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THE AP-TMA LIVING PROTOCOL FOR ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FORA

ROOTED IN CARE, CENTRED ON JUSTICE, COMMITTED TO CHANGE

ASIA PACIFIC-TRANSITION MINERAL ACCOUNTABILITY WORKING GROUP (AP-TMA WG)

Introduction

At the heart of the Asia Pacific-Transition Mineral Accountability Working Group's (AP-TMA WG) mission is to safeguard, empower, and build the capacity of local and Indigenous communities affected by climate change and transition mineral mining. This includes expanding opportunities to equip frontline community members with the tools and knowledge to assert their rights, protect their lands and livelihoods, and actively engage and lead in energy transition and mining decision-making processes. For us, empowering community members includes strengthening protections for frontline communities and environment and human rights defenders facing threats and repression, and ensuring their voices are at the forefront of a just and rights-based energy transition.

In September 2024, the AP-TMA WG co-organized the 2024 OHCHR Human Rights Dialogue on Rights-Based Pathways to Climate Mitigation and Just Transition in Asia-Pacific¹ as well as sessions at the Asia-Pacific Regional United Nations Business and Human Rights Forum in Bangkok, Thailand.

The 2024 OHCHR Human Rights Dialogue became a fundamental engagement for the AP-TMA WG as it marked the first opportunity for the WG to support frontline community participation in international fora. Specifically, this engagement empowered the AP-TMA WG to bring two Indigenous leaders from the Philippines and Indonesia to international advocacy forums, both directly affected by environmental and human rights violations stemming from large-scale nickel mining. This opportunity provided a platform for leaders to share their lived experiences, demands, and contribute to UN dialogues and decision-making processes.

These engagements have been pivotal for advancing meaningful community participation within just energy transition governance spaces. However, they also surfaced institutional, cultural, and logistical gaps that are not unique to AP-TMA' WG's experience. Even with the best of intentions, the asymmetric power dynamics rooted in development work can be colonial and extractive in nature. Whether it be time, resources or knowledge being drawn from communities, once community members return home, they are left to bear the brunt of extractivism and climate disasters while receiving limited long-term benefits from their engagement.

As organizers, we remain deeply committed to ongoing self-reflection about our power, privilege, and positionality. Recognizing that these are dynamic and context-specific, we

¹The Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR). (2024). Human Rights Dialogue on Rights-Based Pathways to Climate Mitigation & Just Energy Transition in Asia-Pacific. Retrieved from: <https://bangkok.ohchr.org/human-rights-dialogue-2024>

strive to continuously navigate how best to leverage our influence, not to speak for others, but to create space, redistribute power, and amplify the leadership of those most impacted.

The ***“The AP-TMA Living Protocol for Ethical Engagement with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in National and International Fora”*** is a direct outcome of our experience bringing local community partners to high-level fora. This document serves both as a learning guide and a moral responsibility by the AP-TMA WG to take all action necessary to ensure that future engagements and participation with IPLCs in international fora are empowering, safe, and rooted in do-no-harm, decolonial approaches.

This document represents our collective commitment to decolonize advocacy spaces², operationalize Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), and build equitable, care-based systems that uplift frontline women, community members, rights holders, Environmental and Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) and marginalized groups at the heart of the energy transition.

It is important to note that this is a living document and will continue to evolve and be shaped by the wisdom of communities and the real-time lessons of future engagement.

While this protocol sets out our commitment to the highest ethical standards in engaging alongside local and Indigenous community members, we recognize that some elements may be difficult to fully implement due to donor restrictions and funding policies (e.g., limitations on prepayments or requirements for financial documentation). The guidelines outlined below, therefore, represent our vision of the level of due diligence and meaningful engagement we aim to achieve while working within these external constraints.

