach that promotes cooperative learning and a plurality of knowledge systems, values and visions. The Stone Village Biocultural Heritage Landscape was used as a living laboratory for exchanging knowledge and experiences. Participants analyzed how biocultural heritage-based approaches are helping to protect and revitalize traditional food, agriculture and water systems including biodiversity, traditional knowledge, and cultural concepts and values.

Policy makers from national governments and international organizations were invited to learn about South-South exchanges as a tool for sustainable agriculture, poverty alleviation, and biocultural landscape management. They engaged in a policy dialogue where indigenous mountain community representatives shared key messages related to the challenges they face and the urgent need for support for their traditional resource management systems.

The International Network of Mountain Indigenous Peoples, concerned for the future of mountain eco-systems and the livelihoods of our communities in the face of climate

change, calls upon governments, research organizations, civil society organizations and the international community to:

1. Recognise the value of biocultural heritage and traditional knowledge, and the spirituality that guides them, and provide support for strengthening traditional natural resource management systems, especially water management.
2. Recognise the different roles played by men and women in traditional resource management and the distinct impacts that climate change is having on their respective livelihoods.
3. Provide support for strengthening traditional natural resource management institutions, local capacity building and preventing the rapid loss of traditional knowledge, including support for inter-generational knowledge transmission.
4. Recognise that traditional knowledge, or the use of both traditional and modern practices, can provide effective solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation, through low-cost and culturally appropriate alternatives to often energy-intensive modern technologies.
5. Provide support for research and development of biocultural products and services and the development of market linkages and branding for indigenous products, to strengthen the conservation of biological and cultural diversity.
6. Recognise the need for more research, especially community-led investigations, on climate change and future scenarios around water supply and use, and support community-led landscape management approaches for adaptation.
7. Recognise the critical role of diverse local landraces in agricultural production, food security and resilience and adaptation in mountains, and provide support for landrace conservation and improvement and participatory plant breeding.
8. Recognise and strengthen the International Network of Mountain Indigenous Peoples at the international level as an important mechanism for knowledge exchange and innovation for enhancing the biocultural heritage and adaptive capacity of mountain indigenous peoples.

We call on indigenous peoples and traditional farmers to work for the preservation of their biocultural heritage landscapes and traditional resource management systems; and we call upon national governments to implement policies that support local knowledge systems.

Finally, we want to reaffirm our commitment to working together and in our own communities towards our goals of fostering biodiversity-rich agricultural systems and the protection of our Biocultural Heritage.