

The 4th PACT Framework to Enhance Support for Indigenous-Led Research and Education

Advancing Knowledge Sovereignty and Self-Determined Development



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	PREAMBLE AND RATIONALE	5
1.1	Reclaiming Knowledge Sovereignty and Self-determination	6
1.2	Centering Indigenous-Led Education and Intergenerational Knowledge	7
1.3	Universities and Research Institutions	7
1.4	Aligning National Frameworks with Indigenous Research Sovereignty	8
1.5	Why This Framework is Critical	9
2	INTRODUCTION.....	10
2.1	Background Information	10
2.2	Overview of the 4th PACT Conference as a foundation to this Framework	10
2.3	Definition of Indigenous-Led Research and Education	11
3	CONTEXT	13
3.1	Historical marginalization of Indigenous Peoples in research	13
4	FRAMEWORK OBJECTIVES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES	14
4.1	Objectives of the Framework.....	14
4.2	Guiding Principles.....	15
4.3	Expected Impact	17
5	STRATEGIC ROLES AND ACTIONS BY KEY ACTORS	18
5.1	Indigenous Leaders, Elders, and Organizations	18
5.2	Youth and Early-Career Indigenous Scholars	19
5.3	Indigenous Women and Gender Knowledge Holders	23
5.4	Policy Makers, Government Institutions, and Regulatory Bodies	27
5.5	Universities, Research Institutions, and Academia	33
5.6	DEVELOPMENT Partners, Donors, and Philanthropic Institutions	37
5.7	Media, Storytellers, and Knowledge Communicators.....	39
5.8	Indigenous Research Alliances, Networks, and Coalitions	43
5.9	Cross-Cutting Actions and Collaborative Pathways	45
6.	VISION OF IMPACT	47
7.	THEORY OF CHANGE.....	48
	Impact Pathway Summary	49
8.	IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING MECHANISMS	50
9.	CONCLUSION.....	51

Table 1 Strategic Actions for Advancing Indigenous Youth Leadership in Research and Education.....	21
Table 2 Strategic Actions for women and knowledge holders in advancing Research and Education	25
Table 3 <i>Strategic Actions for Policy Makers, Government Institutions, and Regulatory Bodies in Advanced Research and Education</i>	30
Table 4 Strategic Actions for <i>Universities, Research Institutions, and Academia</i> in Advanced Research and Education	35
Table 5 Strategic Actions for Media, Storytellers, and Knowledge Communicators in advancing Research and Education.....	41

Term	Definition
Indigenous-Led Research	Research initiated, designed, governed, and owned by Indigenous Peoples, grounded in their languages, protocols, and worldviews. It ensures that Indigenous communities set priorities and benefit directly from research outcomes.
Knowledge Sovereignty	The inherent right of Indigenous Peoples to control the creation, ownership, and dissemination of knowledge originating from their lands, cultures, and experiences.
Decolonization of Knowledge	The transformative process of dismantling colonial hierarchies in research and education systems while re-centering Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies.
Epistemic Justice	Recognition of diverse knowledge systems, ensuring that Indigenous ways of knowing are valued as legitimate and authoritative alongside Western science.
Self-Determination	The collective right of Indigenous Peoples to define, govern, and implement their own research, education, and development agendas.
Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)	A principle guaranteeing that Indigenous Peoples are consulted and give consent before any activity or research affecting their territories, knowledge, or wellbeing.

Intergenerational Learning	The exchange of knowledge, values, and practices among elders, youth, and women to sustain Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural continuity.
Indigenous Epistemologies	Systems of knowledge and understanding rooted in relationships with land, spirituality, and community, emphasizing interconnectedness and balance with nature.
Research Sovereignty	The right of Indigenous communities to set research priorities, control methodologies, and determine how findings are interpreted and shared.
Community-Based Research	Participatory research where Indigenous communities are co-researchers, ensuring shared ownership, respect, and mutual benefit.
Gender-Responsive Research	An approach that recognizes and integrates the roles, experiences, and leadership of Indigenous women and gender-diverse persons in research and education.
Ethical Partnerships	Collaborative relationships grounded in respect, reciprocity, and transparency between Indigenous communities, academia, and other partners.
Narrative Sovereignty	The power of Indigenous Peoples to tell their own stories, control representation, and define how their knowledge and experiences are portrayed.
Indigenous Education Systems	Holistic, land-based, and spiritually grounded learning frameworks integrating language, ecological knowledge, and cultural values.
Alliances and Networks	Collective Indigenous-led platforms that promote solidarity, shared learning, and advocacy for Indigenous research and education.
Cultural Integrity	The preservation and protection of Indigenous languages, rituals, and values that sustain cultural identity and resilience.
Research Ethics Boards (Indigenous)	Community-based governance structures that review and guide research to ensure cultural alignment, ethics, and community benefit.
Policy Alignment	The integration of Indigenous-led research outcomes and evidence into local, national, and global policy frameworks.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty	The right of Indigenous Peoples to govern how data about their communities and lands is collected, managed, and used.
Collaborative Knowledge Production	Co-creation of knowledge among Indigenous researchers, elders, and allies that integrates Indigenous and scientific insights.
Transdisciplinary Learning	An approach that blends Indigenous, scientific, and experiential knowledge to address complex ecological and social challenges.
Place-Based Knowledge	Knowledge derived from deep, long-term relationships with specific lands, ecosystems, and species.
Relational Accountability	The ethical principle requiring researchers to act responsibly toward all relationships—human and ecological—through respect and reciprocity.
Community Benefit-Sharing	Ensuring that research or education initiatives deliver equitable, tangible benefits to Indigenous communities.
Indigenous Governance Systems	Traditional decision-making institutions that manage natural resources, uphold community harmony, and sustain ecological balance.

1 PREAMBLE AND RATIONALE

The 4th PACT International Conference on Indigenous-Led Research, co-convened by Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA) and the Pathways Alliance for Change and Transformation (PACT) in Narok, Kenya, represented a landmark moment in advancing the global agenda for Indigenous knowledge sovereignty and the decolonization of research and education. Building on the momentum of earlier PACT convenings in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, this conference reaffirmed the collective determination of Indigenous Peoples to reclaim their right to define, conduct, and interpret research that affects their lives, territories, and futures.

The conference began with a decolonial act of ceremony, affirming the legitimacy of Indigenous epistemologies and setting the tone for dialogue rooted in memory, ritual, and lived experience. Attended by Indigenous Peoples (youth, women, and elders); policymakers (government officials and academia/researchers); development practitioners (conservationists and environmentalists); donors/funders; and international agencies, including intermediaries, students, early-career researchers, and practitioners in multiple disciplines, rights activists, campaigners, media persons, and journalists and global allies from Africa, Asia, and the United States of America, reaffirmed a fundamental truth:

research about Indigenous Peoples must be led, owned, and interpreted by Indigenous Peoples themselves; this will ensure evidence is relevant, accurate, and transformative.

At its core, the conference recognized that research has long been a double-edged instrument: while it holds the power to illuminate and transform, it has historically been wielded to dominate, distort, and dispossess. For generations, Indigenous communities have been studied rather than consulted, their knowledge extracted for academic or commercial gain without benefit or acknowledgment. This extractive research model not only entrenched inequalities but also delegitimized Indigenous epistemologies, portraying them as inferior to Western scientific paradigms.

Against this backdrop, the conference called for a paradigm shift—from research on Indigenous Peoples to research by, with, and for Indigenous Peoples. This shift embodies an act of epistemic justice and a reaffirmation of the right to self-determined knowledge production as articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO Convention 169, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Indigenous-led research is not simply a matter of participation; it is a question of sovereignty—of who defines what constitutes knowledge, whose methodologies are validated, and how evidence informs policy and practice. In this sense, knowledge sovereignty becomes a multifaceted pursuit that underpins community resilience, identity, and development, encompassing political, cultural, and spiritual aspects.

The framework presented in this report, therefore, emerges as a strategic roadmap to promote and institutionalize Indigenous-led research and education as tools for justice, sustainability, and self-determination.

1.1 RECLAIMING KNOWLEDGE SOVEREIGNTY AND SELF-DETERMINATION

The conference proceedings illuminated the urgent need to reposition Indigenous research as a process of self-determination and resistance. As highlighted by Indigenous leaders such as Kimaren Ole Riamit (ILEPA), Ole Simel (MPIDO), and Milka Talaa (RRI), *reclaiming research means restoring control over how data is gathered, interpreted, and used*. It requires moving beyond token involvement toward community ownership of methodologies, outcomes, and benefits.

This reclamation also demands that research be grounded in Indigenous values—relationality, reciprocity, and respect for the land and spirit—ensuring that knowledge production contributes to healing, not harm. By embedding research within Indigenous governance systems, protocols, languages, and cosmologies, communities can generate evidence that strengthens their capacity to advocate, plan, and govern according to their priorities.

Hon. Lowoi reaffirmed that research must serve as a tool of empowerment rather than marginalization. He challenged Indigenous communities to resist patterns of self-marginalization such as the sale of ancestral land, urging them to work in concert with government initiatives to secure their rights, assert their agency, and shape national development trajectories. In doing so, the 4th PACT International Conference positioned Indigenous-led research not only as an intellectual pursuit but also as a practical pathway to justice, resilience, and self-determined futures.

Conference participants reflected on the power of research as both a tool of influence and a means of self-determination. They reaffirmed that “we are all researchers,” a sentiment translated in the Maasai language as “Mmemanyayu meleeno,” capturing the collective ownership of knowledge production and its centrality to Indigenous renewal.

Prof. Kariuki emphasized that knowledge production is never neutral but is inherently a site of power. Indigenous research, therefore, is inseparable from the broader struggle for self-determination.

Knowledge production without Indigenous voices is epistemic violence... To decolonize research, Indigenous people must move from objects of study to authors of knowledge. Research is remembering—a reassembling of broken histories into a just future.

