



Native Women's  
Association of Canada

L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

# WATER CARRIERS SURVEY

Report  
July 07, 2023

**ENVIRONICS**  
RESEARCH

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**The goal of this research was to gather the opinions and experiences of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people in their roles as water carriers, their challenges related to water insecurity and the impacts of climate change in their communities.**

This research is a part of Phase 2 of the Water Carriers: Engaging Traditional Knowledge to Build Capacity project, developed with Indigenous Services Canada.

# RESEARCH METHODS

**This report is based on an online survey completed by 196 Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people, from June 14<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The survey was not open to male participants.**

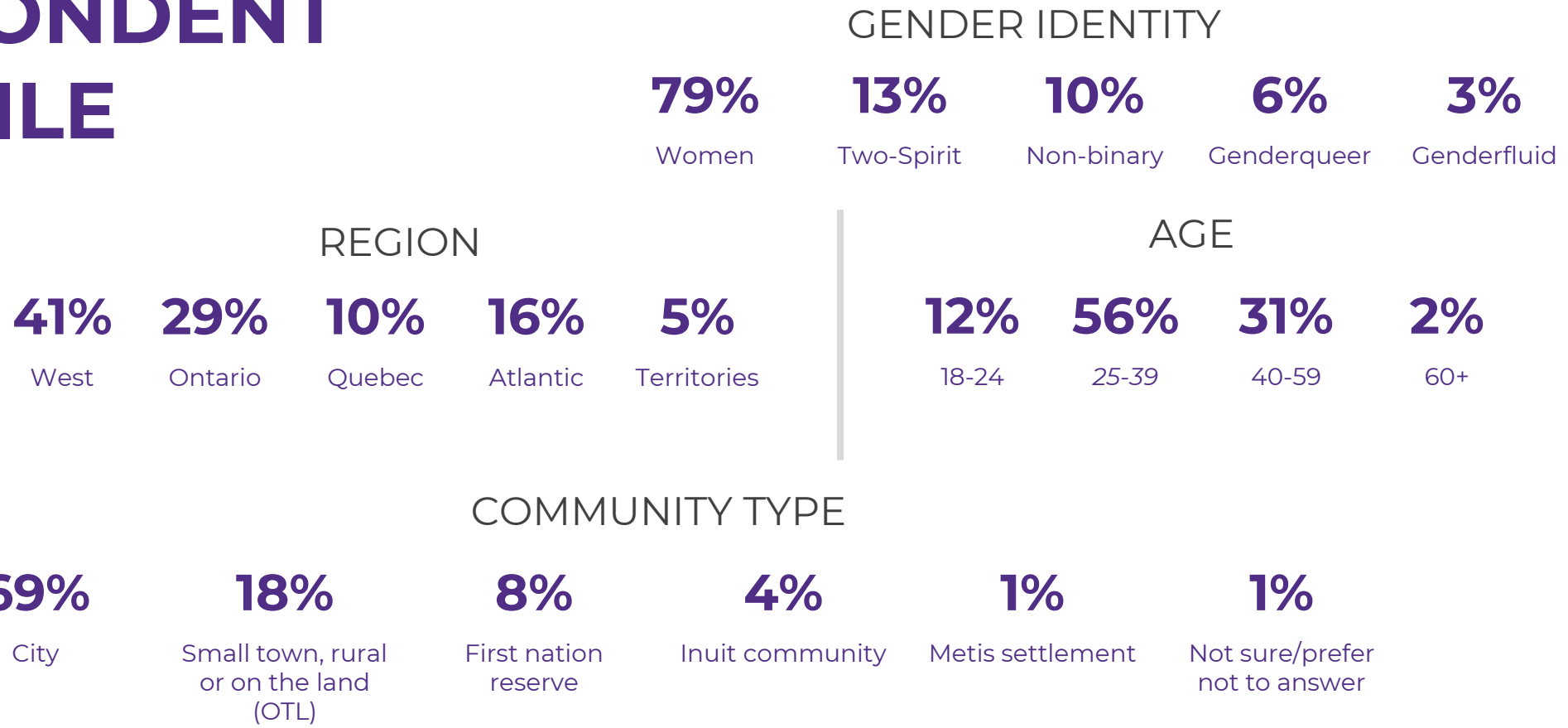
The questionnaire was designed by NWAC, with input and advice from Environics Research. NWAC programmed the questionnaire in Simple Survey and distributed an open survey link via social media. A cash incentive of \$50 was offered to the first 200 participants. Due to the nature of social media and the offer of a cash incentive, a number of responses were determined to be invalid and removed from the final data set prior to analysis.

This sample is a convenience sample, meaning that it was drawn from a conveniently available group of individuals. Because it is not a probability sample (respondents were not randomly selected, nor did all individuals in the desired communities have an equal chance of being selected into the sample), **the sample cannot be considered representative of all Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people.** Caution should be used in interpreting the data.

**About this report:** Unless otherwise noted, results for all questions are based on the total sample of 196 participants. Sometimes results do not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses. Labels for values less than 2% are not shown. For “select all that apply” questions, categories with no responses are not shown.

The following page presents a regional and demographic profile of survey participants.

# RESPONDENT PROFILE



# SUMMARY

# KEY FINDINGS

- 1 Survey participants indicate broad concern about the condition of water resources in their community, though most feel there is enough water to meet their community's needs; in other words, concern is concentrated mainly on quality, access, and rights to water, rather than the quantity available.** A vast majority of survey participants are *very* or *somewhat* concerned about the condition of water resources in their community, and find that this condition has stagnated or declined, rather than improved over ten years' time. More than half (54%) are *very* concerned about the condition of water resources in their community, with another 41 percent saying they are *somewhat* concerned. Four in ten (39%) say the condition of water resources has declined, one in three (32%) think it has stayed the same compared to ten years ago. While concern about water resources is high, a majority (70%) of survey participants are *somewhat* or *very* confident that their community has enough water resources to meet long-term needs.
- 2 Beyond water's place as essential for daily living, the spiritual and cultural significance of water is evident among survey participants.** Indigenous values are seen as highly important to water-related decisions. Nearly all survey participants (98%) noted this to be *very* or *somewhat* important. Ranking values derived from Water in terms of importance, spiritual and cultural fulfilment is ranked most important by survey participants, with eight in ten (83%) saying this value is *very* important. Water to nourish and support the environment (73%), as a source of food and health (71%), and as a support for economic activities (62%) were also noted to be *very* important values for a majority of survey participants. Water has deep meaning to this audience; three in four say that water is sacred (76%) and a source of spiritual calmness (75%). Majorities also say that water is community (66%), a source of therapy (60%), and medicine (55%).
- 3 Participants see threats to water access and water quality on several fronts, including environmental impacts and rights violations.** Half of survey participants say their community has experienced contamination of water bodies in the past five years, and issues with drinking water are also common. About four in ten say their community has experienced boil water or no-drinking advisories (43%) and a lack of clean drinking water (42%). In addition to these serious quality issues impacting day-to-day life and health, many participants have also had their rights to access water violated (39%) and most find that climate change has impacted their experience of water (63%). Two-thirds (66%) have experienced gender-related barriers inhibiting their ability to exercise their water rights, and half (51%) say that violations of water rights have affected their or their communities' ability to harvest fish and other animals.

