Chapter 3
Alternative Climate Change Policies: Learning From Indigenous Peoples and Traditions

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is defined as changes in the average state of the climate occurring at certain periods. From this perspective, climate changes are natural events that have continued from the formation of the world to the present day. However, today, the risk that climate change poses to humanity and the protection of biodiversity is associated with extreme climate events resulting from human activities. Considering nomadic societies, indigenous peoples provide information about their lifestyles in harmony with nature, which come from their past and traditions, and their exemplary life habits in adapting to climate change. The aim of this study is to investigate how the climate change-adapted living habits of local people can be addressed as an alternative climate change policy. After examining the general outlines of climate change policies addressed in the world with this approach, the effects of the traditions and living habits of local communities on climate change policies will be examined through a literature review.

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INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters caused by climate change include extreme weather events such as coastal erosion, melting glaciers, warming oceans, rising sea levels, and floods. These processes also affect a sustainable future in terms of water and food crises. When examining climate policies on an international scale, the climate conferences developed by the United Nations, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement, which represent the joint commitments of member states against global warming and greenhouse gas emissions, and the reflection of these approaches in national policies, form the basis of this content. The Biodiversity Convention, which includes indigenous peoples, shapes the UN's fundamental policies for a sustainable future. There are also on another front climate activists fighting for climate justice in the fight against climate change. With these two fronts, "learning from indigenous peoples" has begun to emerge as an alternative way of adapting to and mitigating climate change; this can be described as a return to the essence of ancient wisdom.

The 1992 Rio de Janeiro World Summit established a fundamental framework for the conservation of flora and fauna and indigenous life worldwide through the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as a sustainable development approach (Goldman, 1992; Little, 1995; Tollefson and Gilbert, 2012). Ongoing conferences and agreements have not fully achieved the expected goals. However, the increasing visibility of climate change has heightened interest in this area, and the rapid global changes have increased the importance of indigenous peoples.

"There are more than 5.000 different Indigenous Peoples around the world comprising 476 million people – around 6.2% of the global population. They are spread across more than 90 countries in every region and speak more than 4,000 languages" (Amnesty International, 2025). According to the World Bank report (2025), indigenous peoples, who govern approximately a quarter of the world's land surface, have a population as high as 476 million. Their habitats comprise half of the world's protected areas and more than half of its pristine forest areas. The World Bank report (2025) also shows that these people constitute the poorest populations in their regions. "Indigenous peoples, who make up about 6% of the global population, account for 18% of those living in extreme poverty worldwide" (World Bank Group, 2025). These communities, which have very little access to basic services such as education, infrastructure, and healthcare, also have a life expectancy that is 20 years lower than the global average. "In Panama, indigenous women are about six times more likely to die during childbirth than the non-indigenous population" (World Bank Group, 2025).

The respectful integration of indigenous knowledge with scientific data and analysis has become an increasingly popular topic in academic literature (Berkes & Usher, 2000; Prober et al., 2011; Alexander et al., 2021). Indigenous peoples'