The framework thus emerges as a response to the urgent need to reclaim research as an act of self-determination—a process of restoring epistemic justice and rebuilding systems of knowing, teaching, and learning that are grounded in the land, language, spirituality, and cultural integrity of Indigenous Peoples. It recognizes that Indigenous research sovereignty is not merely an academic pursuit but a political and cultural right, aligned with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO Convention 169, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

1.2 CENTERING INDIGENOUS-LED EDUCATION AND INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The framework situates Indigenous-led education as the foundation for sustaining cultural identity and continuity, fostering innovation for future resilience, and ensuring the intergenerational transmission of wisdom. As underscored by Ms. Milka Talaa and Commissioner Lentupuru, *Indigenous education systems extend beyond classrooms—they are lived through rituals, oral histories, land-based learning, and community practice.*

Ms. Talaa advocated for gender-sensitive research and recognition of women, elders, and youth as the triad of interdependent knowledge custodians: women anchor continuity through nurturing roles and social cohesion; elders (“professors without paper”) safeguard cultural integrity and moral law; and youth innovate by bridging ancestral wisdom with modern opportunities.

Commissioner Lentupuru underscored the importance of aligning national frameworks with Indigenous-led research outcomes. She reaffirmed NGECE’s commitment to ensuring that the lived realities of Indigenous women and girls shape inclusive, sustainable development.

Therefore, Indigenous-led research and education must be gender-responsive, intergenerational, and inclusive, recognizing that the empowerment of women and youth is not peripheral but central to knowledge sovereignty and community resilience.

1.3 UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

Academic institutions such as Maasai Mara University and University of Michigan, represented at the conference, affirmed that decolonizing research requires redefining the relationship between universities and Indigenous communities—from extraction to co-creation, from studying communities to working with them as equal partners. Prof. Mabwoga (Maasai Mara University) and representatives from University of Michigan underscored that academic institutions must integrate Indigenous epistemologies into teaching, curriculum design, and governance.

Prof. Mabwoga articulated a vision of higher education as a catalyst for amplifying Indigenous voices, integrating local innovation, and promoting collaborative research that both respects and leverages community expertise.

The framework calls for concrete measures such as

- ✓ Institutionalizing Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a cornerstone of ethical research.
- ✓ Embedding shared authorship and community co-supervision in academic outputs.
- ✓ Recognizing Indigenous community researchers and knowledge holders as legitimate co-authors and peer experts.
- ✓ Developing Indigenous-led curriculum content that bridges ancestral knowledge and modern scientific inquiry.

Through these measures, universities become catalysts for epistemic decolonization—spaces where academic rigor and Indigenous worldviews converge to produce solutions rooted in justice, sustainability, and local realities.

1.4 ALIGNING NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS WITH INDIGENOUS RESEARCH SOVEREIGNTY

Equally critical is the alignment of national and regional policy frameworks with the principles and outcomes of Indigenous-led research. For INDIGENOUS knowledge to inform decision-making in a meaningful way, governments and national institutions must recognize and institutionalize Indigenous research outputs within their legal, educational, and development planning systems. This alignment ensures that INDIGENOUS-led research moves beyond the margins of advocacy to shape mainstream policy, guiding national strategies on climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, land governance, and cultural preservation. By embedding INDIGENOUS epistemologies and priorities within state frameworks, nations not only fulfill their obligations under UNDRIP and related human rights instruments but also unlock transformative, context-specific solutions grounded in centuries of lived experience, resilience, and environmental stewardship.

Commissioner Lentupuru reiterated the potential of such conferences to function as critical learning exchanges, bridging Indigenous realities with state and institutional frameworks.

She affirmed that

the value of research lies not in its academic permanence on library shelves but in its capacity to generate policy, inform development, and redress systemic inequalities.

The attendance of the Hon. Lowoi, Secretary, Minorities and Marginalized Affairs Unit (MMAU) in the Office of the President, situated the conference as a watershed moment in the transition from marginalization to empowerment. Recalling the establishment of this Unit in 2023 with a mandate to promote and protect Indigenous and marginalized communities, Lowoi announced the development of a national policy on Indigenous Peoples' rights supported by the World Bank, NGEC, MPIDO, and other partners. He condemned extractive research practices that prioritize external academic gain over community welfare, urging Indigenous peoples to lead their own research and knowledge production. With powerful declarations, he called for securing land rights, institutionalizing Indigenous knowledge, and rejecting dependency narratives. For Lowoi, the future lies not in protest but in a mutually respectful and equitable partnership between government, Indigenous communities, and academia.

The Narok conference crystallized a set of guiding strategies aimed at transforming Indigenous-led research from aspiration to institutionalized practice. These include:

- ✓ Policy Alignment and Advocacy—Promoting national and regional policies that recognize Indigenous research sovereignty as a right and integrate it into legal and academic frameworks.
- ✓ Capacity Strengthening – Building networks of Indigenous researchers, community data collectors, and traditional knowledge holders equipped to lead evidence-based advocacy.
- ✓ Ethical Standards and Governance—Establishing Indigenous research ethics boards and frameworks guided by FPIC and community protocols.
- ✓ Partnerships for Co-Production—Encouraging universities, governments, and development agencies to co-create research with Indigenous communities as equal partners.

- ✓ Gender and Generational Inclusion—Ensuring women and youth are central actors in research planning, leadership, and interpretation.
- ✓ Documentation and Dissemination—Promoting Indigenous-authored publications, digital archives, and repositories that preserve and amplify Indigenous knowledge systems.

1.5 WHY THIS FRAMEWORK IS CRITICAL

This framework is designed to crystallize the strategies, principles, and partnerships that will sustain the global movement for Indigenous-led research and education.

It is both a manifesto and a roadmap—a declaration that the time has come for Indigenous Peoples to lead in defining the global research agenda. It envisions a future where knowledge serves liberation rather than control, where Indigenous methodologies are celebrated as sources of innovation and wisdom, and where every research endeavor contributes to the enduring struggle for dignity, justice, and self-determined development.

It is both a roadmap and an advocacy tool to:

- ✓ Build an enabling ecosystem where Indigenous organizations, youth, and communities drive research priorities.
- ✓ Ensure that evidence generated from Indigenous contexts informs national, regional, and international policy.
- ✓ Foster equitable partnerships among Indigenous Peoples, academia, media, governments, and development partners.
- ✓ Create intergenerational continuity through mentorship, innovation, and inclusive learning systems.

Ultimately, this framework aims to reposition Indigenous knowledge systems from the periphery to the center of global research and education.

It affirms that

when Indigenous Peoples lead research, knowledge becomes a tool of empowerment, not exploitation; of resilience, not erasure; of justice, not charity.

The Framework therefore serves as both a moral and strategic commitment—to ensure that Indigenous-led research and education shape the narratives, policies, and futures that affect Indigenous Peoples and the planet.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Indigenous Livelihood Enhancement Partners (ILEPA)

Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA) is a not-for-profit community-based Indigenous Peoples organization (IPO) for human rights and governance, environment and climate change, Indigenous-led research and local level development. ILEPA is registered in Kenya, with the National NGO Coordination Board. The organization serves Indigenous Peoples in Kenya with a focus on pastoral communities within the southern rangelands. ILEPA envisions a just and prosperous Indigenous Peoples' society and works to promote Indigenous Peoples' sustainable self-determined development anchored on recognition and respect of their rights including their ways of knowing and doing. ILEPA is a founding member of The Pathways Alliance for Change + Transformation (PACT).

Pathways Alliance for Change + Transformation (PACT)

PACT began in February 2023 and is catalysing action for systemic change in four international arenas: climate finance and markets; ecosystem conservation; support for Indigenous and community-led research and education; and education for sustainability and social change. The core strategy to achieve PACT's vision is to strengthen the self-determination of emerging Indigenous and community scholar-activists, strengthen Indigenous and community-led research, and deepen the relationships between them within and across regions.

PACT envisions four outcomes from this initiative: 1) stronger Indigenous and community-led research institutions in each major region of the Global South; 2) a new cohort of Indigenous and community scholar-activists who are actively networked and engaged in innovating new approaches to land rights, conservation and climate action; 3) new and effective exchanges and collaboration on international initiatives between Indigenous and community-led research institution in the Global South and North; and 4) international donor finance for research in the Global South shifts substantially to directly support Indigenous and community-led research-action institutions.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE 4TH PACT CONFERENCE AS A FOUNDATION TO THIS FRAMEWORK

The 4th PACT International Conference on Indigenous-Led Research, held in Narok, Kenya (August 25–28, 2025), provided the foundational insights and collective aspirations upon which this Framework is built. Convened under the theme 'Making Indigenous-Led Research Count,' the conference created a vibrant space for dialogue, reflection, and strategic action among diverse participants—Indigenous Peoples, scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and allies from across Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

The conference's primary goal was to advance the global movement for Indigenous research sovereignty by centering Indigenous Peoples as the architects of their own knowledge systems and development pathways. Through a series of keynote sessions, intergenerational dialogues, and community visits,

participants explored how Indigenous-led research can inform policy, strengthen community resilience, and transform the academic landscape toward justice and equity.

Three critical themes emerged from the deliberations:

- ✓ Reclaiming Knowledge Sovereignty – Participants reaffirmed that Indigenous Peoples must define research priorities, methodologies, and interpretations to ensure that outcomes are culturally grounded and politically empowering.
- ✓ Strengthening Indigenous-Led Education – Delegates emphasized the interdependence between research and education, advocating for Indigenous pedagogies that transmit values, language, and ecological ethics across generations.
- ✓ Building Equitable Partnerships with Academia and Policymakers – The conference underscored the need for mutual accountability between universities, Indigenous communities, and policymakers to institutionalize Indigenous-led approaches within national and global knowledge systems.

A defining moment was the Maji Moto community field visit, where participants witnessed how research and development initiatives anchored in Indigenous leadership can achieve tangible outcomes—from land reclamation and livestock management to cultural preservation and women’s empowerment. This practical example demonstrated how Indigenous-led research translates knowledge into community transformation.

The Framework that follows crystallizes these learnings into actionable strategies. It captures the shared vision articulated in Narok—to make Indigenous-led research not only a principle but a practiced reality across institutions, communities, and policy spaces. Grounded in lived experience, intergenerational wisdom, and decolonial ethics, the Framework stands as both a legacy of the 4th PACT Conference and a roadmap for the future of Indigenous research and education.

2.3 DEFINITION OF INDIGENOUS-LED RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Indigenous-led research and education refer to the processes of generating, interpreting, teaching, and applying knowledge that are initiated, directed, and governed by Indigenous Peoples themselves. This approach positions Indigenous communities—not as subjects of study—but as *authors, custodians, and beneficiaries* of the knowledge systems that concern their lives, territories, and futures.