# KEY FINDINGS

- 4 While a regional strategy is noted to be an important step that should be given high priority, this sort of strategy needs to be supported by funding and open engagement from external stakeholders if it is to succeed.** A regional strategy for managing and protecting water, led by Indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse and Two-Spirit people, is broadly seen as something that would be effective (95% *very* or *somewhat*), with seven in ten (72%) finding that the current lack of such a strategy has negatively impacted them. Eight in ten (78%) think high priority should be given to developing such a strategy. Four in ten (42%) say there are policies in place within their communities for including Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals in water-related decision-making while over half (54%) see active efforts toward inclusion. Considering different external stakeholders, survey participants find local government (50%) and external contractors/service providers (49%) to be the most difficult to engage with on water issues. Two in three (68%) think that a lack of funding to support engagement activities most hinders engagement between Indigenous communities and governments.
- 5 Survey participants generally see some positive steps toward better water management policy within their communities and see long-term funding and investment in Indigenous knowledge as critical to ongoing progress.** While participants report receiving information from a variety of sources including meetings, hotlines, and workshops, web-based communication is seen as most effective in transmitting information about water policy changes and boil water advisories. Six in ten (62%) say their community has a dedicated water resource use/management policy; of those with such policies in their community, two-thirds (69%) say the policy indicates clear goals. Over half (56%) say water resource strategies have been established to address future challenges in their communities. Four in ten (42%) think that policies that protect/promote the right to waters would best protect waterways without violating Indigenous treaty rights. Considering tools for establishing a reliable and resilient Indigenous water strategy, majorities find all tools helpful, but long-term government funding (66%) and investments to develop Indigenous knowledge (63%) are noted most often. All value approaches to policy making were assessed to be similar in importance, with 88 percent or more rating each one as *very* or *somewhat* important; at 95 percent, honoring Indigenous outlooks ranked highest among these values.

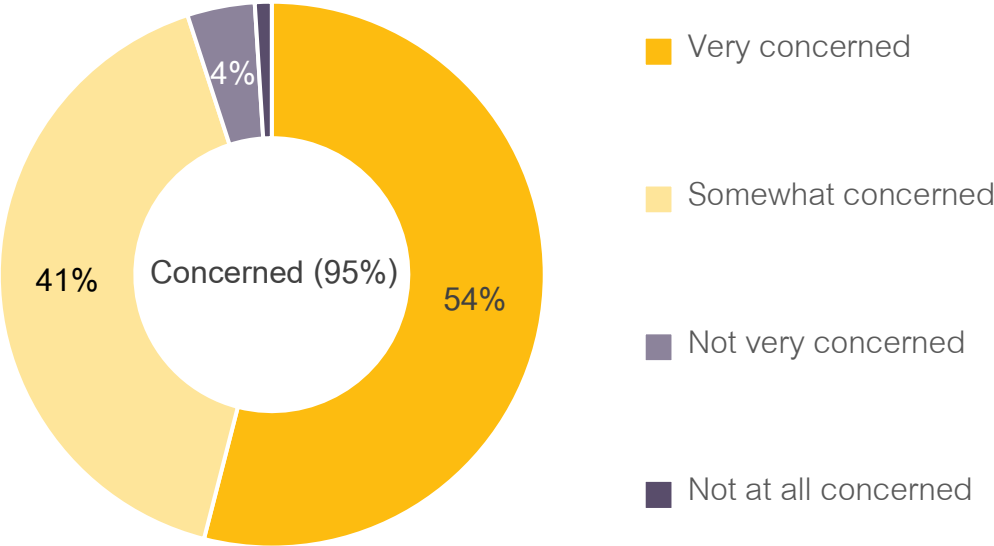


# PERCEPTIONS OF WATER RESOURCE CONDITIONS

# Perceptions | **Overall concern about water condition**

There is widespread concern about the condition of water resources, including more than half who are very concerned.

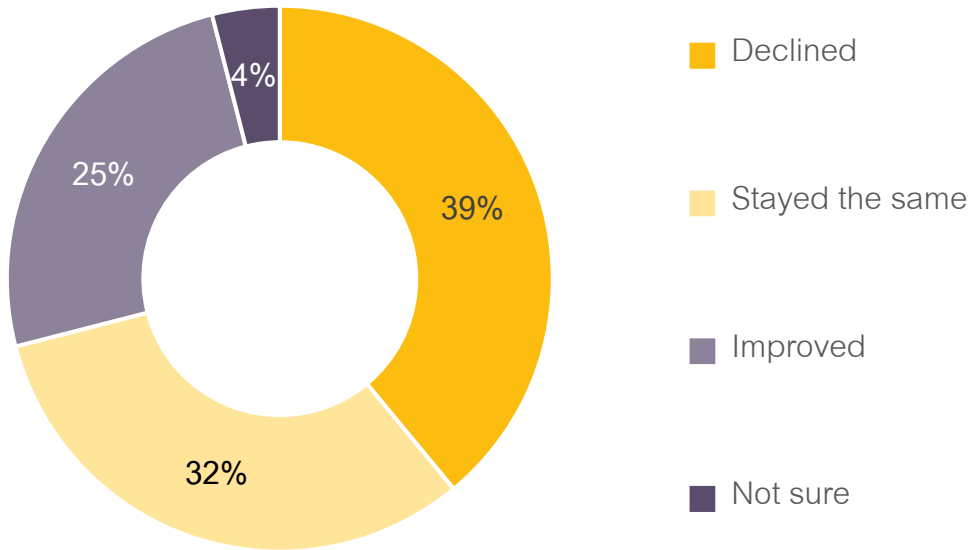
Q5 *How concerned are you about the condition of water resources in your community? Note: Water resources means the natural resources of water that are potentially useful for human consumption and use.*



# Perceptions | **Water condition compared to ten years ago**

About four in ten say the condition of water resources in their community has declined while just over three in ten think the condition has stayed the same compared to ten years ago.

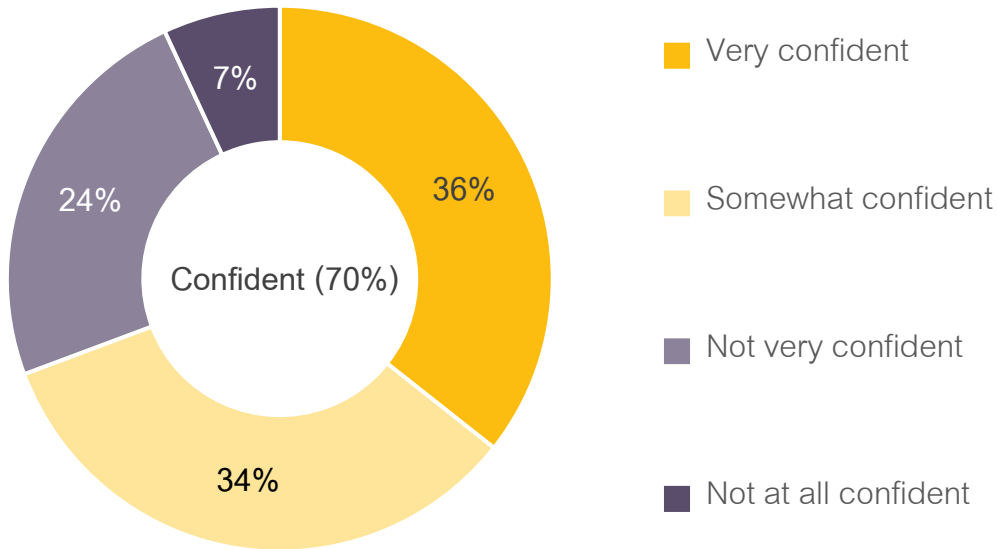
Q6 Compared to ten years ago, do you think that the condition of water resources in your community has improved, stayed the same or declined?



