



Report Symposium on

# Inclusive Government in Suriname



THE YOUTH EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION May 2025 with support of UNDP Suriname



## **The Youth Education and Leadership Foundation**

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### **Introduction**

Inclusive Governance enables people to exercise a voice and influence in the processes that concerns them. It also provides the basis for forging shared identity and common values. This creates effective and resilient states and societies that are inclusive and that prioritize Good Democratic Governance and the Human Rights-Based Approach (OECD, 2020). Several initiatives were implemented to this end.

Between 2021 and 2024 the “Joint Programme Leaving No One Behind, Building Resilience, and Improving Livelihoods of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ITPs) (JPLNOB)” was implemented in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Government (The Ministry of Regional Development and Sport, The Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of Health) and organizations from ITPs, *Vereniging van Inheemse Dorpshoofden Suriname* (VIDS)<sup>1</sup> and *Kwinti, Aluku, Matawai, Paramaccaners, Okanisi en Saramaccaners* (KAMPOS). One conclusion that was emphasized is the design of a policy that included the perspective of the ITPs; a challenge for the government of Suriname (GoS), especially when facilitating sustainable development in ITP communities.

To create more awareness on this subject the Youth Education and Leadership Foundation (YELF) in partnership with the UNDP, organized a symposium and a roundtable on Inclusive Government in Suriname. Examples from Panama were also discussed during this symposium.

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<sup>1</sup> Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname



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### **Opening remarks**

The symposium was held on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2025. It began with opening remarks from Mr. Boejoekoe in his position as the chair of the YELF. A brief review of the “Joint Programme Leaving No One Behind, Building Resilience, and Improving Livelihoods of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples” that was implemented in partnership with different stakeholders (2021-2024), was given. During this programme, an integrated policy framework was developed, in line with international treaties. The absence of participation mechanisms for ITPs was one of the shortcomings that was observed during this programme. This led to the development of an Inclusive Policy framework. It was stated that inclusive policies are not only important for indigenous peoples, but also for other vulnerable groups in Suriname:

*“To establish an integrated policy framework aimed at improving the well-being of ITPs in Suriname, consistent with international law, it is necessary to adapt the current national governance framework to allow participatory mechanisms for ITPs”* (JPLNOB, Rômulo Paes de Sousa, 2024)

The concluding remarks restated the importance of Inclusive Government Policies in Suriname, especially for ITPs and the need for their participation in decision-making processes. The questions below were presented to the participants.

What is inclusive government? How is it implemented in Latin America or *“Is Inclusive Governance Dead?”* (Ralph Ramkarran, 2022)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stabroeknews.com/2022/08/14/sunday/conversation-tree/inclusive-governance-is-dead/>



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## 1. The Quality of the Structure of Government in Suriname



Mrs. Apapoe is a senior lecturer at the Public Administration (policy and Government) Department at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Anton de Kom University of Suriname and was head of this department from 2020 till 2024. Mrs. Apapoe has worked on several research projects in the field of (local) governance, small scale gold mining, traditional governance and livelihood, land rights, gender and gender mainstreaming. In addition, one of her main topics of study is good governance and public values in modern and traditional governance structures. In November 2024 she successfully defended her dissertation at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, titled: *“Governing apart together: the structure, process and quality of modern, traditional and dual governance of traditional societies in Suriname with special reference to the Ndyuka Maroons.”*

Mrs. Apapoe gave an in-depth explanation of what good governance entails in the Surinamese context and provided insight into the fundamental values of governance in Suriname, showing what steps have been taken by the GoS to be effective and efficient. She also explained the shortcomings in the GoS. She gave the following definition of Governance:

*“Governance includes the processes and institutions, both formal and informal, that guide and constrain the collective activities of a society, which need not be carried out exclusively by (state) governments”.*

According to Mrs. Apapoe, good governance consists of eight elements: democracy, integrity, transparency, participation, efficiency, effectiveness, legality, legislation and accountability. She referred to the Surinamese constitution and the multi-year development plan, in which participation has been included as a central value since 2001.

Using concrete government initiatives such as the Public Sector Recovery Program (2006–2010), the introduction of the Anti-Corruption Act (2017), the establishment of the Anti-Corruption



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Commission (2022) and the Decentralization Local Government Strengthening Programme (2003-2024), she explained that steps have been taken to be more inclusive. However, there were challenges in the implementation of these programs. She also mentioned that government policy has been moving more towards citizen participation since 2001, but that this is still limited to local government.