Rooted in the principles of self-determination, knowledge sovereignty, and cultural integrity, Indigenous-led research and education affirm that Indigenous Peoples possess unique epistemologies, methodologies, and worldviews grounded in their relationships with land, spirituality, language, and community. These systems of knowing are legitimate and dynamic sources of insight for addressing contemporary global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and social justice.

In practice, Indigenous-led research and education:

- ✓ Center Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies, valuing oral traditions, storytelling, rituals, and experiential learning as valid forms of inquiry and knowledge transmission.
- ✓ Ensure community ownership and control of the research agenda, data, interpretation, and dissemination—guided by Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

- ✓ Promote gender-responsive and intergenerational participation, recognizing the roles of women, elders, and youth as interconnected knowledge holders and innovators.
- ✓ Foster equitable partnerships between Indigenous communities, academic institutions, and policymakers—transforming universities from extractive entities to co-creators and enablers of Indigenous knowledge systems.
- ✓ Advance education as a tool of cultural continuity and resilience, embedding learning within ecological, social, and spiritual contexts rather than confining it to formal classrooms.

Ultimately, Indigenous-led research and education are acts of epistemic justice—reclaiming the right of Indigenous Peoples to define, produce, and apply knowledge on their own terms, ensuring that research and learning serve their priorities, strengthen their identities, and contribute to sustainable, self-determined futures.

3 CONTEXT

3.1 HISTORICAL MARGINALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN RESEARCH

The marginalization of Indigenous Peoples in research and education is rooted in a long history of colonial domination and epistemic erasure. For decades, research about Indigenous communities has been designed, conducted, and interpreted by external actors—often without consent or meaningful participation from the very peoples being studied. This extractive model positioned Indigenous Peoples as mere subjects of inquiry rather than as producers of knowledge, thereby reinforcing narratives of dependency and inferiority while displacing Indigenous epistemologies from mainstream scholarship and policy. Education systems, similarly, have privileged Western paradigms that devalue Indigenous worldviews, languages, and pedagogies, systematically alienating learners from their cultural roots and local contexts.

Against this backdrop, conference proceedings emphasized that contemporary Indigenous-led research and education continue to face entrenched structural barriers that perpetuate historical inequalities. Weak infrastructure for data acquisition and analysis within Indigenous territories limits communities' ability to document, store, and use their own knowledge. The persistence of westernized curricula in schools and universities sustains a hierarchy of knowledge that sidelines Indigenous philosophies and methodologies. Moreover, inadequate capacity-building and underinvestment in Indigenous research institutions have left many communities dependent on external expertise and funding.

Political interference and limited legal recognition of Indigenous research institutions further constrain autonomy, while stringent donor requirements and declining funding commitments hinder the sustainability of community-driven initiatives. Insecurity, technological gaps, and linguistic exclusion exacerbate disparities, as most academic and funding systems operate in dominant global languages that exclude Indigenous expression. Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples—especially from the Global South—continues to shape how their research is perceived, funded, and integrated into global knowledge systems.

Collectively, these factors illustrate that the marginalization of Indigenous-led research and education is not merely a matter of resource scarcity but a deeper manifestation of systemic injustice. Overcoming this requires decolonizing research structures, legitimizing Indigenous knowledge systems, and establishing equitable partnerships that recognize Indigenous Peoples as co-creators and custodians of knowledge essential for global sustainability and justice.

4 FRAMEWORK OBJECTIVES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

4.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE FRAMEWORK

This Framework on Crystallized Strategies for Promoting Support for Indigenous-Led Research and Education seeks to translate the momentum of the 4th PACT Conference into sustained, coordinated, and actionable commitments. It is guided by the shared aspiration to advance Indigenous knowledge sovereignty, strengthen institutional collaborations, and ensure that Indigenous research directly informs policy and practice at local, national, and global levels.

The Framework is anchored on the following key objectives:

OBJECTIVE 1: STRENGTHEN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SOVEREIGNTY AND LEADERSHIP

To affirm and institutionalize the right of Indigenous Peoples to define, lead, and own research about their knowledge systems, territories, and futures—ensuring that all processes align with Indigenous values, languages, and governance systems.

This reclamation also demands that research be grounded in Indigenous values—relationality, reciprocity, and respect for the land and spirit—ensuring that knowledge production contributes to healing, not harm. By embedding research within Indigenous governance systems, community protocols, languages, and cosmologies, communities can generate evidence that strengthens their capacity to advocate, plan, and govern according to their priorities.

OBJECTIVE 2: INSTITUTIONALIZE INDIGENOUS-LED RESEARCH AND EDUCATION WITHIN ACADEMIC AND POLICY SYSTEMS

To promote recognition and integration of Indigenous research methodologies, epistemologies, and ethics in universities, research institutions, and government structures—bridging the gap between academic research and Indigenous worldviews. Decolonizing research requires redefining the relationship between universities and Indigenous communities—from extraction to co-creation, from studying communities to working with them as equal partners

OBJECTIVE 3: PROMOTE INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING AND EMPOWER YOUTH AND EARLY-CAREER SCHOLARS

To nurture a new generation of Indigenous researchers, scholars, and educators who can translate ancestral knowledge into contemporary innovation, ensuring mentorship, continuity, and digital engagement in Indigenous-led knowledge production.

OBJECTIVE 4: FOSTER GENDER-RESPONSIVE AND INCLUSIVE RESEARCH ECOSYSTEMS

To ensure Indigenous women’s knowledge, perspectives, and innovations are centered in research and education, recognizing them as custodians of cultural resilience and sustainability. Indigenous-led research and education must be gender-responsive, intergenerational, and inclusive, recognizing that the empowerment of women and youth is not peripheral but central to knowledge sovereignty and community resilience.

OBJECTIVE 5: REFORM FUNDING, PARTNERSHIP, AND COLLABORATION MECHANISMS

To influence development partners, philanthropic institutions, and governments to provide direct, flexible, and multi-year funding for Indigenous-led initiatives, thereby reducing dependence on intermediaries and ensuring community-driven priorities guide investments.

OBJECTIVE 6: STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION, MEDIA, AND NARRATIVE POWER

To reposition Indigenous Peoples as narrators of their own research and education journeys, using media, digital storytelling, and communication platforms to reclaim narrative sovereignty and global visibility.

OBJECTIVE 7: INFLUENCE POLICY AND DECISION-MAKING THROUGH INDIGENOUS EVIDENCE

To ensure that Indigenous-led research outcomes inform policy frameworks, development planning, and environmental governance, embed Indigenous priorities in national and global strategies on climate, land, biodiversity, and education.

4.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Framework is grounded in ethical, cultural, and strategic principles articulated during plenaries, breakout discussions, and Mentimeter dialogues. These guiding principles define how actors across sectors will collaborate, ensuring integrity, reciprocity, and justice in all processes.

PRINCIPLE 1: SELF-DETERMINATION AND OWNERSHIP

All research and educational processes must respect the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination, ensuring that they define the purpose, methods, interpretation, and use of knowledge produced.

PRINCIPLE 2: DECOLONIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Research and education must consciously dismantle colonial frameworks and epistemic hierarchies by valuing Indigenous ways of knowing—oral traditions, rituals, languages, ecological practices—as equal to Western academic methodologies.

PRINCIPLE 3: INTERGENERATIONAL CONTINUITY

Knowledge systems must link elders, women, and youth through mentorship, storytelling, and co-learning, ensuring cultural continuity and resilience. Youth are not just beneficiaries but agents and co-researchers shaping future methodologies.

PRINCIPLE 4: GENDER EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Research and education processes must actively address gender disparities by acknowledging and amplifying Indigenous women's contributions to environmental stewardship, food systems, and cultural preservation.

PRINCIPLE 5: ETHICAL PARTNERSHIP AND RECIPROCITY

Partnerships between Indigenous organizations, universities, governments, and development actors must be built on mutual respect, transparency, and reciprocity—moving from extractive to co-creative engagement.

PRINCIPLE 6: FREE, PRIOR, AND INFORMED CONSENT (FPIC)

All data collection, dissemination, and collaboration must obtain the full consent of communities and be governed by locally agreed-upon ethical standards and data sovereignty protocols.

PRINCIPLE 7: CULTURAL INTEGRITY AND CONTEXTUAL RELEVANCE

Research and education must be culturally grounded, context-specific, and rooted in Indigenous cosmologies, ensuring that knowledge reflects local realities and strengthens cultural identity.

PRINCIPLE 8: EQUITY IN RESOURCING AND DECISION-MAKING

Resource allocation and decision-making power must reflect the centrality of Indigenous leadership—ensuring that funding, authorship, and visibility are equitably distributed.

PRINCIPLE 9: ACCOUNTABILITY TO COMMUNITIES

Researchers, institutions, and funders must remain accountable to the communities from which knowledge originates, ensuring that outputs are shared, beneficial, and practically applicable to local challenges.

PRINCIPLE 10: COLLABORATION AND SOLIDARITY

The Framework emphasizes collective action and solidarity among Indigenous Peoples, academia, policymakers, and global allies to foster mutual learning and advance Indigenous research movements at scale.

4.3 EXPECTED IMPACT

By implementing these objectives and principles, the Framework seeks to transform Indigenous-led research and education into a recognized pillar of sustainable development, policy influence, and cultural regeneration. It envisions a future where:

- ✓ Indigenous Peoples are recognized as equal knowledge producers.
- ✓ Universities and research institutions serve as allies, not extractors.
- ✓ Youth and women lead innovation grounded in cultural identity
- ✓ Development partners fund directly and flexibly to sustain Indigenous knowledge ecosystems.

5 STRATEGIC ROLES AND ACTIONS BY KEY ACTORS

Indigenous-led research and education thrive when actors across communities, institutions, and policy levels work collaboratively toward a shared vision of knowledge sovereignty, justice, and self-determined development. The following section defines the strategic roles and concrete actions of each stakeholder group as articulated through the plenaries, panel discussions, Mentimeter feedback, and breakout sessions of the 4th PACT 2025 Conference.

5.1 INDIGENOUS LEADERS, ELDERS, AND ORGANIZATIONS

Indigenous leaders such as Kimaren Ole Riamit (ILEPA) and Ole Simel (MPIDO) emphasized that research about Indigenous Peoples must be “by, with, and for Indigenous Peoples.” This statement encapsulates the essence of Indigenous research sovereignty—the principle that Indigenous Peoples are not merely subjects of study but architects and custodians of their own knowledge systems. From the plenary reflections to the Maji Moto case study, the conference underscored that Indigenous organizations are both knowledge holders and development actors, shaping solutions rooted in cultural integrity and community-defined priorities.