# Perceptions | **Confidence in long-term water resources**

Seven in ten are confident that their community has enough water resources to meet long-term needs, including over one-third who are very confident.

Q7 How confident are you that your community has enough water resources to meet its long-term needs.

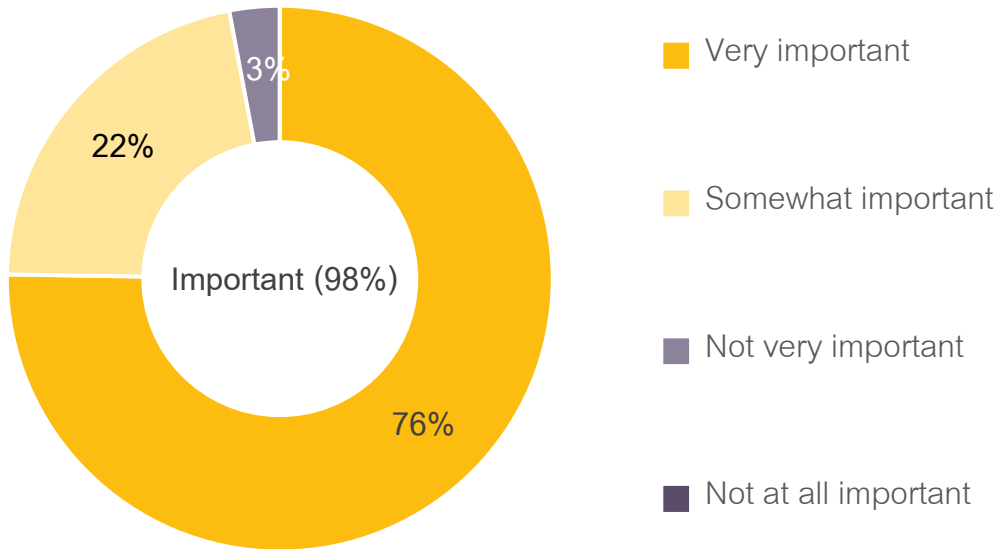


# WATER RESOURCES AND INDIGENOUS VALUES

# Values | Including Indigenous values in water decisions

Survey participants widely believe (98%) it is important to include Indigenous values in making water-related decisions, including over three in four who believe it is very important.

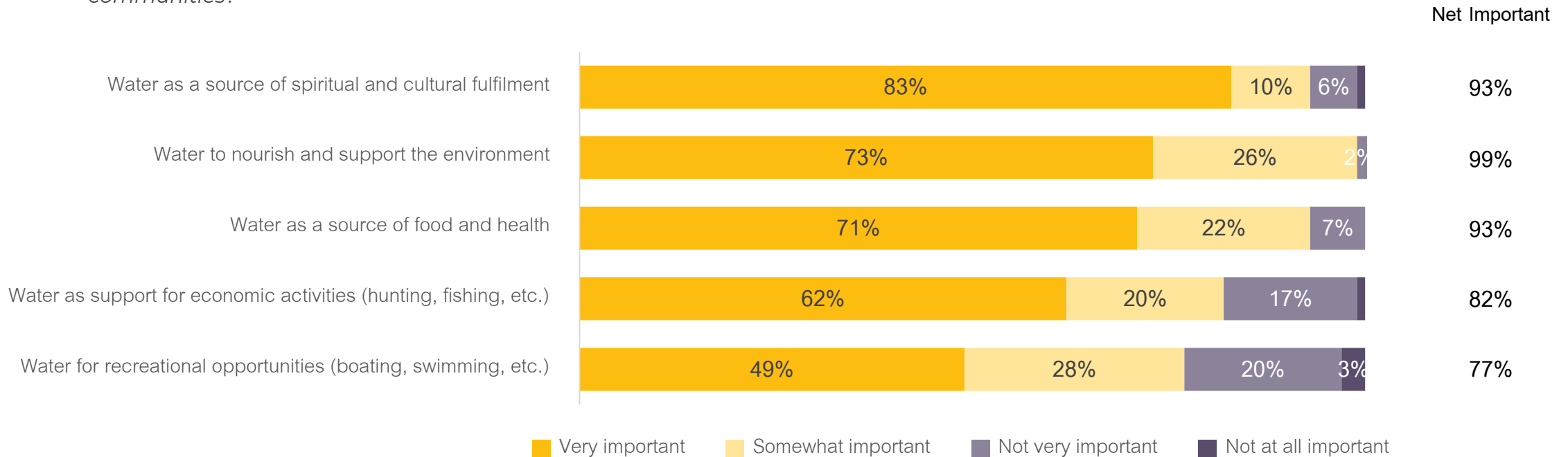
Q10 How important is it to include the values of Indigenous culture/communities in decisions about managing, using, and protecting water?



# Values | Importance of considering water values

Participants (ranging from three in four to nearly all) widely believe it is important to consider all values examined. Water as a source of spiritual and cultural fulfilment is noted most often as very important to consider.