One of the first obstacles identified by Ms. Apapoe was 1) the inadequate implementation of policies. Another obstacle was 2) a lack of checks and balances in the political system. 3) The patronage network and the weak accountability in government and parliament were also seen as an obstacle.

She stated that citizen participation in decision-making is essential and should be strengthened and that the political will to encourage inclusive and conscious voter behavior, will play a key role in inclusive governance.

### **Conclusion**

Mrs. Apapoe concluded by stating that although policy initiatives have been taken over the years to strengthen good governance in Suriname, the actual impact of these policy initiatives remain limited. Mrs. Apapoe emphasized that good governance is not only a task of the government but also requires active involvement of citizens, critical voters and a vigorous civil society. Civil society must also contribute more actively and constructively to strengthening governance. Without joint efforts, reforms remain superficial and sustainable improvement is difficult to achieve.



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## **2. Inclusive, Human Rights-Based Government Policies for Indigenous and Tribal Peoples**



Mr. Ooft is a part-time lecturer at the Anton de Kom University of Suriname, Public Administration where he teaches the subject Human Rights and Business Administration, where he teaches the subjects Project Development and Research Project. He is also a part-time policy officer at VIDS. He also does consultancies and has worked in the past on the international UNDP and UNESCO policy on engagement with indigenous peoples. Recently he has been a consultant at JPLNOB. Where the focus was on developing a policy for ITPs. He has produced a manual to come to such a government policy.

Mr. Ooft highlighted the importance of a human rights-based government policy for ITPs. He emphasized the need for structural recognition, effective participation and respect for collective rights to realize sustainable development within these communities.

Mr. Ooft referred to a manual that was produced during JPLNOB program. Despite the existence of numerous national and international reports and recommendations, a concrete and targeted Government policy framework is still lacking for ITPs.

Mr. Ooft emphasized that general policies do not sufficiently address the specific needs of these communities. He explained that a Human Rights-Based Approach is essential because this means that policies will be developed that recognize collective rights, guarantee participation, and make decision-making transparent and inclusive.

He framed the discussion on the reason it is necessary for a specific policy for ITPs around the notion that they have collective rights. The challenges and living conditions are also different. He argued that the GoS does in fact want these communities to catch up with the development of other parts of the country. This will only be realized if specific policies are implemented. *“Business as usual will render results as usual”*. Suriname also signed international treaties obligations to ITPs,





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which are based on human rights and collective rights. For these treaties to be implemented legislation, policies need to be created.

The inequality of ITPs was further demonstrated by data from the Multi-Dimensional Poverty study (2023), which shows that poverty, educational disadvantage and lack of basic services are much more prevalent in ITPs communities. Indigenous and Tribal communities suffer structurally from this disadvantage.

Mr. Ooft explained that a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) uses the basic Human Rights as a foundation and is based on a Human Rights Analyses.

The current policy of the GoS is a general policy. He gave an example that there are policies developed for people with disability, women and children, but there are no specific policies for the ITPs, “the people who are left behind”. He also pointed out the lack of political recognition, cultural sensitivity, transparent decision-making and structural capacity building.

Mr. Ooft stated that an effective and inclusive government policy must be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Results-oriented and Time-bound) and anchored in respect, participation, equal communication and budgetary support. He also stated that this policy should be participatory and inclusively designed with a coordination mechanisms put in place in service of this policy. The foundation for an inclusive policy is respect for the institutions, the representatives and the culture of ITPs. He also stated that international human rights standards should be used as a guide for policy development and the implementation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) should also be as a standard for Government decision-making.

## **Conclusion**

Mr. Ooft concluded by stating that sustainable policy for ITPs in Suriname is an obligation rooted in both national and international frameworks. General policies fail to acknowledge the unique position of these communities and contribute to their continued marginalization. True inclusion and development can only be achieved through a specific, participatory, and human rights-based policy process. This requires political will, clear structures, and active involvement of the ITP communities.





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### **3. Climate Change in Suriname – How to Include Local Communities**



Mr. Sardjoe holds an M.Sc degree in Sustainable Management of Natural Resources. In December 2020 he was installed as the director at the Ministry of Spatial Planning and Environment, responsible for monitoring and coordinating environmental policy in collaboration with relevant ministries. He is a part-time lecturer at the Anton de Kom University of Suriname, he is also a lecturer at the Polytechnic Institute

Mr. Sardjoe provided insight into the urgency of Climate Change in Suriname and the need to actively involve local communities in policy making and implementation. He highlighted the impact of Climate Change on key sectors and the steps Suriname is taking to make itself resilient, with an emphasis on Citizen Participation and Good Governance.