The Maji Moto community visit provided a practical demonstration of this principle.

When communities lead research—documenting their ancestral territories, livestock systems, and climate resilience practices—they generate transformative knowledge that informs both policy formulation and on-the-ground development interventions. This participatory and culturally grounded research approach exemplifies how Indigenous-led methodologies strengthen resilience, affirm self-determination, and drive sustainable change.

To institutionalize and scale such approaches, the Framework outlines the following strategic actions for Indigenous leaders, elders, and organizations:

- ✓ Set and safeguard Indigenous research priorities anchored in cultural protocols, traditional governance systems, and the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- ✓ Institutionalize Indigenous research frameworks through community-based structures such as Indigenous councils, local research committees, and community review boards to ensure accountability, legitimacy, and cultural coherence in all research processes.
- ✓ Lead knowledge documentation and dissemination through participatory mapping, oral history, storytelling, and other Indigenous methodologies that honor collective memory and intergenerational transmission of knowledge.
- ✓ Champion ethical standards and Indigenous data sovereignty, ensuring that communities retain control over research processes, findings, and benefits derived therefrom.
- ✓ Foster intergenerational mentorship between elders—revered as “professors without paper”—and young researchers, to nurture the transmission of Indigenous epistemologies and ensure the continuity of cultural knowledge systems.

- ✓ Strengthen alliances and coalitions, including PACT and regional Indigenous networks, to amplify advocacy, enhance visibility, and mobilize joint research resources for Indigenous-led education and knowledge production.

Collectively, these strategic roles and actions position Indigenous leaders, elders, and organizations as central pillars in advancing the global agenda for Indigenous-led research and education. Their leadership ensures that knowledge generation is rooted in Indigenous values, guided by ethical reciprocity, and directed toward collective well-being and self-determined development.

5.2 YOUTH AND EARLY-CAREER INDIGENOUS SCHOLARS

Youth and early-career Indigenous scholars occupy a pivotal position in advancing Indigenous-led research and education. As emphasized by Ms. Edna Kaptoyo, their role extends beyond being the leaders of tomorrow—they are present leaders shaping climate resilience, knowledge production, and innovation today. Discussions and interactive sessions, including the use of digital platforms such as Mentimeter, revealed that Indigenous youth perceive themselves as bridges between ancestral wisdom and contemporary innovation. Their creativity, digital fluency, and energy position them to translate Indigenous-led research into actionable knowledge and advocacy tools. However, this potential remains under-realized without adequate mentorship, institutional recognition, and equitable access to research and learning opportunities.

Referencing the UNEP Commission Report, Nguiffo underscored the urgency of community-driven approaches, warning that unsustainable exploitation of forests threatens not only ecological stability but also the survival of Indigenous knowledge systems embedded within those ecosystems. He cautioned that without immediate interventions, economic growth models driven by extractive forest use could collapse within the next four decades. To avert this crisis, he called for interventions rooted in the lived experiences and traditional practices of Indigenous Peoples, positioning Indigenous youth as essential custodians who connect ancestral wisdom with modern strategies for forest conservation and sustainable development.

Further contributions, including from Edith Santiyan (Kenya), highlighted persistent gaps in youth participation, observing that while opportunities for engagement in governance and policy processes exist, Indigenous youth remain underfunded and underrepresented. Addressing this disparity requires deliberate investment in motivation, capacity-building, and sensitization to enhance meaningful youth participation. Complementing this, Carson Kiburu (Kenya) emphasized the imperative of decolonizing knowledge by harmonizing Indigenous systems with contemporary science through intergenerational dialogue, ensuring that Indigenous research and education remain dynamic and inclusive.

Collectively, the youth panel called for deeper inclusion of Indigenous youth in decision-making spaces, stronger documentation and dissemination of traditional knowledge, equitable policy environments, and greater integration of culture into education and conservation strategies. They articulated a shared vision of youth as bridge-builders—facilitating intergenerational knowledge transfer while driving innovation

through technology, advocacy, and cultural revitalization. For them, forests are not only ecological assets but also sources of identity, spirituality, health, and livelihood.

Positioned as critical change agents, Indigenous youth are increasingly mobilizing for climate justice, leveraging digital platforms for advocacy, and asserting the centrality of Indigenous knowledge systems to global sustainability. Yet, their contributions are constrained by structural barriers, including limited access to climate finance, exclusion from policy and decision-making processes, and prolonged bureaucratic cycles that marginalize Indigenous perspectives. Cultural erosion, forced migration, lack of legal literacy, and mentorship gaps further exacerbate their marginalization.

Despite these challenges, emerging opportunities signal a growing shift toward empowerment and agency. Youth-led networks—such as the Kenya Indigenous Youth Network—and cross-border advocacy platforms are amplifying Indigenous voices and fostering solidarity. Initiatives like digital storytelling and cultural festivals are revitalizing identity, while participation in academia, application of biocultural rights frameworks, and engagement in policymaking processes are expanding youth influence. Hope and resilience are being drawn from mentorship programs, global representation, and the increasing recognition of Indigenous knowledge as central to climate action.

As Ms. Debrah Delgado, representing the Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA) through its Forest Peoples and Climate (FPC) Program, emphasized, both youth and women are indispensable actors in shaping the future of climate and conservation governance. Youth are harnessing digital technologies to amplify Indigenous voices globally and to demand accountability in climate finance and policy implementation. “Youth and women’s voices must be visible in every indicator of success we use,” she concluded, echoing CLUA’s broader objective of aligning equitable financing, cultural resilience, and community-led governance with global forest conservation goals.

In his concluding reflection, Prof. Angelo Nai Kuney delivered a forward-looking call to action, urging Indigenous Peoples—and youth in particular—to move beyond narratives of marginalization toward a mindset anchored in agency, authorship, and long-term visioning. He challenged Indigenous youth to embrace digital tools for research, advocacy, and storytelling, positioning themselves as architects of the next fifty years of Indigenous futures rather than reactive participants in short-term interventions. For Nai Kuney, education must transcend personal advancement to become a transformative tool for dismantling stereotypes, redefining Indigenous identities, and ensuring that each generation contributes to a legacy of dignity, resilience, and self-determination.

The centrality of youth in sustaining Indigenous research processes was affirmed by conference participants, who called for structured mentorship, leadership incubation, and capacity-building programs tailored to Indigenous realities. Such initiatives should equip young researchers not only with methodological competence but also with practical skills—such as grant writing, fundraising, and project management—to reduce dependency on external actors. Empowering youth and early-career Indigenous scholars is thus both a strategic necessity and a moral imperative for advancing self-determined, resilient, and future-oriented Indigenous knowledge systems.

Table 1 Strategic Actions for Advancing Indigenous Youth Leadership in Research and Education

Strategic Objective	Key Actions / Interventions	Primary Responsible Actors	Supporting / Collaborating Partners
1. Strengthen Indigenous youth leadership and participation in research and advocacy	- Establish Indigenous Youth Research Councils within community organizations and universities. -Facilitate youth representation in national and county policy processes on climate, biodiversity, and education.	ILEPA, PACT, Indigenous Youth Networks	Ministries of Youth & Education National Youth Council County Governments UNDP UNESCO
Strengthen Indigenous youth leadership and participation in research and advocacy	-Establish small research grants and micro-funds for youth-led studies. -Organize annual Indigenous Research Academies or fellowships and programs linking elders, Indigenous scholars, and youth.	Maasai Mara University/ higher learning institutions, ILEPA/Indigenous Organizations Indigenous Research Institutions Indigenous Youth Networks/researchers	Ministries of Youth & Education National Youth Council County Governments UNDP UNESCO

Promote equitable access to research resources and opportunities	Create digital knowledge repositories and Indigenous learning centers. Facilitate youth participation in regional and global Indigenous research exchanges.	Development partners (Donors) (CLUA, Ford Foundation, IDRC), ILEPA/Indigenous Organizations Alliances (PACT)	County Governments Ministry of Science & Technology Global Indigenous Youth Caucus
Foster digital innovation and storytelling for Indigenous research visibility	Develop multimedia platforms for documenting and sharing Indigenous knowledge. - Promote youth-managed online databases on Indigenous research.	Indigenous Youth Networks ILEPA/Indigenous Organizations Universities' ICT Departments	UNESCO Google.org Indigenous Media Collectives Youth Tech Hubs
Institutionalize Indigenous knowledge systems and inclusivity in education and research	- Advocate for inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies in national curricula and university programs. - Formalize partnerships between academia and Indigenous organizations through joint research chairs and co-supervision arrangements.	Maasai Mara University/ Higher learning institutions Ministry of Education,	Pastoralist Women Council (PWC) UN Women Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) National Research Fund (NRF) International Indigenous Research Network

5.3 INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GENDER KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS

Custodians play an indispensable role in shaping and sustaining community-led development, particularly among Indigenous women, whose historical responsibilities have centered on ensuring family, community, and ecological resilience. Within the Framework on Crystallized Strategies for Promoting Support for Indigenous-Led Research and Education, women are recognized not as passive participants but as active custodians of knowledge systems and agents of transformative change. By foregrounding women's agency, the conference reaffirmed that Indigenous-led research must be both gender-responsive and intergenerational in order to advance just, inclusive, and sustainable futures.

Speakers such as Milka Talaa and Commissioner Caroline Lentupuru emphasized that Indigenous women are the custodians of food systems, language, and traditional medicine—domains that form the backbone of community resilience and continuity. Despite their centrality, women's knowledge remains underrepresented and undervalued in dominant research frameworks. The Framework therefore positions gender-responsive Indigenous-led research as fundamental to achieving epistemic justice, environmental sustainability, and intergenerational equity.

Ms. Talaa and other delegates drew attention to the persistent failure of mainstream research to account for women's substantive contributions. They observed that women's inclusion has too often been tokenistic, motivated by compliance with donor or legal requirements rather than by genuine recognition of Indigenous women's knowledge systems and leadership. In this context, the conference was framed as a deliberate space for capacity building from within Indigenous communities outward, fostering partnerships that elevate Indigenous women, elders, and youth as active producers and custodians of knowledge.

Further contributions from Ms. Delgado underscored the pivotal role of youth and women as central actors in shaping climate and conservation futures. Youth were described as bridges between traditional knowledge systems and modern advocacy tools—leveraging digital platforms to amplify Indigenous voices globally and to strengthen accountability in climate finance and policy spaces.