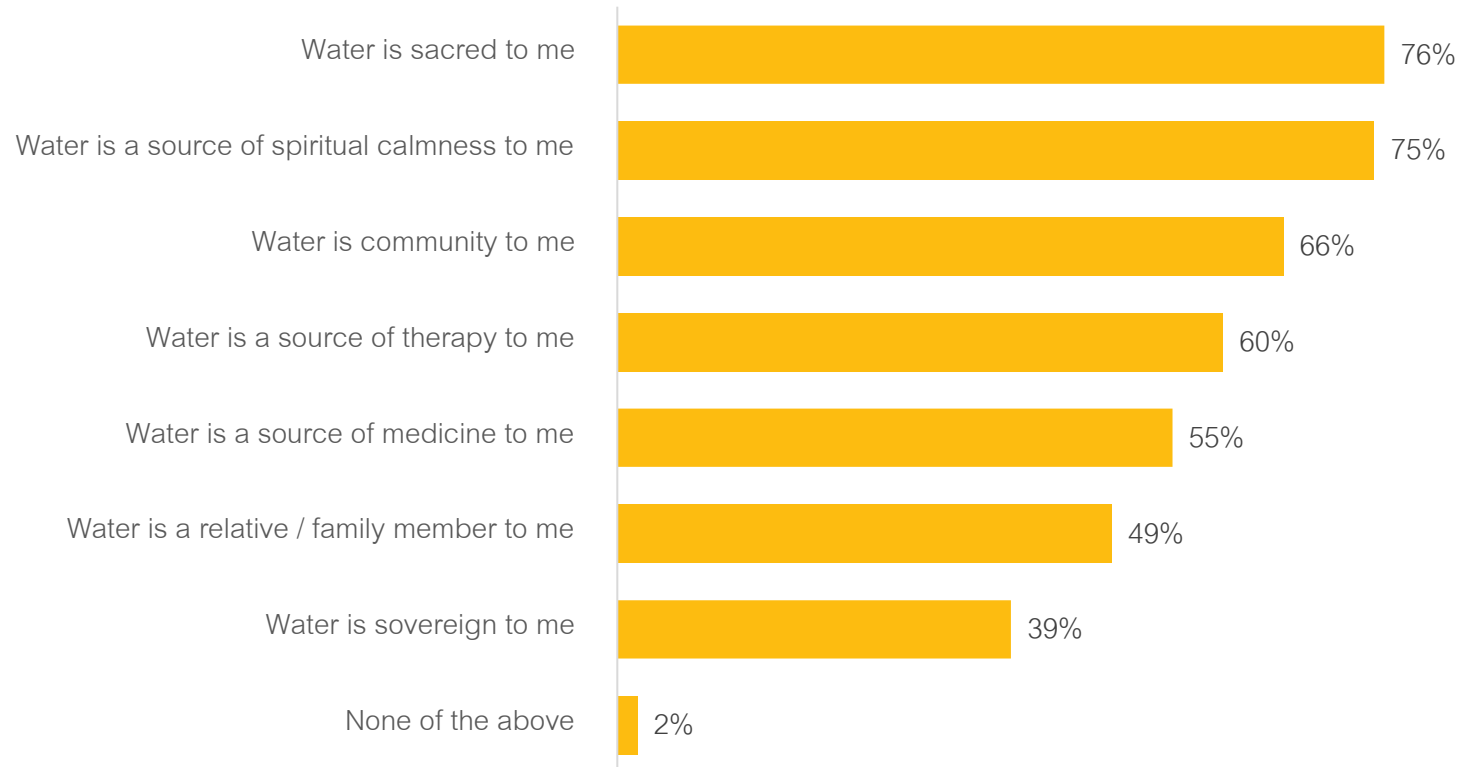
Q11 How important is it to consider each of the following values derived from Water, in managing and protecting water resources in Indigenous communities?



# Values | **Meaning of water**

Over three in four say that water is sacred (76%) and a source of spiritual calmness (75%) to them. About two-thirds say that water is community to them (66%). Roughly six in ten say that water is a source of therapy (60%) and medicine (55%).

Q13 What does water mean to you? (Select all that apply)



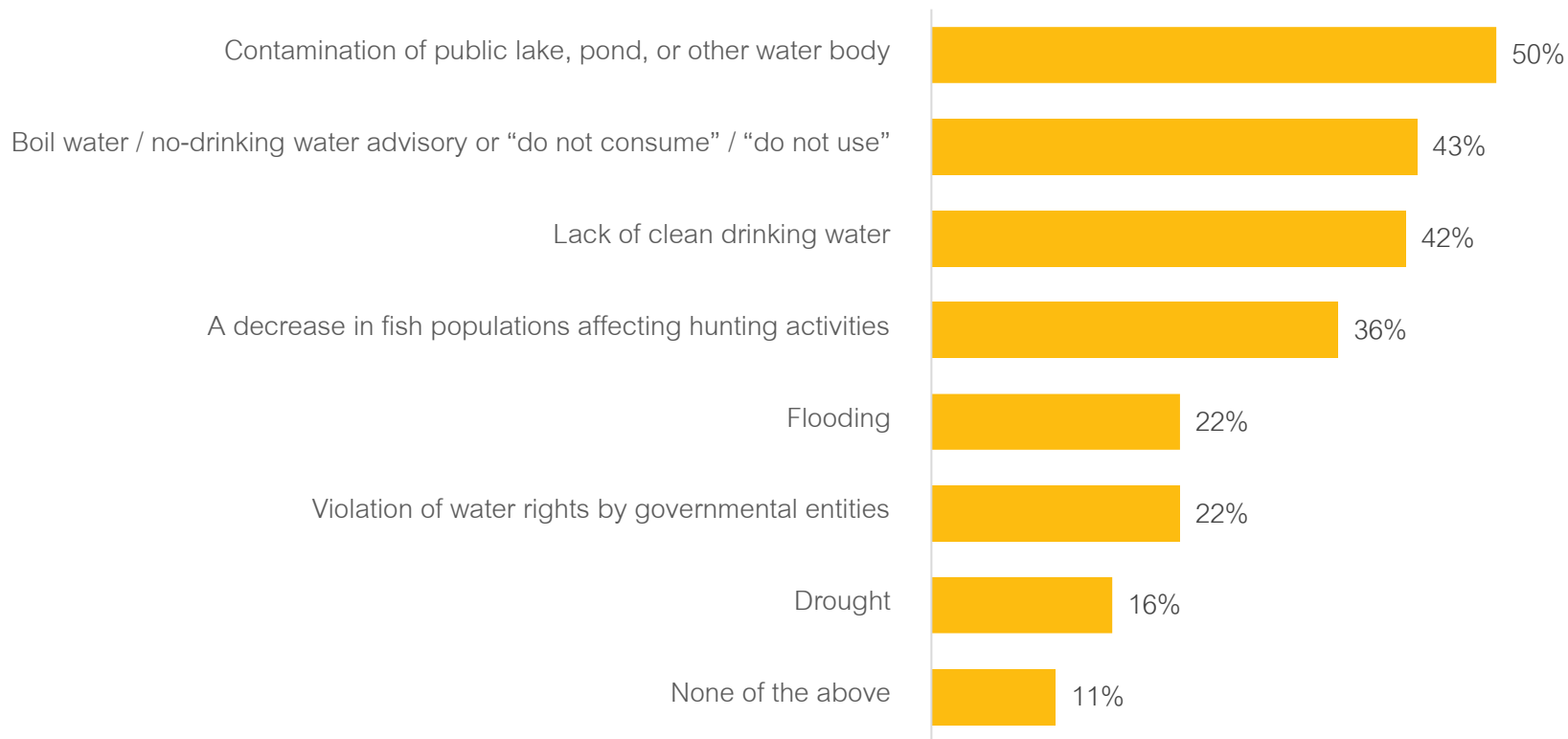


# IMPACTS ON WATER RESOURCES

# Impacts | **Community water issues in past five years**

Half of communities have experienced contamination of a water body in the past five years. About four in ten have experienced boil water or no-drinking advisories (43%) and lack of clean drinking water (42%) in the past five years.