² Movement for Community-Led Development, CIVICUS Global Alliance and Peace Direct. (2022). We Majority World Actors... How to Organise International Events and Convenings: A Guidance Note from Local Actors. Retrieved from https://www.civicus.org/documents/how-to-organise-international-events-and-onvenings_en.pdf

1.0 Purpose and Principles

Core Principles

- **Consent & Clarity**
Engagement must be fully voluntary, informed, and transparent. Communities must be equipped with all relevant information, including risks, expectations, roles, and possible outcomes, before accepting the engagement opportunity.
 - **Care & Safety**
Ensure physical, emotional, digital, and political security at all stages. This includes protection from state or corporate retaliation, trauma-sensitive practices, and health preparedness (e.g., travel insurance, medicine kits, and stress support).
 - **Cultural Integrity**
Respect, affirm, centre, and adapt to Indigenous worldviews, languages, and cultural protocols. This includes familial roles, community authority structures, spiritual traditions, and dietary or linguistic needs.
 - **Solidarity & Empowerment**
IPLC voices must not be tokenized. IPLC partners must be treated as co-leads in agenda setting, dialogue framing, and outcome development, whenever possible.
 - **Continuity & Reciprocity**
Engagement must not result in one-time appearances or extractive storytelling. Engagement should focus on long-term relationships, feedback loops, and community-centred benefits.
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2.0 Pre-Engagement Phase: Outreach, Consent, and Preparation

2.1 Invitation and Selection

- Collaborate with national or local CSO partners to co-create criteria that promote and ensure intersectional representation, ensuring participation from youth, elders, women, LGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities and marginalized groups.
- It is fundamental to connect with a trusted organization that has strong, built relationships with the identified community partner to ensure an additional layer of security and that effective communication channels are created. This is especially necessary for those organizing engagement with community members outside of their country of residence or for community members located in remote, hard-to-reach areas.
- Suppose there is an intermediary person connected to the local organization which is handling communication between the main organizer and the community member. In that case, this individual must be compensated for their time, energy and efforts to support both the organizer and the community member. This information should be communicated to the intermediary person from the start of the engagement, and the cost of their support must be included within the financial budget planning.
 - Send invitations as early in advance, translated into the participants' preferred languages and including:
 - Clear articulation of the event's purpose, expected roles and responsibilities
 - Acknowledgment of potential risks and limitations of advocacy spaces such as the UN, as well as highlighting expectation management for engagement
 - Confirmation of financial and logistical support (e.g., visa, travel insurance, daily stipend, honorarium, and travel companions)
- To ensure fairness, transparency, and mitigate risk for internal community dynamics, we strongly recommend that all representatives invited to participate in national or international fora consult with their respective communities and undergo their community's governance mechanisms to identify the best representative for the activity. This applies equally to Indigenous Peoples, women's groups, and other local organizations to avoid misunderstandings or tensions.
- Communities are encouraged to close the loop by informing members about who will represent them and ensuring that delegates report back on discussions and outcomes. This process helps safeguard inclusivity, accountability, and alignment with community protocols.

2.2 Informed Consent

- Conduct in-depth consultations (verbal and/or written) with participants as well as the trusted partner connected to the participant to:
 - Explain the objectives and limitations of the forum
 - Identify and discuss potential security risks, including surveillance or backlash from mining companies or state actors Outline data use, photos, and digital storytelling policies
 - Secure formal or informal documented informed consent in the local or Indigenous language, based on the participant's preference and cultural appropriateness
 - It is fundamental to manage expectations regarding the outcome of engagement

2.3 Safety and Risk Assessment

- Map travel, logistical, political, legal, and corporate risks across departure and destination points. Ensure that there is an accessible channel for communication for the community member (if they are travelling alone), and/or the travel companion shares all contact details with the main organizer before departure.
- Ensure that all travel documents, including all transportation, flight itineraries, and in-transit accommodation, are shared with both the main organizer and with the local organizational partner.
- Avoid engaging IPLCs in countries where laws criminalize Indigenous advocacy, gender identity, or grassroots organizing.
- Prepare a risk mitigation plan with emergency contacts, legal support, and protective communication protocols, including UN Human Rights Offices and national contact points information.

2.4 Cultural and Accessibility Briefing

- Provide a Pre-Departure Welcome Pack with:
 - Event agenda and contacts
 - Health and dietary tips, travel advice (visa, currency, weather)
 - Cultural expectations and dress codes
 - Access to interpretation services and support for those bringing elders, children, or spouses

2.5 Passport and Documentation Support

Securing a passport is often the first and most significant barrier for many Indigenous and local community members to participate in international forums. Organizers must recognize

that most IPLC representatives may not have passports, and obtaining one requires early, intentional support.