To operationalize these commitments, Ms. Delgado reported that the Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA) aims to:

Create direct financial channels for Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and Local Communities (LCs)-led organizations.

Promote research partnerships that position youth as co-creators of knowledge; and

Institutionalize gender and youth equity as core performance indicators within research and development programs.

Ms. Delgado reiterated CLUA's institutional commitment, affirming *that* "women's and youth voices are non-negotiable" within its well-being indicators strategy. She stressed that their leadership and perspectives are essential for ensuring cultural integrity, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and the design of equitable funding frameworks that reflect the lived realities and priorities of Indigenous Peoples.

Building on this, Prof. Kariuki invoked Antonio Gramsci's assertion that "everyone is an intellectual," emphasizing the importance of recognizing both traditional intellectuals working within formal institutions and organic intellectuals emerging from community struggles and counter-hegemonic movements. Drawing from his ongoing research in Olderkesi and Sekenani, he illustrated how land subdivision, privatization, and the establishment of conservancies link local processes of dispossession to broader global political and economic dynamics. His reflections reinforced the Framework's call for acknowledging and integrating community-based intellectualism as a legitimate and critical dimension of Indigenous-led research.

In sum, this section of the Framework reaffirms that empowering Indigenous women, elders, and youth is not peripheral but foundational to advancing knowledge sovereignty. Their leadership, wisdom, and lived experiences must shape the methodologies, priorities, and outcomes of Indigenous-led research—ensuring that such research is both culturally grounded and structurally transformative.

Table 2 Strategic Actions for women and knowledge holders in advancing Research and Education

Strategic Objective	Key Actions / Interventions	Lead / Responsible Actor(s)	Supporting / Collaborating Partners
1. Strengthen Indigenous women's leadership and representation in research governance structures	-Establish Indigenous Women's Research Advisory Councils at community and national levels. -Advocate for inclusion of Indigenous women's voices in research policy and funding decisions.	ILEPA, Indigenous Women's Networks, Community Research Committees	Maasai Mara University, University of Michigan, PACT, Ministry of Gender, UNESCO, National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC)
2. Enhance financing and resource access for women-led Indigenous research initiatives	-Establish dedicated funding windows for Indigenous women-led research. -Simplify donor requirements and promote flexible funding mechanisms.	Donors (CLUA, Ford Foundation, RRI), ILEPA, Indigenous Women Consortia	UNDP-GEF SGP, Global Green grants Fund, County Gender Offices, Local Trusts
3. Build capacity of Indigenous women and youth in research, advocacy, and digital innovation	-Offer trainings in research design, data management, advocacy, and communication. -Develop mentorship and fellowship programs for Indigenous women and youth researchers.	ILEPA, PACT, Maasai Mara University, Indigenous Youth Networks	FAO, CGIAR, UNESCO, CLUA, African Academy of Sciences

4.Integrate Indigenous women's knowledge into local, national, and regional policy frameworks	-Produce policy briefs and evidence syntheses on women's contributions to food systems and climate adaptation. -Advocate for inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies in education and climate policies.	ILEPA, Indigenous Women's Networks, NGECC	Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Education, African Union IP Working Group, RRI, FAO
5.Foster equitable research collaborations and co-authorship between Indigenous women and academic institutions	-Co-design research projects ensuring joint authorship and benefit-sharing. -Integrate FPIC protocols into all collaborative research.	Indigenous Women Researchers, ILEPA, PACT	Universities, Council for Higher Education, Development Partners, Ministry of Education

5.4 POLICY MAKERS, GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS, AND REGULATORY BODIES

As underscored by Hon. Josphat Lowoi and Commissioner Caroline Lentupuru, research without direct policy linkage remains sterile and ineffective. Government institutions such as the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) and the Minorities and Marginalized Affairs Unit (MMAU) hold constitutional mandates to promote equality, inclusion, and representation. Their strategic collaboration with Indigenous-led research institutions presents a crucial opportunity to institutionalize Indigenous knowledge systems within national governance, ensuring that policy and practice are informed by community realities and priorities.

Conference deliberations revealed persistent challenges in developing local human resources and strengthening community-level capacities, particularly among Indigenous Peoples with limited or no formal education. Participants highlighted recurring misalignments between external funders and Indigenous priorities, insufficient understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems, and weak community engagement mechanisms that have contributed to project failures and perpetuated cycles of marginalization. These systemic challenges continue to undermine the sustainability and impact of Indigenous-led initiatives.

To address these barriers, participants emphasized the urgent need to translate Indigenous-led research into actionable policy frameworks and to enhance training and capacity-building initiatives at all levels. Such measures would sustain Indigenous knowledge systems, empower communities, and ensure that development interventions are not only inclusive but also reflective of Indigenous priorities and aspirations.

Ms. Delgado emphasized that indicators of well-being must be defined by communities themselves, rather than externally imposed. Her statement— "thriving forests require thriving communities"—captured the principle that Indigenous-led research is indispensable for grounding policy and practice in local realities. She further underscored the interconnectedness of East African savannah ecosystems with global priority landscapes such as the Congo Basin and the Amazon, highlighting the necessity of place-based, community-led research in shaping sustainable futures.

Ms. Ann Sammante facilitated a session on lessons and experiences from national, regional, and county governments regarding policy trends in recognizing and promoting Indigenous Peoples' rights. The discussion revealed critical gaps in existing policy frameworks—particularly the lack of mechanisms to safeguard Indigenous rights despite their proven contributions to biodiversity, climate resilience, and community development. Participants noted that limited capacity to engage in policy processes and the disconnect between communities and existing legislation continue to constrain progress. The session concluded that governments must integrate Indigenous knowledge systems into sectoral policies on health, education, climate, and environment, ensuring that recognition of Indigenous Peoples moves from rhetorical acknowledgment to measurable implementation with clear indicators of well-being.

Hon. Josphat Lowoi, Head of the Minorities and Marginalized Affairs Unit (MMAU), reaffirmed that Indigenous Peoples in Kenya are constitutionally recognized under Article 56, which obligates the state to address the needs of minorities and marginalized groups, and Article 260, which safeguards community rights across education, land, health, and infrastructure. He emphasized that the Community Land Act of 2016 provides a legal foundation for communal land registration, thereby enhancing tenure security. Established through an Executive Order in 2023, the MMAU spearheads recognition, mapping, and policy formulation for Indigenous Peoples, including the ongoing development of Kenya's first Indigenous Peoples Policy and a draft bill aimed at translating recognition into law. Hon. Lowoi noted that through inclusive consultations and integration of Indigenous experts into governance structures, Kenya is making significant strides in embedding Indigenous priorities within national policy frameworks, affirming that

Kenya is on course to lead Africa in creating strong legal and policy instruments to protect Indigenous Peoples' rights. This is no longer optional—it is a constitutional mandate.

Commissioner Caroline Lentupuru of the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) echoed this progress, highlighting that Indigenous communities now benefit from reserved representation within commissions and senior government offices, including the NGEC itself, where a dedicated commissioner represents Indigenous Peoples. She emphasized the role of public participation in shaping inclusive draft policies and cited the Meteorological Law as a landmark example—mandating the inclusion of Indigenous experts on its board to integrate traditional forecasting with scientific models.

She affirmed

We are in the right direction. Policies and laws must embed Indigenous knowledge—not as an afterthought but as a core component of national development.

From an international perspective, Ms. Sharana Sherpa highlighted that while Nepali policies allow the development of local curricula, gaps persist as Indigenous languages and food heritage remain under threat. The Master's in Indigenous Studies Program at Kathmandu University—the first of its kind in South Asia—demonstrates the transformative potential of Indigenous-led education models.

As she asserted

Indigenous well-being begins with education rooted in our languages, food systems, and governance traditions—not imposed models.

Ms. Cindy Yohana, a youth leader from AMAN (Indonesia), reflected on her country's experience, noting that while Indonesia's official narrative proclaims, "we are all Indigenous," this generalization has constrained recognition of distinct Indigenous identities. Despite constitutional recognition under Articles 18B and 28B, and protection of traditional languages under Article 25(3), government priorities often favor economic and trade interests over Indigenous rights.

Nguiffo highlighted the case of Cameroon, where recognition of Indigenous Peoples is often tied to donor-funded projects. He argued that this selective approach undermines sustainability, stating:

Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon are valued for their knowledge but invisible in law. Recognition cannot remain selective, or donor driven.

Ms. Mary Beth Jäger, representing the University of Michigan and the PACT Secretariat, described the complex realities in the United States, home to 574 federally recognized tribes.¹ Despite this recognition, deliberate erasure and public ignorance persist. Recent policy shifts, such as the Executive Order declaring English the official language, threaten Indigenous language revitalization and cultural continuity.² She stressed that Indigenous perspectives on well-being encompass cultural vitality, land security, and communal cohesion—elements often overlooked by conventional policy frameworks. Yet, barriers such as policy hostility, defunding, and denial of the climate crisis persist. She concluded that community-based research and youth leadership are central pillars of resilience, affirming:

True well-being is not just the absence of disease—it's the presence of language, land, and culture for generations to come.

Kariuki highlighted the urgent need to transition from extractive models of knowledge production toward frameworks grounded in co-creation, community participation, and Indigenous self-determination. Jane Meriwas reinforced this, demonstrating that placing evidence first in the hands of communities fosters trust, legitimacy, and justice—transforming research into a powerful tool for advocacy and accountability.

Mr. Kimaren Ole Riamit emphasized that bureaucratic systems privilege written documentation, while Indigenous systems often rely on oral traditions, resulting in “data silence” and erasure. He urged communities to translate oral knowledge into written formats to enhance policy influence, noting that policymakers often respond to documented evidence.

Dr. Maundu, representing the National Museums of Kenya, discussed institutional frameworks supporting Indigenous knowledge protection, referencing the Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions Act (2016) and the Nagoya Protocol. Both instruments establish benefit-sharing and legal safeguards for Indigenous knowledge documentation and commercialization. He advocated for county-level Indigenous knowledge databases governed by communities and cautioned that sacred knowledge should remain protected. Linking local initiatives to global instruments such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, he urged for active youth participation in documentation processes. His remarks emphasized that documentation is a deep political and cultural act tied to sovereignty, law, and intergenerational responsibility.

