

Indigenous Understandings of Climate Vulnerability in Chile: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract : This article aims to discuss the importance of indigenous people participation in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Specifically, it analyses different understandings of climate vulnerability among diverse actors involved in climate change policies in Chile: indigenous people, state officials, and academics. These data were collected through participant observation and interviews conducted during October 2017 and January 2019 in Chile. Following Karen O'Brien, there are two types of vulnerability, outcome vulnerability and contextual vulnerability. How vulnerability to climate change is understood determines the approach, which actors are involved and which knowledge is considered to address it. Because climate change is a very complex phenomenon, it is necessary to transform the institutions and their responses. To do so, it is fundamental to consider these two perspectives and different types of knowledge, particularly those of the most vulnerable, such as indigenous people. For centuries and thanks to a long coexistence with the environment, indigenous societies have elaborated coping strategies, and some of them are already adapting to climate change. Indigenous people from Chile are not an exception. But, indigenous people tend to be excluded from decision-making processes. And indigenous knowledge is frequently seen as subjective and arbitrary in relation to science. Nevertheless, last years indigenous knowledge has gained particular relevance in the academic world, and indigenous actors are getting prominence in international negotiations. There are some mechanisms that promote their participation (e.g., Cancun safeguards, World Bank operational policies, REDD+), which are not absent from difficulties. And since 2016 parties are working on a Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform. This paper also explores the incidence of this process in Chile. Although there is progress in the participation of indigenous people, this participation responds to the operational policies of the funding agencies and not to a real commitment of the state with this sector. The State of Chile omits a review of the structure that promotes inequality and the exclusion of indigenous people. In this way, climate change policies could be configured as a new mechanism of coloniality that validates a single type of knowledge and leads to new territorial control strategies, which increases vulnerability.

Keywords : indigenous knowledge, climate change, vulnerability, Chile

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