



Defending diversity since 1969

Press release

Climate change further reinforces inequalities and disproportionately affects minorities and indigenous peoples, according to MRG's annual Trends Report

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) launched today the 2019 edition of its annual '*Minority and Indigenous Trends*'. This year's report focuses on the distinct impact that climate change has on minorities and indigenous peoples as the discrimination and exclusion they face around the world leave them disproportionately vulnerable to its effects.

Although the climate crisis leaves no country or community unaffected, its social impacts deepen the inequalities of the world's most marginalised. Minorities and indigenous peoples are already acutely feeling its consequences before many other communities.

"Business as usual" trajectories have been unable to unravel the structural discrimination that characterises global societies. This has left minorities and indigenous peoples behind, inevitably forming the frontline to the unfolding climate disaster', says Joshua Castellino, MRG's Executive Director.

While recognition of the social and institutional dimensions of extreme weather events and other 'natural' disasters is increasing, not enough is being done to address their impact on marginalised communities. This new report covers a range of case studies which describe how minorities and indigenous peoples are shouldering the burden of such disasters. Examples from the text include:

- South Asia's Dalits, frequently concentrated in areas lacking access to water and sanitation, are often left vulnerable during monsoons. These communities may also be excluded from emergency assistance due to discrimination.
- Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005 disproportionately impacted African Americans and other minorities. Similar outcomes were seen in the wake of disasters such as Hurricane Sandy in coastal New Jersey in 2012 and Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico in 2017.



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- The Sámi and other indigenous communities are rapidly having to adapt as melting ice and other changes threaten traditional livelihoods in the Arctic region, where temperatures are rising twice as fast as the rest of the planet.

Global migration movements are also reflecting a quickly changing environment. For instance:

- Pastoralists in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in countries such as Chad where changes to the climate are severe, are having their traditionally nomadic way of life challenged by factors such as desertification, drought and reduced rainfall. Changing weather patterns and a lack of resources have disrupted traditional migration routes and intensified competition and conflict with other sedentary communities.
- For low-lying Pacific island states such as Kiribati, rising sea levels pose an existential threat to a wealth of cultural and spiritual traditions tied to ancestral lands. Faced with the prospect of an uninhabitable homeland, the Kiribati government is planning a resettlement of much of its population. Even if these countries avert a humanitarian catastrophe in the decades to come, their unique heritage could face extinction due to forced displacement.

Meanwhile, indigenous knowledge systems and other traditional practices related to sustainable management of the environment are already under threat. Indigenous peoples' unique understanding of local ecosystems, developed over centuries, means that approximately 80 per cent of the world's remaining biodiversity is being stewarded by indigenous peoples – a situation that would logically justify their place at the centre any environmental decision-making. However, power inequalities have left minority and indigenous communities on the fringes of climate change negotiations. Even worse, despite these communities being among those least responsible for the climate crisis, they are the most affected by its consequences. These include the damage being caused by governments in their attempts at mitigation and adaptation. For example:

- In the Brazilian Amazon, indigenous communities face displacement following the construction of hydroelectric dams such as Belo Monte without their free, prior and informed consent. Besides the damage inflicted on local communities, with thousands of lives uprooted, the supposed environmental benefits of these developments are increasingly being called into question.
- Likewise, Kenya's Sengwer people have been violently evicted by Kenya Forest Service guards with connections to environmental and climate change mitigation programmes funded by international donors such as the European Union and the World Bank.

'The Sustainable Development Goals, with their strong emphasis on the *Leave No One Behind* principle are to be welcomed, but will not be realised until the communities described in this report, as both victims and custodians of the environment, are meaningfully included in decision making',



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Castellino stresses. 'This is imperative to preventing, mitigating and resolving the climate challenges we face.'

The report includes recommendations that focus on human rights and climate justice, political participation, traditional knowledge, land rights, migration and intercommunal conflict.

Notes to editors:

- **Minority Rights Group International (MRG)** is the leading international human rights organization working to secure the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples. We work with more than 150 partners in over 50 countries.
- MRG's online [World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples](#) is used globally and updated frequently, with 53 entries having been updated this month alone.

Interview opportunities:

- Joshua Castellino, Executive Director, Minority Rights Group International (London, UK)
- The authors of case studies in the report

For more information or to arrange interviews please contact:

- Samrawit Gougsa, MRG Press Office (London, UK)

M: +44 (0)7903 645 640 / **E:** samrawit.gougsa@mrgmail.org / **Twitter:** [@MinorityRights](https://twitter.com/MinorityRights)