Participants further recommended establishing a community-rooted peer-review mechanism to ensure accountability, cultural legitimacy, and validation of Indigenous research outputs. A call for stronger policy frameworks and equitable partnerships that recognize and legitimize Indigenous Peoples’ rights and contributions was emphasized. This includes updating national registries for accurate recognition, strengthening Indigenous governance structures, and creating inclusive platforms for Indigenous voices in both national and global policymaking spaces.

¹ USAGov, www.usa.gov/tribes

² US Presidential Executive Order 14224, www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/designating-english-as-the-official-language-of-the-united-states/

Table 3 Strategic Actions for Policy Makers, Government Institutions, and Regulatory Bodies in Advanced Research and Education

Strategic Role / Objective	Key Actions / Interventions	Primary Responsible Actors	Supporting / Collaborating Partners
1. Institutionalize Indigenous Knowledge and Research within National Policy Frameworks	-Integrate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into sectoral policies (education, climate, environment, health, land, and culture). -Enact and operationalize the Indigenous Peoples Policy and draft bill currently under development by the MMAU.	Minorities and Marginalized Affairs Unit (MMAU) National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) Ministry of Education Ministry of Environment Climate Change and Forestry Attorney General's Office	ILEPA/Indigenous Peoples 'Organizations PACT/ Alliances Maasai Mara University/Higher learning Institutions County Governments National Museums of Kenya Development Partners

2. Strengthen Community Participation and Representation in Policy and Governance	-Mainstream Indigenous-led research findings into planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes. -Develop and fund Indigenous community peer-review and validation mechanisms for research outputs to ensure legitimacy and accountability.	National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) Minorities and Marginalized Affairs Unit (MMAU) Parliament County Governments Ministry of Public Service, Gender, and Affirmative Action	Indigenous Councils of Elders Indigenous Women and Youth Networks Community-Based Organizations Research Institutions
3. Align National and County Development Plans with Indigenous Priorities	-Establish frameworks for data co-ownership and use of Indigenous evidence to inform county and national development agendas. -Incorporate community-defined well-being indicators into policy evaluations and impact assessments.	Council of Governors National Treasury and Economic Planning Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) SDGs Kenya Forum County Planning Units	Indigenous-led Research Institutions Civil Society Organizations Development Partners Academia
4. Promote Legal and Institutional Safeguards for Indigenous Knowledge Systems	-Create Indigenous knowledge databases managed and governed by communities to protect intellectual property and sacred knowledge.	Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage Kenya National Museums	Community Knowledge Custodians Councils of Elders' Legal Experts Global Indigenous Knowledge Networks

	-Enforce benefit-sharing provisions under the Nagoya Protocol and related national legislation	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) WIPO National Focal Point	
5. Foster Multi-level Partnerships for Policy Coherence and Global Solidarity	-Strengthen collaboration between national and county governments, Indigenous-led organizations, and international partners. -Encourage regional recognition-Indigenous research and policy implementation through the African Union, East African Community, and UN mechanisms.	Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs Minorities and Marginalized Affairs Unit (MMAU) National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) Council of Governors	PACT; ILEPA; RRI African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) UNESCO UNDP Global Indigenous Networks

5.5 UNIVERSITIES, RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS, AND ACADEMIA

In reference to the role of universities in research, the conference reaffirmed that Indigenous Peoples are not merely subjects of study but producers of knowledge—custodians of the future rather than relics of the past. Participants emphasized that academic institutions must transition from extractive research models toward genuine partnerships that respect and embed Indigenous epistemologies. This shift represents a paradigm of dignity, justice, and self-determined knowledge creation, marking a fundamental reorientation in the global research landscape.

Academic leaders, including Prof. Samson Mabwoga (Maasai Mara University) and representatives from University of Michigan underscored the need for universities to move beyond extractive research practices and become active partners in co-creating Indigenous knowledge. Realizing this transformation requires deliberate curriculum reforms, the establishment of ethical frameworks, and sustained, long-term collaborations with Indigenous organizations. Universities present reaffirmed that true partnerships must move beyond tokenism, merging academic rigor with Indigenous epistemology to address pressing global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and cultural erosion.

Prof. Kirigiah Kariuki emphasized that Indigenous Peoples should no longer be confined to the roles of research assistants or local informants but rather be recognized as equal partners and co-producers of knowledge. He called for a fundamental reconfiguration of authorship, citation practices, and publication decisions to reflect Indigenous intellectual contributions, advancing a compelling call for a paradigm shift in the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and academic research.

Prof. Kariuki introduced an epistemological framework grounded in African philosophies of knowledge, highlighting the centrality of epistemology, ontology, cosmology, and pedagogy in reshaping academic approaches. He reframed research as “re-search”—a process of remembering and reconnecting broken histories, stories, and systems. Within this framing, Indigenous knowledge must be restored as a legitimate and authoritative system, rather than relegated to anecdotal input or supplementary perspectives.

He further observed that current practices continue to sideline local researchers, often reducing them to assistants rather than recognizing them as scholars in their own right. To correct this imbalance, Prof. Kariuki proposed co-designing research projects from inception with Indigenous communities, ensuring fair recognition through shared authorship and intellectual credit rather than token acknowledgments. He also recommended institutional innovations such as dual degree programs and exchange partnerships between African and international universities—for example, collaborations between Maasai Mara University and the University of Toronto. Such initiatives would not only enhance scholarly visibility but also strengthen global Indigenous solidarity.

Participants emphasized the strategic importance of establishing a dedicated center or institute to anchor Indigenous-led research, providing both a physical and intellectual home for these initiatives. Such a center would facilitate systematic documentation, promote research conducted in Indigenous languages, and safeguard methodologies that reflect Indigenous epistemologies rather than defaulting to mainstream academic models.

The integration of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, was discussed as a potential enabler of Indigenous-led research—provided that its application respects Indigenous protocols, values, and knowledge sovereignty.

To dismantle structural barriers, participants highlighted the urgency of establishing Indigenous-owned and Indigenous-led knowledge institutions. Priorities include developing curricula that reflect Indigenous values and methodologies, establishing research hubs and data centers, and ensuring the preservation of knowledge in Indigenous languages. These institutions would serve as platforms for producing, preserving, and disseminating Indigenous knowledge, thereby resisting the dominance of external and westernized frameworks.

Furthermore, participants underscored the importance of training Indigenous youth as the next generation of researchers and expanding mentorship networks to connect early-career scholars with experienced Indigenous leaders. Such capacity development is essential for sustaining Indigenous research sovereignty and ensuring intergenerational continuity in knowledge production.

Table 4 Strategic Actions for Universities, Research Institutions, and Academia in Advanced Research and Education

Strategic Role / Objective	Key Actions / Interventions	Primary Responsible Actors	Supporting / Collaborating Partners
1. Reposition universities as co-creators and enablers of Indigenous-led research and education.	- Adopt ethical frameworks grounded in Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and Indigenous data sovereignty - Establish shared authorship and intellectual credit mechanisms recognizing Indigenous researchers and knowledge holders.	Universities and research institutions	Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs), Academic Networks Research Councils
2. Integrate Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies into academic curricula and research governance.	- Reform curricula to embed Indigenous philosophies, epistemologies, and pedagogies-- Promote teaching and research in Indigenous languages and knowledge systems. - Create joint degree and exchange programs between African and international universities to enhance Indigenous scholarly visibility.	University Senates Curriculum Committees Academic Boards	Ministry of Education Indigenous Knowledge Practitioners UNESCO Regional Academic Networks
3. Establish Indigenous-owned and Indigenous-led research and knowledge centers	- Develop Indigenous data repositories and knowledge archives ensuring ethical use of emerging technologies such as AI. - Facilitate documentation, publication, and dissemination of Indigenous knowledge.	Indigenous Universities / Council of elders Research Hubs Indigenous Peoples' Organizations	ILEPA, PACT Maasai Mara University University of Michigan Development Partners

4. Strengthen intergenerational and gender-responsive Indigenous research capacity.	- Offer scholarships and research grants targeting Indigenous youth and early-career scholars. - Foster inclusive research environments that uphold gender and intergenerational equity.	Universities Research Foundations	IPOs Women's Networks Youth Platforms Donors Academic Consortia
5. Foster equitable and decolonial partnerships between academia and Indigenous organizations.	- Institutionalize participatory evaluation and learning frameworks to track partnership impacts. - Align university research strategies with Indigenous priorities and global sustainability goals.	Academic Leadership Vice Chancellors Research Directors	IPOs Policy Think Tanks International Academic Partners (e.g., University of Toronto) Funding Agencies

5.6 DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, DONORS, AND PHILANTHROPIC INSTITUTIONS

The framework recognizes that sustainable Indigenous-led research and education cannot be realized without equitable, flexible, and trust-based financial partnerships. Historically, the architecture of international funding has mirrored broader colonial hierarchies—where priorities, methodologies, and outcomes are externally defined, often undermining Indigenous self-determination and epistemic sovereignty. Despite growing acknowledgment of Indigenous Peoples’ contributions to global sustainability, systemic funding barriers continue to marginalize their research institutions and limit their capacity to shape and implement their own agendas.

Ms. Edna Kaptoyo of the Pawanka Fund underscored that

Funding must be community-led, with priorities defined locally rather than imposed externally, since true resilience also encompasses conflict resolution, cultural and language revitalization, and systems change beyond incremental adjustments.

This perspective reaffirms that Indigenous resilience transcends environmental adaptation—it is equally rooted in cultural continuity, linguistic vitality, peacebuilding, and transformative governance.

Despite the convening of twenty-nine global climate conferences under the UNFCCC framework, Indigenous Peoples remain at the frontlines of the climate crisis as custodians of ecosystems vital for planetary survival.³ Their knowledge, far from being “traditional,” constitutes essential and dynamic systems of environmental governance and adaptation.

Within the Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA) framework, five interconnected pillars were identified as critical for advancing Indigenous self-determination and sustainability: securing forest community rights and livelihoods; advancing governance, policy, and accountability; strengthening movements and collective action; shifting financial systems; and improving conservation, production, and trade.

However, a persistent gap remains—the prevailing donor architecture often dictates how financial resources should be utilized, thereby disregarding actual community priorities and perpetuating dependency. The call to action emerging from the conference was unequivocal: fund Indigenous communities directly, empower them to define the parameters of resilience—whether through language preservation, conflict resolution, or cultural revitalization—and recognize that enduring change arises when communities themselves shape their own pathways to resilience.