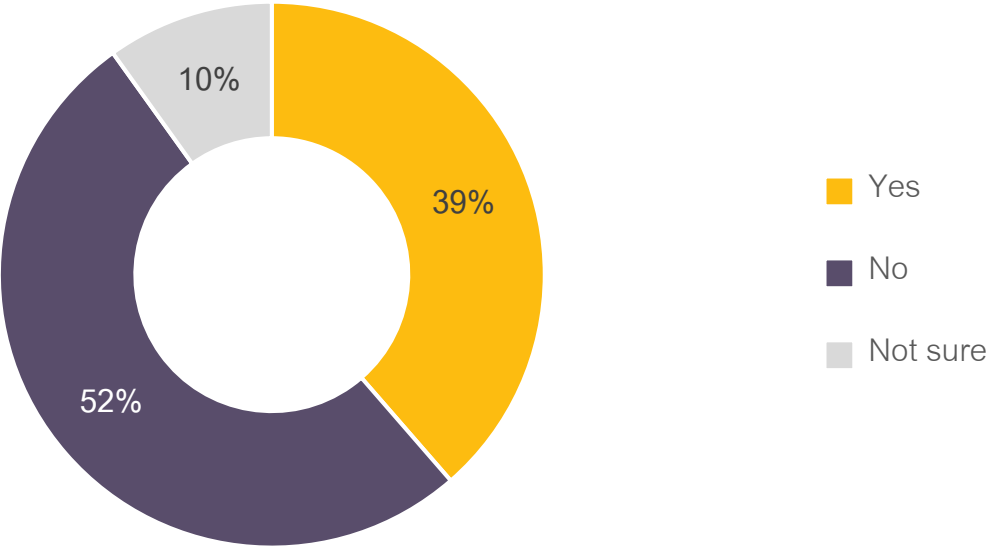
Q8 *Has your community experienced any of the following in the past five years? (Select all that apply)*



# Impacts | Individual rights in accessing clean water

Just under four in ten have experienced violations of their individual rights to access clean and safe water.

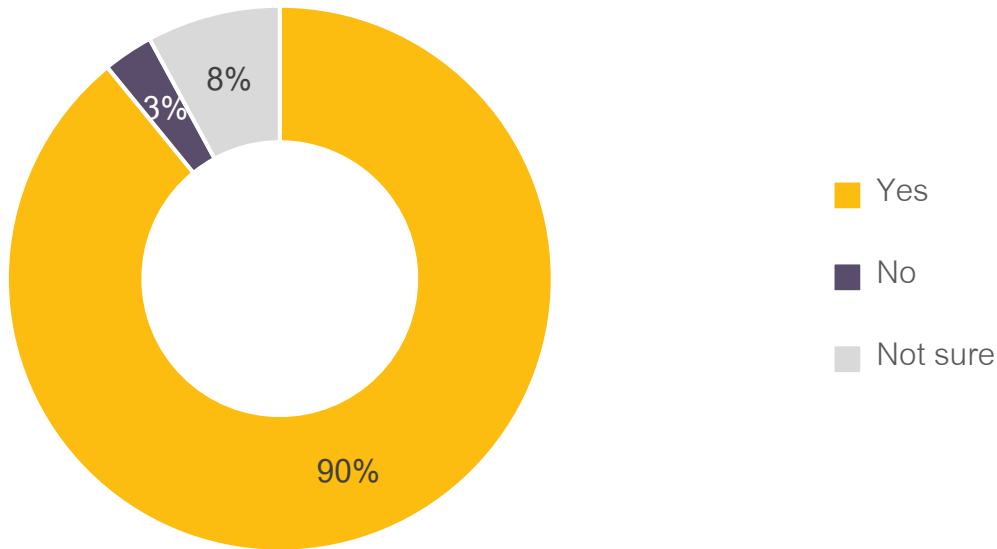
Q15 Has there ever been any violations of your own individual rights to access clean and safe water for personal, household, or economic (fishing and hunting) uses?



# Impacts | **Ability to conduct cultural/spiritual practices**

Nine in ten of those who have experienced violations of rights to water say their ability to conduct cultural and spiritual practices in and around water have been affected.

Q17 *If you have experienced violations of your rights to water resources, have these violations affected your ability to conduct cultural and spiritual practices in and around water? Note: If you have experienced no violations whatsoever, please choose 'Not Applicable'.*



Base: Those who said Yes to Q15, n = 76.

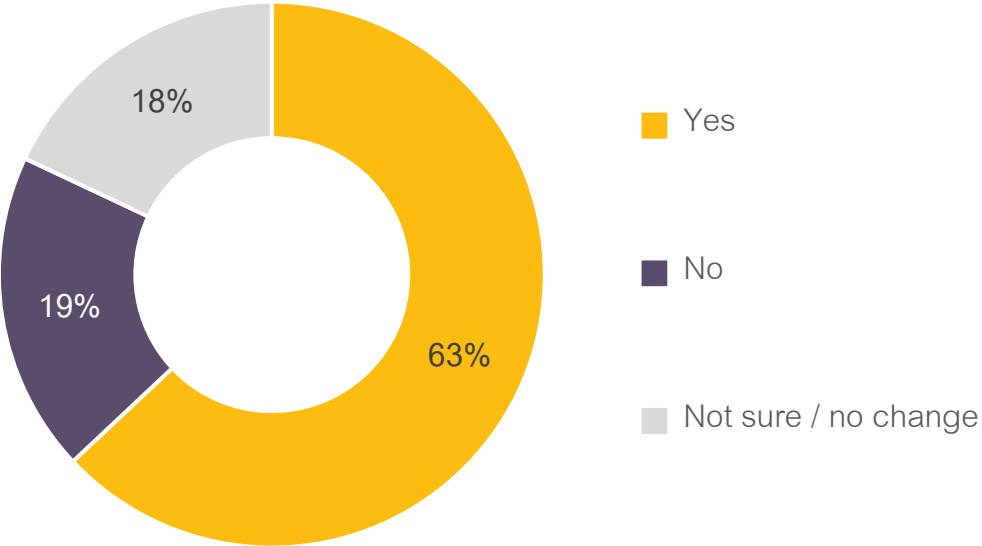
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# Impacts | **Climate change & cultural/spiritual fulfilment**

Six in ten say climate change has affected their ability to experience spiritual and cultural fulfillment from water.

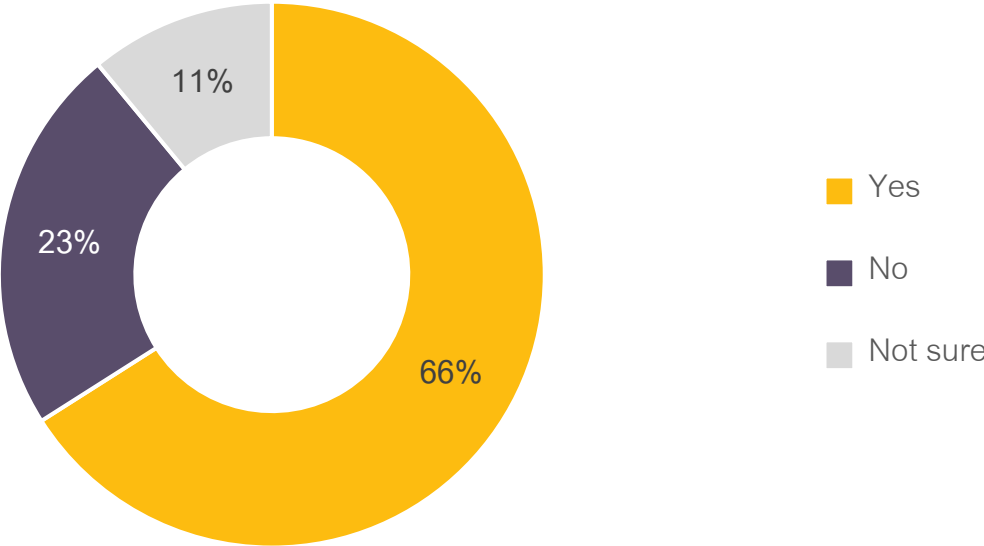
Q12 Has climate change affected your ability to experience spiritual and cultural fulfillment from water?