Mr. Sardjoe started his presentation by emphasizing that Suriname is 93 percent covered by forest and is officially carbon negative, but is extremely vulnerable to climate impacts (sea level rise, coastal erosion, flooding, higher temperatures, high winds, and saltwater intrusion). Suriname also has a significant economic potential with the offshore Oil and Gas discoveries. The impact of climate change creates a need for a sustainable development that leaves no one behind, especially-ITPs.

He states that sectors such as energy, transport and agriculture contribute to emissions. These emissions must be reduced and the sector must comply with international agreements. He also discussed the Climate Action Framework of Suriname. In accordance with international agreements, the GoS developed several strategies such as the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and a Climate Financing Strategy. In the Nationally Determined Contribution the GoS outlined how it will reduce greenhouse gas emission and adapt to Climate Change Impact to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. Suriname will maintain 93 percent forest coverage. By 2030 Suriname also plans to transform 35 percent of its energy to renewable energy. Another element of the Climate Framework of Suriname is the countries NAP. It focusses on reducing vulnerability and building



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resilience. Some of the priorities in this framework are social equity, gender, institutional strengthening, capacity building and finance.

He stated that an important effect of climate Change is the impact it has on vulnerable groups, especially ITPs and that inclusive approach ensues fairness. This approach also uses the knowledge that local communities possess for sustainable resource management. Also described is participation of ITPs in decision making and acknowledging the land rights are inclusion strategies. It is also important to address and recognize the role and vulnerability of women in climate action.

Mr. Sardjoe described the challenges in making inclusive Climate Change policies. He stated that the limited capacity, financial and technical resources within the government is a challenge that the GoS deals with. Another challenge is the coordination within the GoS, more specifically ensuring constructive collaboration between the different Ministries and community initiatives. The final challenge he described is the gap between policy and practice.

An opportunity he identifies is the untapped traditional knowledge of Indigenous communities. Another opportunity is the fact that Suriname is considered carbon negative, which attracts international partners. He also emphasized that the current policy mandate provides a clear and direct vision for the country (NDC, NAP and GDS).

## **Conclusion**

Mr. Sardjoe concluded by stating that climate change is a collective challenge that requires shared responsibility, integrated planning, and participation. Only through joint efforts, inclusive policies, and strong governance can Suriname build resilience against the increasing impacts of climate change, while preserving its ecological integrity and promoting social justice.



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#### **4. Inclusive Governance in Latin America, insights from panama and the vision for regional transformation**



Mrs. Monteza is a governance expert with experience in policy development and initiatives to strengthen citizen participation and transparency in Panama. She has contributed to the development of Panama's Visión País with APEDE, the National Strategic Plan for Science and Technology (PENCIYT) 2019-2024, and the National Energy Plan through 2050. She was also invited to write Chapter Two of the National Report for the Pacto del Bicentenario, detailing the dialogue process.

Currently, she is developing Gobernanza XL, a platform in progress aimed at sharing knowledge and strengthening good governance in Panama and Central America. As a Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow and alumna of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, she combines academic expertise with practical experience to promote inclusive and sustainable governance models.

Mrs. Monteza discussed the experience of Inclusive Governance in Panama and how the Government of Panama (GoP) is implementing this concept. She emphasized that good governance should not be seen as a luxury, but as the basis for resilience in a country. In her presentation she focused on the challenges and opportunities that Panama has in the field of inclusive policies and governance, with special attention to the situation of indigenous communities and tackling inequality.

She stated that inclusive governance ensures participation from marginalized groups and combines equity, legitimacy and accountability. Her presentation was framed around a waste project that was implemented in Suriname, Armenia and Panama. This project gave her some insights on governance in Suriname, more specifically Brokopondo. She explained that there is a lack of transparency and accountability within government, which hampers the involvement of citizens and communities in decision-making processes. Limited access to valuable information hinders



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citizen participation in policy processes. Obtaining the right information is crucial for effective democracy and inclusive decision-making. Mrs. Monteza highlighted the significant inequality in Panama, particularly between indigenous and non-indigenous communities. This inequality is an obstacle to social cohesion and sustainable development in the country.

She also described indigenous and gender responsive programs in Panama. This initiative seeks to strengthen the institutional capacity of indigenous authorities and align national planning with the priorities of indigenous communities. This intervention is structured in institutional strengthening and governance capacity building. The focus lies here in enhancing the capacity of the civil servants of the GoP and the indigenous authorities to effectively manage government functions to improve opportunities and living conditions in indigenous territories. Another aspect of this intervention is the improvement of the quality and cultural relevancy in service delivery. The focus here is on elevating the quality and ensuring the cultural appropriateness of public service in the twelve indigenous territories.