Key Protocol Actions:

Begin Passport Planning in Advance

Initiate coordination as early as possible to allow for passport issuance and visa processing. Last-minute planning increases the risk of exclusion.

- It is important to note that accident insurance should be included before beginning the passport provisioning process. Accident insurance will ensure an additional layer of safety for community participants, such as those living in remote areas, who have to use multiple forms of transportation and travel long distances to submit, process and obtain their passports and associated documents.

Provide Formal Letters of Invitation

Forum organizers must issue official invitation letters (in English and the local language, if necessary) for passport and visa application purposes. These letters must clearly state:

- Purpose of travel
- Name of the participant and their role
- Details of event sponsorship and financial support

Cover All Associated Costs

The main organizer must allocate sufficient funds prior to engagement to cover:

- Passport application fees
- Transportation to and from passport processing offices (which are often in distant cities if the participant is located in a remote area)
- Accommodation if overnight travel is needed
- Per diem for meals and incidental costs during documentation appointments
- **Work with Local Partners for Coordination**

Local NGOs or trusted community-based organizations should be tasked with:

 - Helping the participant complete forms
 - Navigating online or in-person appointments
 - Handling administrative follow-up with government offices
 - Accompanying the participant if needed for security or logistical reasons

- **Ensure Participants Are Not Out-of-Pocket**

All support should be provided upfront or on a no-reimbursement basis, with advance disbursement of funds wherever possible.

3.0 Logistics Phase: Travel, Stay, and Accessibility

3.1 Travel Arrangements

- Intentional planning should be undertaken for community participants, which includes buffer time for participants who are travelling from far and/or remote areas. Buffer time is 1-2 days before the activity begins to ensure that the local participant can have time to rest and be oriented before the activity begins.
- To ensure additional layer of safety, security, and comfort, local participants should be accompanied by a chaperone who can assist the local community participant in logistical, translation and other pertinent activities during and outside the event.
- An accessible, secure communication channel, such as on WhatsApp, or Signal, should be created between all organizing partners (local to national), as well as community participants involved.
- Ensure upfront, pre-paid bookings for flights, accommodation, and travel health insurance, reimbursements should be the last resort. The administrative, technical and financial limitations concerning reimbursement processes can oftentimes be a barrier for community members to meaningfully engage.
- Offer advance stipends for visa application travel, local transit, vaccinations, per-diem and urgent needs. If this is not possible due to institutional restrictions, opportunities to advance stipends prior to engagement must be identified. (E.g. institutional transfer and informal reimbursement processes once the participant obtains the funds).
- Allow requests for accompaniment by family members, elders, or local partners for emotional and cultural support, if the budget allows.
- All local participants should also be provided communication allowance prior to the event to ensure proper communication channels are secured once landing in a new country. Important to note that some participants may not have devices which allow for e-sims, and will have to be taken into account when buying sim cards for participants.

3.2 Accommodations

- Book accommodation close to the venue, ensuring:
 - Easy accessibility to the conference area
 - Room-sharing is optional, if culturally appropriate and preferred
 - Safe lodging that respects gender identity, disability access, and religious/spiritual needs

- Local knowledge (e.g. trusted hosts or partner homes) is considered over-isolating hotels
- The main organizers and affiliated network representatives must be housed in the same accommodation as community participants to ensure accessible, immediate, and trusted points of contact. This proximity is essential for providing real-time assistance, addressing emergencies, and fostering a sense of safety and solidarity throughout the engagement.
- At least one trusted individual from the affiliated network who speaks the same language as the community participant must be designated as their focal point. This person should remain in close proximity at all times, sharing accommodation and be available to provide consistent support, cultural grounding, and real-time translation throughout the engagement.
- An initial meeting with all community and AP-TMA network participants should be undertaken before the conference commences. This meeting should be safe space for initial relationship building, introductions and preparations for the next day engagements.