# Impacts | **Gender identity and rights to water**

Two-thirds have experienced barriers due to their gender identity that limited their ability to exercise their water rights.

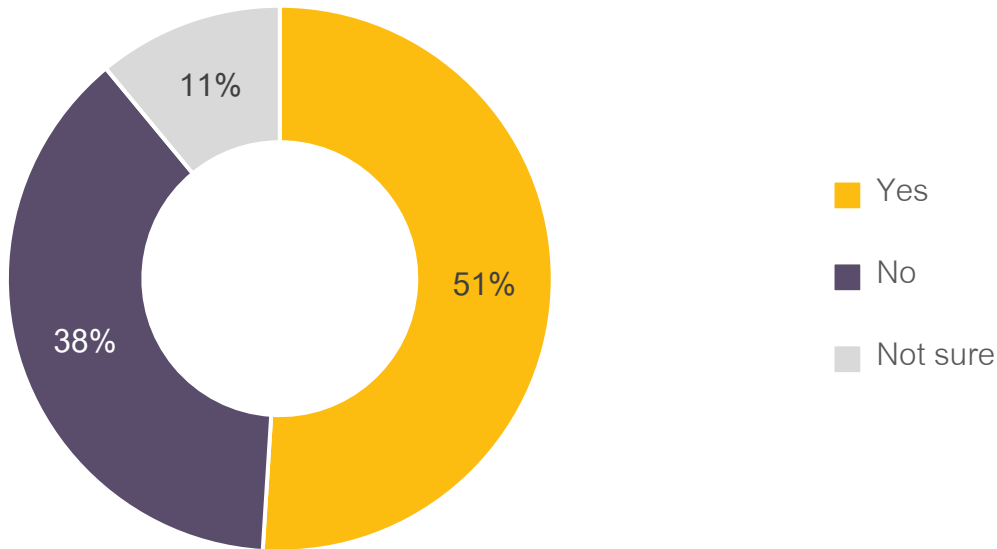
*Q32 Have you ever experienced barriers (voicing an opinion, disregard etc.) due to your gender identity that have limited your rights either to access clean water, perform cultural rituals and practices or to protect and conserve territorial waters?*



# Impacts | **Ability to harvest fish and other animals**

Half say that violations of Indigenous water rights have affected their own / their community's ability to harvest.

Q16 *Regardless of whether you have ever had your own individual water rights violated, have violations of Indigenous water rights ever affected your or your community's ability to harvest fish and other animals' that depend on water?*



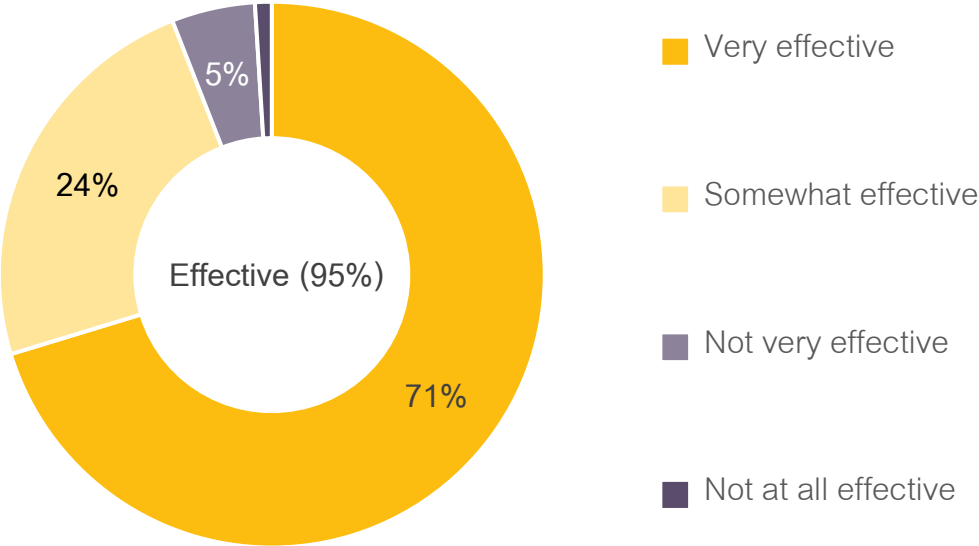
# ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION



# Engagement & Inclusion | **Strategy effectiveness**

Participants widely believe (95%) that a regional strategy for managing and protecting water, led by Indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse and Two-Spirit people would be effective; over seven in ten who believe it would be very effective.

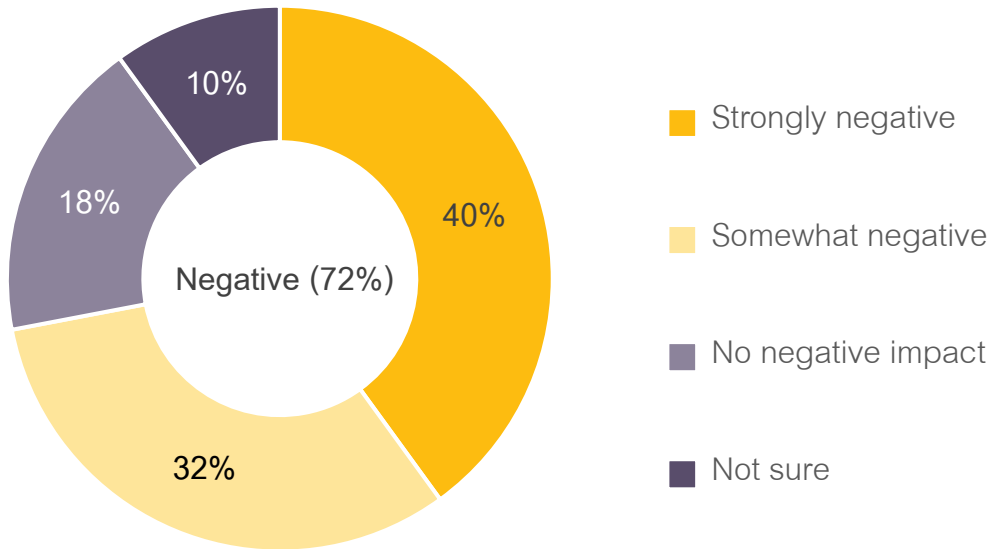
Q27 How effective do you think a regional strategy for managing and protecting water, that is led by Indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse and Two-Spirit people would be?