A final aspect is project management, monitoring and evaluation. Support is provided for the supervision, planning, coordination, social management, communication, monitoring and evaluation of projects. Another initiative of the GoP is economic empowerment plan for indigenous women. The plan promotes access to credits, entrepreneurship training and market integration for indigenous women led businesses.

Mrs. Monteza also discussed Nabatchi's, 10 Good Governance Principles. They form the foundation for good governance, accountability and inclusiveness. Mrs. Monteza recommended that efforts must be made to improve governance structures in the GoP. Inclusive policies require government to function effectively with broad support, all groups, especially indigenous communities.

Another recommendation was that participation should be increased. More space must be created for the participation of indigenous leaders and communities in policy decisions. Promoting genuine participation is essential for developing policies that truly reflect the needs of these communities.



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The GoP should work to improve the transparency and accountability of its processes. This can be done by establishing mechanisms that enable citizens and communities to actively participate in and monitor policy implementations. There should be a systematic approach to sharing information with all levels of society so that all groups are better informed and can play an active role in decision-making. A last point that was emphasized was that Economic Programs for Indigenous Communities should be strengthened. The GoP should continue to invest in programs aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and economic independence within indigenous communities. This can help improve the socio-economic situation of these communities.

### **Conclusion**

Mrs. Monteza concluded that good governance and inclusive governance are crucial for Panama's development and resilience. Despite the positive initiatives taken to engage indigenous communities and address inequality, many challenges remain, such as improving transparency and access to information. She emphasized that the participation of indigenous communities in decision-making is essential for creating effective policies that truly benefit these communities. Panama's success in inclusive governance depends on the government's willingness to address these obstacles and effectively implement the necessary changes so that all communities in Panama have a fair chance to develop.

### **5. Panel Discussion Highlights**

This discussion was held after the different presentation and focused on the experience of Panama and the role of inclusive governance in the current growth of Panama. There was also emphasis on what we can learn from the Panama experience and what can be introduced as an inclusive governance framework in Suriname. The moderator confirmed that Panama is one of the 15<sup>th</sup> fastest growing economies in Latin America. Mrs. Monteza highlighted that Panama is currently facing some pressure from the United States and there is no equal distribution of the wealth in Panama, it does not reach all levels of the population. Additionally, Panama has created participatory frameworks and governance with the women and indigenous organizations to



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accommodate growth in these communities. She further stated that, “*inclusion is about political will*” hinting that there is not always the political will to evenly distribute the wealth of the country. Mrs. Apapoe indicated that it is important for Suriname to recognize and respect its traditional societies. She also indicated that an attempt has been made before to involve traditional groups in governance and policy. Most of the natural resources are in the interior of Suriname, and we should also look forward involving the traditional societies in the development of these natural resources. In Panama, the traditional society is recognized and there are models developed by the government to include these communities. There are spaces where traditional authorities and government authorities meet to exchange ideas.

According to Mrs. Apapoe, awareness and decentralization are important for Suriname moving forward. She emphasizes that within traditional communities there are also elements of good governance. Mrs. Apapoe talked about the aspect of community forests that were managed by traditional societies. The political appointments of different traditional leaders (Grangman and Captains) was discussed. It was also discussed that these appointments can cause problems in the communities.

In closing Ms. Monteza indicated that Panama lacks a strong example of inclusive governance in the mining industry, particularly in 2024 when protests occurred over concession rights granted to a mining company.

Mr. Ooft stated that politics are for personal gain and causes polarization, also within traditional communities and that the VIDS is aware of this and the biggest strategy they use to fight this is creating awareness in ITP communities.



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### **Closing remarks**

In his closing remark Mr. Martoredjo of the UNDP thanked the speakers for their contribution and thanked the attendees, who included a mix of policymakers, civil servants, students and lectures from the Anton de Kom University of Suriname, Mr. Martoredjo also encourage the participants to register for the webinar on “The Rights of ITPs in Climate Change Mitigation in Suriname, Guyana, Ecuador and Brazil”.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

One of the observations from the symposium was that Inclusive Governance is a concept that needs to be discussed by a much broader audience from civil society, academia, civil servants, and policy makers, representatives of ITPs and members of parliament. It is also important that the capacity of the GoS can be build, especially on how to include the perspective of ITPs. It is also important to get a better understanding of how this concept is implemented in parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. This will lead to a better understanding of how ITPs and other vulnerable groups can be included in the process of inclusive policy development.