3.3 Food and Religious Needs

- Honor halal, vegetarian, no-pork, no-seafood, fasting, or ritual eating preferences.
 - Provide bottled water and food stipends when local meals are unfamiliar.
 - Include access to prayer rooms, sacred space, and meal breaks that respect religious and cultural rhythms.
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4.0 During the Forum: Empowerment, Inclusion, and Ethics

4.1 Safe Participation

- Provide visible "no photo/no video" badge options, if the participant has identified themselves as a high-security risk or has not provided consent to be photographed.
- Enforce a robust Code of Conduct with swift reporting pathways for harassment or misconduct.
- Offer designated quiet rooms, prayer spaces, cultural grounding spaces, and peer support points.

4.2 Language Accessibility & Respect

- Guarantee a focal point person who can provide live interpretation in all sessions, and when possible, written materials in the community participants' language in advance.
- Encourage participants to speak in their Indigenous or preferred languages without fear of exclusion, while ensuring that they are accompanied by a translator.
- Provide language support before, during, and after the forum (e.g., coaching, buddy system, translation devices).

4.3 Role Clarity and Empowerment

- Confirm all speaking roles, session types, and preparatory briefings in advance.
- Pair participants with experienced mentors, translators, or co-facilitators to reduce performance anxiety.
- Avoid tokenistic participation. Ensure sessions allow space for storytelling, critique, and strategy-setting.

4.4 Relationship Building

Relationship-building is a central element of ethical, inclusive, and meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. Given the long distances community members often travel, the emotional labour they carry, and the unfamiliarity of international forums, creating space for connection, reflection, and cultural grounding is essential.

- Host informal welcome events (e.g., cultural circles, shared meals)

- Facilitate interpersonal connections through buddy systems, ideally someone from the same region or network, who can provide informal guidance, emotional support, and help with logistics or translation.
 - Integrate Indigenous knowledge systems through ritual, art, and ceremony, where possible
 - Allow time for rest and personal travel. Recognize that community members have often travelled long distances, leaving behind critical responsibilities and are alone in a foreign country. Whenever possible:
 - Build in time between meetings and conferences for rest or light cultural excursions (e.g., visits to nearby heritage sites, museums)
 - Organize optional group dinners or outings to experience local culture in a low-stress, relationship-building environment
 - Offer flexibility to explore or reflect independently, while having a security and safety protocol in place. Avoid the schedule being overly packed or extractive.
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5.0 Post-Event: Return, Risk Management, and Reciprocity

5.1 Debrief and Ongoing Support

- Post-event, conduct a personalized in-person debrief:
 - Reflection on the forum's outcomes and any new opportunities, strategic partnerships, risks or issues faced.
 - Reflect on the process of engagement from pre-engagement to post-event and identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to better support future related initiatives.
 - Document community demands and share new opportunities (e.g., funding, speaking invites, legal aid)
 - Discuss ways to continue the sustainability of the engagement and communication channels for continuous connection.
- There must be a comprehensive security plan developed for participants and support groups identified once the activity is completed.

5.2 Reintegration and Home Safety

- Conduct post-travel safety check-ins, especially if media or photos were shared
- Provide letters of support, security contacts, or coordination with local allies if threats are faced upon return
- Coordinate with national and local partner CSOs to ensure ongoing protection and response plans are in place

5.3 Ethical Story Use

- Never publish videos, quotes, or photos without explicit post-event consent
- Offer participants full editorial review and the power to withdraw consent at any point
- Co-create any stories or media with the participant and their community

5.4 Closing the Loop

- Translate and distribute event summaries, media coverage, photos, videos, and outputs to all participants
- Provide regular updates on outcomes where their advocacy shaped decisions
- Maintain safe communication channels (e.g., Signal, WhatsApp) to build long-term solidarity

6.0 Conclusion

This protocol is a foundational tool to ensure that the participation of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in the Asia Pacific-Transition Mineral Accountability Working Group's advocacy activities is conducted ethically, inclusively, and with a long-term commitment to safety, justice, and dignity. It is designed to institutionalize decolonial, non-extractive approaches and mitigate tokenistic and unsafe participation in national and international policy spaces.

Indigenous and local communities are not beneficiaries of advocacy; they are the frontline architects of a just transition. This document affirms their leadership and our responsibility to act in solidarity with their vision for intergenerational justice and land stewardship.