# Engagement & Inclusion | **Indigenous representation**

Seven in ten think that a lack of Indigenous representation in decision-making has had a negative impact on Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people and their relationship to water; four in ten say the impact is strongly negative.

Q14 This question has two parts: i) To what extent do you agree or disagree, that there is a lack of Indigenous representation in decision-making about water resource management, use and protection? ii) If you answered agreed (strongly or somewhat) to the question above, to what extent has this had a negative impact on Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people and their relationship to water? If not agreed, select N/A.



Data for the first portion of this question is not available.

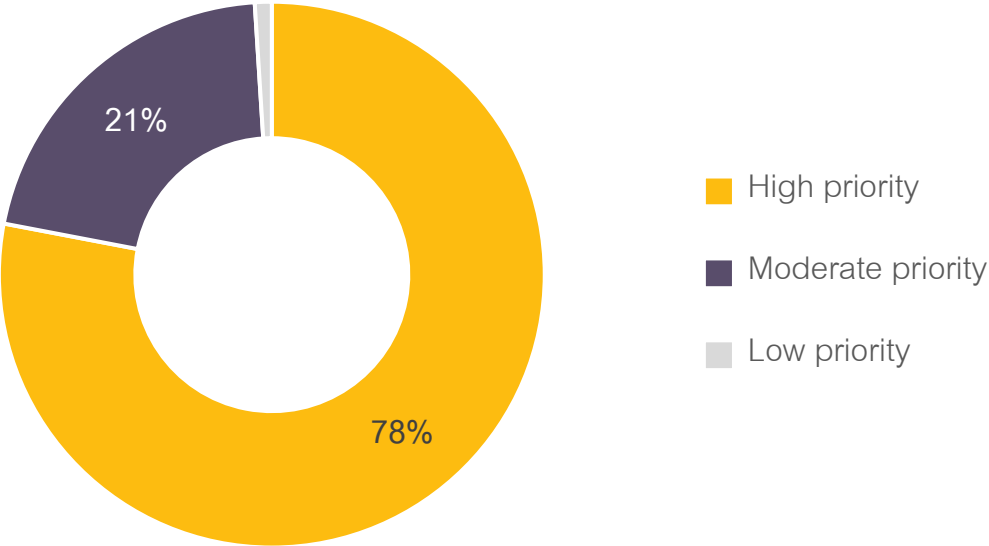
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# Engagement & Inclusion | **Strategy priority**

About eight in ten think high priority should be given to an Indigenous-led water resource management strategy.

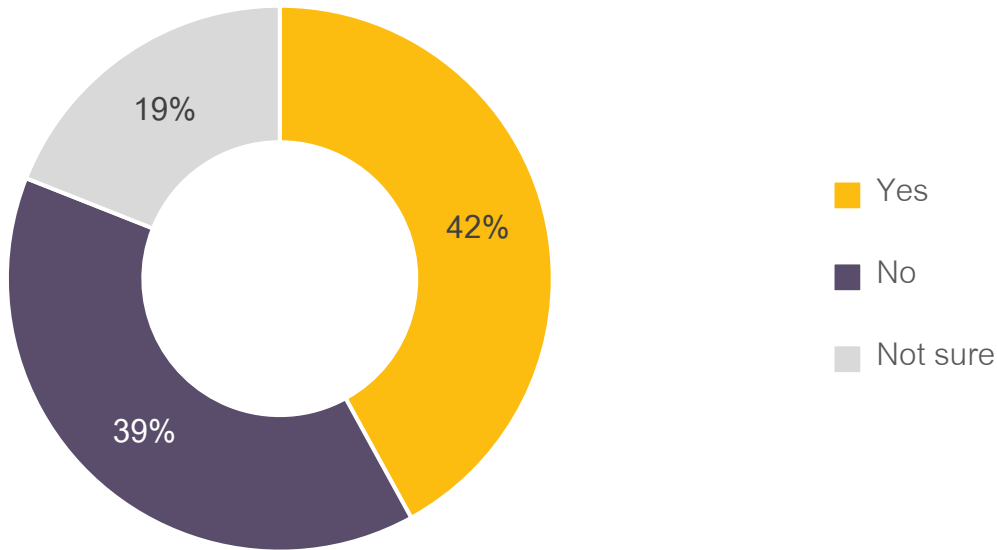
*Q30 What priority should be given to developing an Indigenous-led Water Resource Management/Use strategy for implementation in Indigenous communities across regions and territories of Canada:*



# Engagement & Inclusion | **Policies for including in decisions**

Four in ten say there are policies or rules in place in their community for including Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals in decision-making on issues relating to water.

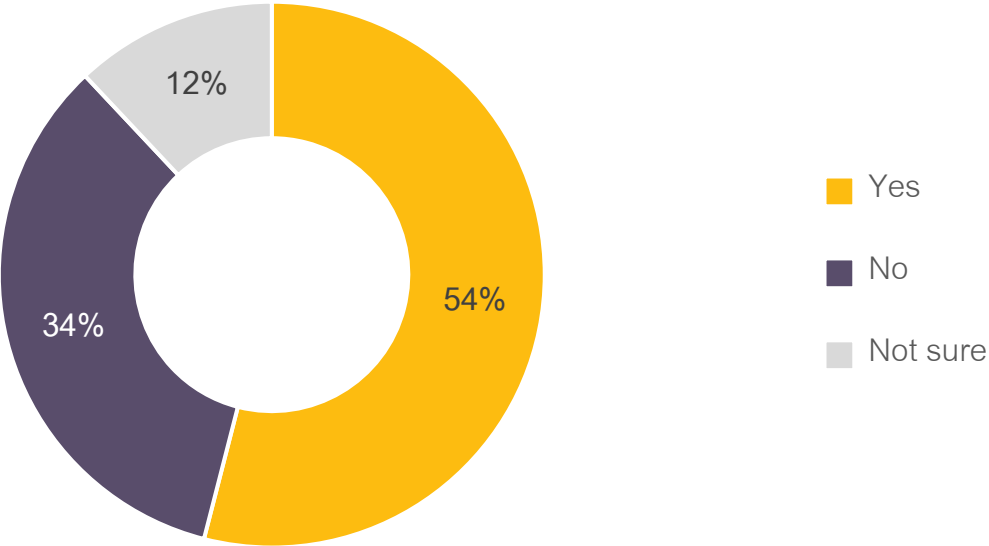
*Q25 Are there any policies or rules (either written or unwritten) in place in your community for the specific inclusion of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals by governments and Indigenous community bands in decision-making on community concerns, issues and solutions relating to water?*



# Engagement & Inclusion | **Efforts in including in decisions**

Over half see active efforts by local municipality or governmental agencies in including Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals in decision-making on water and climate change issues.