Conference plenaries and Q&A sessions illuminated the funding exclusion many Indigenous organizations face due to rigid donor systems. Participants emphasized that flexible, trust-based financing is essential to ensure that Indigenous-led research is sustainable, responsive, and impactful. Donors were urged to

³ This event happened August 2025. There had been twenty-nine global climate conferences www.unep.org/gef/events/conference/unfccc-cop-29 As of November 2025 there have been thirty global climate conferences, <https://unfccc.int/cop30>

reform funding mechanisms that prioritize intermediaries over Indigenous-led institutions, thereby restoring agency to those most affected by the outcomes of such investments.

In this regard, Prof. Kariuki called for deliberate mentorship, equitable funding access, and institutional reforms to facilitate the transition of Indigenous Peoples from research assistants to independent researchers and thought leaders. Similarly, Prof. Elifuraha Laltaika highlighted the severe funding gap, noting that “2% of climate finance is earmarked for Indigenous Peoples, yet even this rarely reaches the ground.”⁴ He argued that financing must extend beyond adaptation to address compensation, strategic minerals for clean energy, and equitable access to green technology, stressing that resources should reflect Indigenous Peoples’ central role as conservators of the Earth’s ecosystems.

Prof. Ben Koissaba, drawing on his experience as a grant reviewer, affirmed that funding opportunities do exist but that Indigenous actors often lack readiness to access them. He emphasized the importance of mastering donor language, building networks, developing grant-writing skills, and strategic positioning, while cautioning against “moonlighting” and advocating for narrative sovereignty—urging Indigenous communities to tell their own stories as a means of disrupting extractive financing models.

Financial literacy—particularly in grant development, management, and compliance—was identified as an essential capacity for Indigenous communities seeking to navigate complex donor environments. Removing rigid funding conditions and ensuring that grants align with Indigenous-defined priorities rather than donor-imposed agendas will enhance autonomy, accountability, and sustainability in Indigenous-led research and education.

Strategic Roles and Actions by Key Actors

To operationalize these principles, the framework identifies the following strategic actions for development partners, donors, and philanthropic institutions:

- ✓ Provide direct, flexible, and multi-year funding to Indigenous organizations and institutions without reliance on intermediaries.
- ✓ Align funding cycles with Indigenous temporalities and governance processes, respecting community rhythms, cultural protocols, and decision-making systems.
- ✓ Invest in capacity strengthening for Indigenous institutions in financial management, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting to enhance accountability and sustainability.
- ✓ Establish dedicated funding windows for Indigenous-led research and education initiatives, ensuring equitable access to global and regional financing mechanisms.
- ✓ Institutionalize participatory grant-making mechanisms, enabling Indigenous representatives to engage directly in funding decisions, design, and evaluation.
- ✓ Recognize and value Indigenous outcomes—including cultural revitalization, land restoration, language preservation, and community cohesion—as legitimate indicators of impact and success.

⁴ <https://www.forest-trends.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/State-of-Climate-and-Conservation-Finance-for-Indigenous-Peoples-Local-Communities-Report-2025.pdf>

5.7 MEDIA, STORYTELLERS, AND KNOWLEDGE COMMUNICATORS

Media practitioners play a strategic and catalytic role in shaping the visibility, legitimacy, and impact of Indigenous-led research and education. During the conference, participants underscored that communication is not merely an extension of research but an essential pillar of knowledge sovereignty. Media engagement determines how Indigenous stories are told, whose voices are amplified, and how global audiences perceive Indigenous Peoples—not as passive victims of circumstance, but as proactive leaders and innovators in sustainability, resilience, and cultural continuity.

Prof. Morombi Ole Ronkei emphasized the urgent need for Indigenous Peoples to reclaim narrative sovereignty in an era of rapidly evolving media landscapes. He posed reflective questions to challenge existing paradigms:

What is your Indigenous story? Who is telling it? Why does mainstream media suddenly take interest?

Prof. Ronkei cautioned that mainstream coverage is often crisis-driven, noting that “catastrophes attract attention—yet such visibility is neither sustainable nor empowering.” According to him, “waiting for mainstream media to provide positive and consistent coverage is fatal,” as Indigenous communities lack the numerical and political clout to command continuous global attention.

He urged Indigenous Peoples to anchor their narratives in evidence-based research, undertaking their own documentation and publications that serve as repositories of knowledge within schools, homes, and community institutions. Such intentional documentation, he argued, strengthens intergenerational continuity and generates intellectual capital that will, over time, become indispensable for both academic and policy engagement. Prof. Ronkei further called for the creation and sustained use of alternative media platforms as strategic survival and advocacy tools—through community barazas, academic symposia, and digital platforms such as online forums and virtual discussions—to disseminate Indigenous knowledge and retain control over narrative framing. He concluded by emphasizing the need to

Cultivate circumstances that compel mainstream media to engage, while simultaneously marshalling networks of Indigenous intellectuals as ambassadors of survival, resilience, and transformation.

Building on this perspective, Dr. Naikuni reflected on his personal experiences navigating between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, highlighting the resilience required to bridge two worlds. He underscored storytelling as a powerful pedagogical and transformative tool for transmitting identity, contesting harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage, and mentoring younger generations. For Dr. Naikuni, “Indigenous identity is a source of strength, not a limitation,” and education must therefore be harnessed to document progress, empower youth, and reinforce cultural pride.

George Sayagie, drawing from more than two decades of experience in mainstream journalism, provided critical insights into the evolution of media–Indigenous relations. He observed that earlier forms of “*extractive*” and parachute journalism are gradually giving way to more collaborative approaches, where Indigenous storytellers co-produce content that reflects community voices, values, and languages.

Sayagie emphasized the strategic blending of data with emotion in storytelling to enhance advocacy impact and policy traction. He called for investments in youth media training, digital literacy, and Indigenous knowledge hubs as essential to preserving narratives for future generations. As he noted, “the internet never forgets,” underscoring the urgency of timely and ethical documentation to prevent external appropriation and misrepresentation of Indigenous experiences.

Independent and community-based media platforms were also recognized as critical vehicles for narrative sovereignty, enabling Indigenous communities to tell their own stories, challenge stereotypes, and amplify the visibility of Indigenous-led research and knowledge production. Such platforms strengthen epistemic justice, diversify the public sphere, and advance the broader objectives of this Framework—namely, the reclamation of Indigenous voices, the validation of Indigenous epistemologies, and the promotion of equitable partnerships in knowledge creation and dissemination.

Table 5 Strategic Actions for Media, Storytellers, and Knowledge Communicators in advancing Research and Education

Strategic Objective	Key Intervention Actions	Responsible Actors	Support/Partnerships Required
1. Strengthen Indigenous narrative sovereignty and documentation of Indigenous-led research outcomes.	- Document Indigenous-led research outcomes through radio, film, photography, print, and digital platforms. - Establish Indigenous media collectives and community archives for knowledge preservation.	Indigenous media practitioners, community-based organizations (CBOs), ILEPA, PACT	Donors and philanthropic institutions; academic media schools; UNESCO and UNDP Communication for Development programmes.
2. Build Indigenous media and communication capacities for advocacy and policy influence.	- Train Indigenous journalists, storytellers, and youth in media advocacy, digital literacy, and policy communication. - Develop mentorship programs pairing experienced journalists with emerging Indigenous storytellers.	Indigenous organizations, youth networks, journalism associations	Media training institutions, local universities (e.g., Maasai Mara University), donor-supported fellowship programs.
3. Enhance visibility of Indigenous-led research in national, regional, and global discourse.	- Collaborate with Indigenous organizations and mainstream media to co-produce content on climate change, biodiversity, and human rights. - Promote media partnerships that ensure ethical coverage, consent, and Indigenous editorial control.	National media councils, Indigenous research institutions, communication departments	International media alliances, press foundations, human rights networks (ACHPR, AMWIK, etc.).

4. Translate Indigenous research into accessible communication for community empowerment.	- Develop communication strategies and knowledge products (infographics, podcasts, community newsletters) that simplify research for local audiences. - Facilitate community forums and storytelling festivals to disseminate findings.	Indigenous researchers, educators, cultural institutions	Development partners, universities, creative industry stakeholders, and national research councils.
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5.8 INDIGENOUS RESEARCH ALLIANCES, NETWORKS, AND COALITIONS

The convening experience of the Pathways Alliance for Change + Transformation (PACT) and the Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA) reaffirmed that alliances are foundational to crystallizing collective action and amplifying Indigenous research leadership. Such alliances and networks serve as vital platforms for fostering solidarity, sharing resources, strengthening advocacy, and bridging local realities with global policy and academic spaces. They provide mechanisms through which Indigenous researchers, communities, and institutions can co-design and implement research agendas that reflect their priorities, values, and aspirations.

Prof. Kariuki underscored a critical concern regarding dominant funding and research models, observing that:

External funding models often dictate research agendas while marginalizing Indigenous priorities.

He emphasized that sustainable and impactful research must instead be anchored in community-driven frameworks—models that respond directly to societal challenges Indigenous communities already understand, live, and navigate. This call for research sovereignty challenges the dependency created by donor-imposed structures and calls for re-centering decision-making within Indigenous institutions and networks.

To illustrate the transformative potential of collaborative approaches, he referenced the Institutional Canopy of Conservation (I-CAN) Project, led by Prof. John Galaty of McGill University. The project exemplified the integration of academic rigor with community participation, producing impactful findings while simultaneously nurturing Indigenous scholars such as Dr. Salau Rogei and Dr. Clarkson Lugusa. Through partnerships with community-based and advocacy organizations—ILEPA, SORALO, MPIDO, and IMPACT—the project demonstrated that meaningful and ethical research thrives when it is a collective endeavor, bringing together universities, communities, NGOs, and activists in mutually reinforcing collaboration.

Building on this perspective, Prof. Andy White highlighted the strategic necessity of cross-regional alliances as a mechanism for Indigenous empowerment and resilience.

He noted that

Colonizers historically consolidated their dominance through transnational networks, and therefore, Indigenous peoples must build similar solidarity to counter contemporary challenges.

White further argued that such alliances are not a luxury but a survival strategy, particularly as Indigenous communities confront extractive models embedded in emerging global systems such as carbon markets and renewable energy projects. His reflections underscored that the future of Indigenous-led research and advocacy depends on sustained global solidarity and coordinated strategies across regions and disciplines.

Collectively, participants agreed that Indigenous research and advocacy must not remain constrained within Western academic standards or external metrics of success. Instead, they emphasized that community-driven research, oral histories, and Indigenous epistemologies must be recognized as authoritative and valid forms of knowledge production. The recognition of these methodologies is essential for restoring epistemic justice and ensuring that Indigenous research contributes meaningfully to both local empowerment and global sustainability agendas. It became evident that community-led research, global Indigenous alliances, and institutional safeguards for self-determination are indispensable strategies for resisting exploitative systems and advancing sustainable and just futures.

The discussions further illuminated the structural inequities embedded within existing funding ecosystems. Participants stressed the urgency of developing enabling and equitable funding structures that are responsive to Indigenous contexts and realities.

Key recommendations included:

- ✓ Forming Indigenous research alliances and consortia to reduce competition over scarce grants and promote shared access to resources.
- ✓ Establishing pooled resource centers and solidarity funds to enhance sustainability and autonomy of Indigenous-led research initiatives.
- ✓ Creating a global Indigenous research funding mechanism that allows communities and their institutions to access resources directly, without bureaucratic or intermediary interference.

These actions collectively represent a transformative strategy for strengthening the ecosystem that supports Indigenous-led research and education. By institutionalizing alliances and funding models rooted in equity, reciprocity, and respect for Indigenous self-determination, stakeholders can ensure that research serves as a vehicle for liberation, resilience, and intergenerational continuity.

5.9 CROSS-CUTTING ACTIONS AND COLLABORATIVE PATHWAYS

To ensure sustainability, coherence, and mutual accountability, all actors—Indigenous communities, governments, academic institutions, civil society, and development partners—must work in synergy through collaborative and ethically grounded mechanisms that uphold Indigenous research sovereignty. These cross-cutting actions serve as the connective tissue between research, education, and policy transformation, reinforcing a holistic and sustained approach to Indigenous-led development.

KEY COLLABORATIVE PATHWAYS INCLUDE:

✓ **JOINT PLANNING, CO-FUNDING, AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORKS**

PROMOTE SHARED OWNERSHIP OF INITIATIVES BY ALIGNING RESOURCES, TIMELINES, AND OBJECTIVES ACROSS ACTORS. JOINT MECHANISMS HELP AVOID DUPLICATION, ENSURE COMPLEMENTARITY, AND STRENGTHEN INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES.

✓ **ETHICAL CO-CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE**

FOSTER PARTNERSHIPS ROOTED IN RESPECT, RECIPROCITY, AND FREE, PRIOR, AND INFORMED CONSENT (FPIC). CO-CREATION PROCESSES MUST RECOGNIZE INDIGENOUS INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS AND CULTURAL PROTOCOLS WHILE ENSURING THAT BENEFITS ARE EQUITABLY SHARED AMONG COMMUNITIES.

✓ **PARTICIPATORY MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING SYSTEMS**

DEVELOP IMPACT ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN COLLABORATION WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, GUIDED BY INDIGENOUS WELL-BEING INDICATORS—SUCH AS CULTURAL VITALITY, ECOLOGICAL BALANCE, AND COMMUNITY COHESION—RATHER THAN SOLELY EXTERNAL METRICS.

✓ **REGIONAL LEARNING EXCHANGES AND INNOVATION HUBS:**

ESTABLISH REGIONAL PLATFORMS AND INNOVATION LABS THAT CONNECT RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND POLICY PRACTICE ACROSS INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES. THESE SPACES SHOULD ENABLE PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING, MENTORSHIP OF INDIGENOUS YOUTH RESEARCHERS, AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF BEST PRACTICES FOR SCALING AND POLICY ADVOCACY.

TOGETHER, THESE COLLABORATIVE PATHWAYS EMBODY THE SPIRIT OF PARTNERSHIP AND SOLIDARITY THAT IS CENTRAL TO THE REALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS-LED RESEARCH AND EDUCATION—ANCHORING SUSTAINABILITY IN SHARED VALUES, MUTUAL LEARNING, AND RESPECT FOR KNOWLEDGE SOVEREIGNTY.

6. VISION OF IMPACT

Through the collective and coordinated efforts of Indigenous communities, academic institutions, policymakers, and development partners, this Framework envisions a transformative future grounded in justice, dignity, and knowledge sovereignty.

✓ **Knowledge Sovereignty**

A world where Indigenous Peoples exercise full ownership and control over their research agendas, data, and narratives—ensuring that knowledge serves community priorities and self-determined development.

✓ **Intergenerational Equity**

A future where Indigenous youth and women are empowered as researchers, educators, and innovators—shaping the continuity, relevance, and dynamism of Indigenous scholarship across generations.

✓ **Academic Transformation**

Universities and research institutions that recognize Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and worldviews as legitimate sciences—integrating them into curricula, research governance, and scholarly discourse.

✓ **Policy Influence and Funding Justice**

Evidence generated through Indigenous-led research informs policy decisions, guides equitable resource allocation, and strengthens accountability toward Indigenous rights and priorities.

✓ **Global Solidarity**

A united global movement that uplifts Indigenous-led research as a cornerstone of sustainable development, climate resilience, and planetary well-being.

7. THEORY OF CHANGE

The Framework's Theory of Change is grounded in the belief that Indigenous Peoples hold the knowledge, values, and systems necessary to shape sustainable and self-determined futures. However, realizing this vision requires transforming the current research and education landscape—from one historically defined by exclusion and extractivism to one built on equity, reciprocity, and Indigenous sovereignty.

At its core, the Theory of Change posits that:

when Indigenous Peoples are recognized and supported as the primary architects of research and education systems, and when academic institutions, policymakers, and funders realign their practices to uphold Indigenous knowledge sovereignty, then research will not only produce contextually relevant evidence but also drive equitable policy outcomes, strengthen cultural identity, and advance sustainable development.

This transformation unfolds through four interconnected pathways:

Strengthening Indigenous Research Governance

- ✓ Establishing and institutionalizing Indigenous-led research frameworks, ethics protocols, and data governance systems that respect Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- ✓ Building the technical and infrastructural capacities of Indigenous research institutions, networks, and knowledge hubs.
- ✓ Promoting community-based research methodologies that blend ancestral wisdom with modern scientific tools.

→ **Outcome:** Indigenous Peoples exercise authority over their knowledge systems, ensuring research integrity, relevance, and accountability.

Reclaiming and Revitalizing Indigenous Education Systems

- ✓ Integrating Indigenous languages, pedagogies, and ecological knowledge into formal and informal learning systems.
- ✓ Empowering women and youth as knowledge custodians through mentorship, leadership training, and intergenerational learning programs.
- ✓ Establishing Indigenous-led centers of excellence and collaborative learning spaces.

→ **Outcome:** Indigenous education systems flourish as vehicles of cultural continuity, innovation, and intergenerational equity.

Transforming Academic and Policy Ecosystems

- ✓ Forging equitable partnerships between universities and Indigenous communities rooted in co-creation, shared authorship, and mutual accountability.
- ✓ Influencing national and regional education and research policies to institutionalize Indigenous epistemologies.
- ✓ Mobilizing sustainable funding mechanisms and policy reforms that prioritize Indigenous-led research initiatives.

→ **Outcome:** Universities, research institutions, and governments recognize Indigenous epistemologies as legitimate sciences and embed them into governance and curricula.

Building Global Solidarity and Knowledge Justice

- ✓ Creating continental and global platforms that elevate Indigenous research and foster South–South cooperation.
- ✓ Amplifying Indigenous evidence in global policy spaces on climate resilience, biodiversity, and sustainable development.
- ✓ Strengthening alliances with donors, civil society, and media to advance narratives of equity, dignity, and justice.

→ **Outcome:** Global solidarity sustains Indigenous-led research as a pillar of environmental and cultural resilience, reinforcing planetary well-being.

Impact Pathway Summary

Inputs: Indigenous knowledge, partnerships, funding, policy support, academic collaboration.

Activities: Capacity building, curriculum reform, research co-creation, advocacy, and dissemination.

Outputs: Indigenous-led research institutions, decolonized education models, inclusive policies.

Outcomes: Knowledge sovereignty, gender and intergenerational equity, policy influence, academic transformation.

Impact: A world where Indigenous Peoples define, produce, and use knowledge to secure just, sustainable, and self-determined futures.

8. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING MECHANISMS

The effective realization of this Framework requires robust and inclusive implementation and monitoring mechanisms anchored in Indigenous values, participation, and accountability. To guide coordination, a Framework Implementation Committee (FIC) shall be established, comprising representatives from Indigenous Peoples' organizations, government institutions, academic and research bodies, donor partners, and civil society allies. The committee will provide strategic oversight, ensure alignment of actions, and promote coherence among all stakeholders.

Implementation will be guided by international and regional instruments including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO Convention 169, and relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4, 13, and 15), as well as the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. These frameworks collectively provide normative and policy foundations for embedding Indigenous-led research and education in global sustainability and justice agendas.

Monitoring and evaluation will adopt well-being indicators that are culturally grounded and relevant to Indigenous Peoples, alongside knowledge indicators that measure the vitality, transmission, and application of Indigenous knowledge systems. Data collection and reporting processes shall be participatory, ensuring that communities define what success looks like from their own perspectives.

To foster transparency, learning, and adaptive management, annual participatory reviews will be conducted with all stakeholders. Findings and lessons learned will be compiled and published in accessible, multilingual formats—including community-friendly versions and visual summaries—to ensure equitable dissemination and feedback. These mechanisms collectively ensure that the Framework remains dynamic, accountable, and responsive to the lived realities and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples.

9. CONCLUSION

This Framework crystallizes the outcomes of the 4th PACT Conference into actionable strategies that reposition Indigenous Peoples as authors and custodians of knowledge, rather than objects of study. It reaffirms that research and education must not only serve Indigenous communities but also emanate from their worldviews, priorities, and lived experiences.

By situating Indigenous-led research and education at the heart of global sustainability, climate action, and biodiversity agendas, the Framework envisions a future where learning is intergenerational, research is emancipatory, and knowledge is genuinely self-determined. It challenges existing power dynamics within academia, policy, and development to build pathways grounded in equity, respect, and partnership.

Ultimately, this Framework is both a call to action and a roadmap for transformation—urging governments, universities, funders, and communities to work collaboratively toward a just, inclusive, and sustainable world where Indigenous knowledge systems are recognized, protected, and advanced as vital pillars of human and planetary well-being.