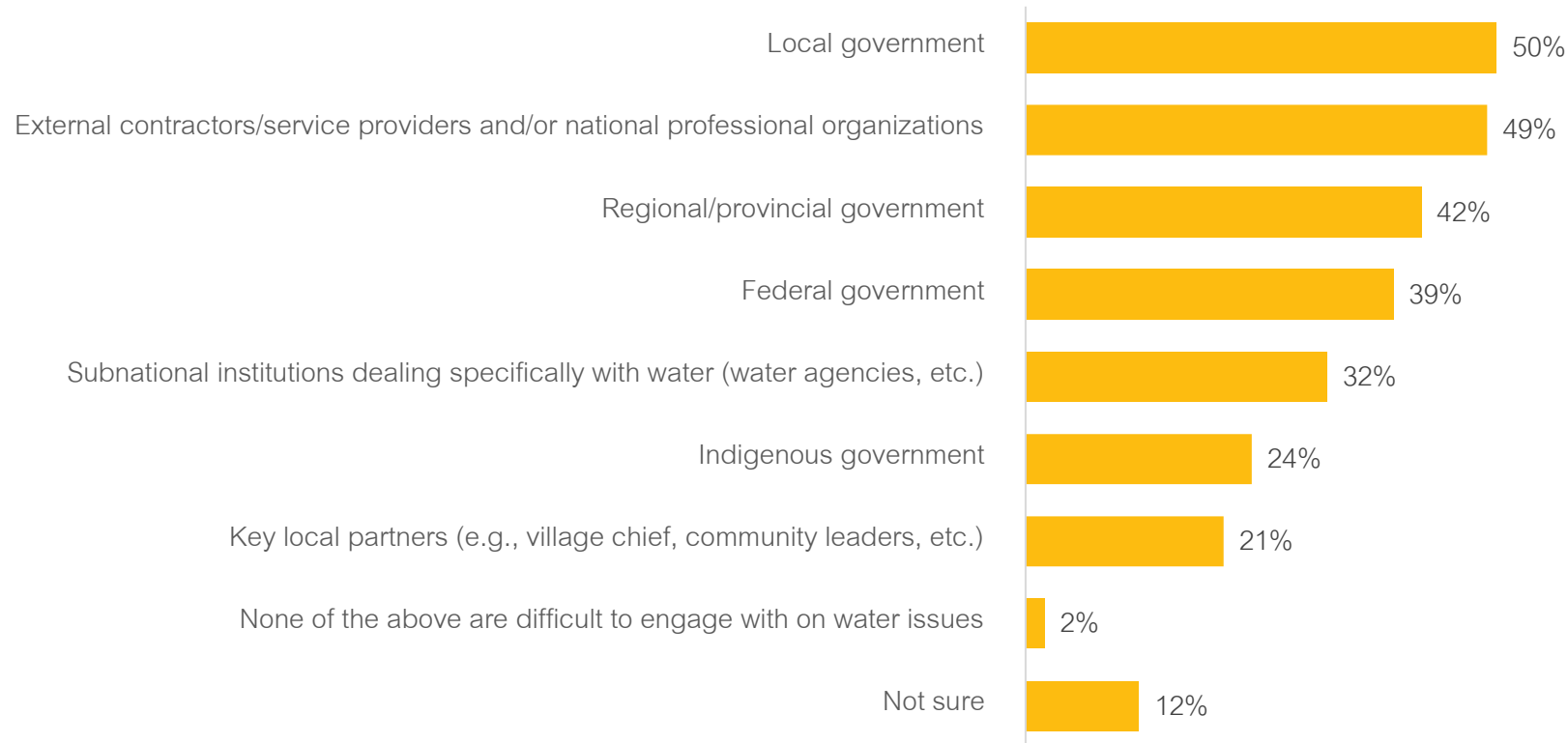
Q31 *Do you see active efforts by your local municipality or governmental agencies in including Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals in decision-making on issues of Water and Climate Change?*



# Engagement & Inclusion | **External stakeholders**

Considering different external stakeholders, half think that local government (50%) and external contractors/service providers (49%) are the most difficult to engage with on water issues in their community/region, followed by regional/provincial government (42%), and federal government (39%).

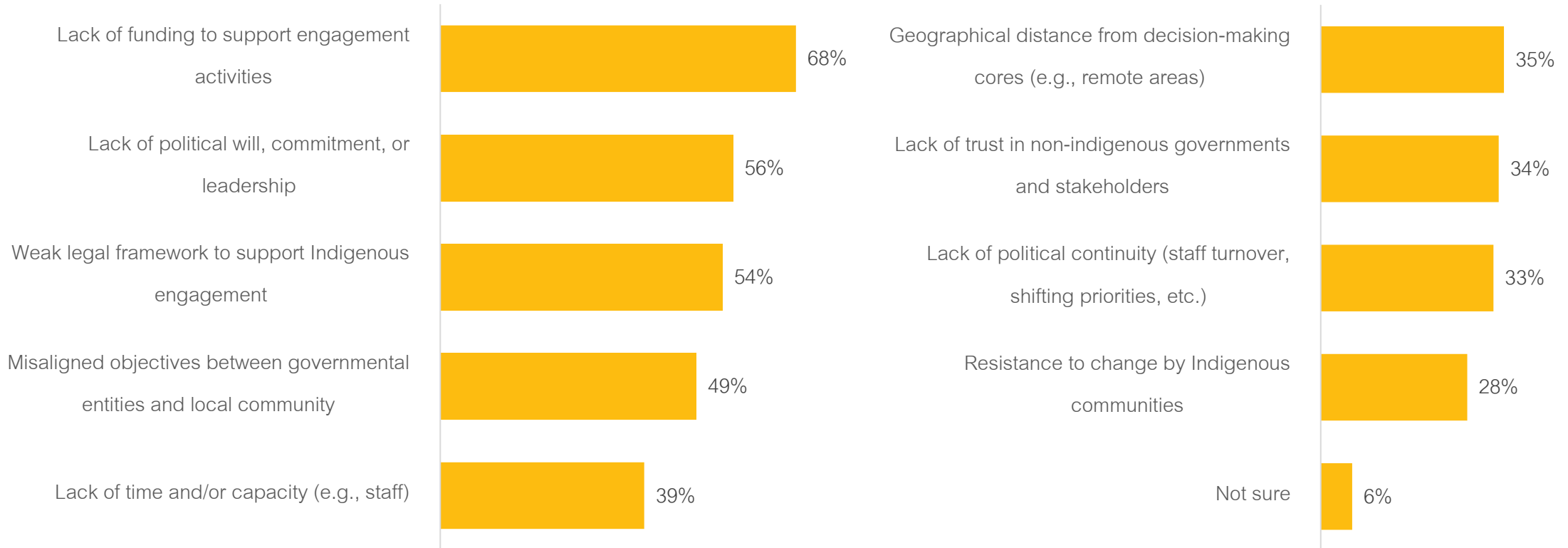
Q22 *In your experience, which of the following external stakeholders are most difficult to engage with on water issues in your community/region? (Select all that apply)*



# Engagement & Inclusion | **Government obstacles**

Two in three think that lack of funding to support engagement activities (68%) most hinder engagement on water-related issues, followed by the lack of political will, commitment, or leadership (56%), weak legal framework to support Indigenous engagement (54%), and misaligned objectives between governmental entities and local community (49%).

Q23 *In your opinion, which of the following obstacles most hinder engagement on water-related issues between Indigenous communities and different levels of government (Select all that apply)?*



# POLICY

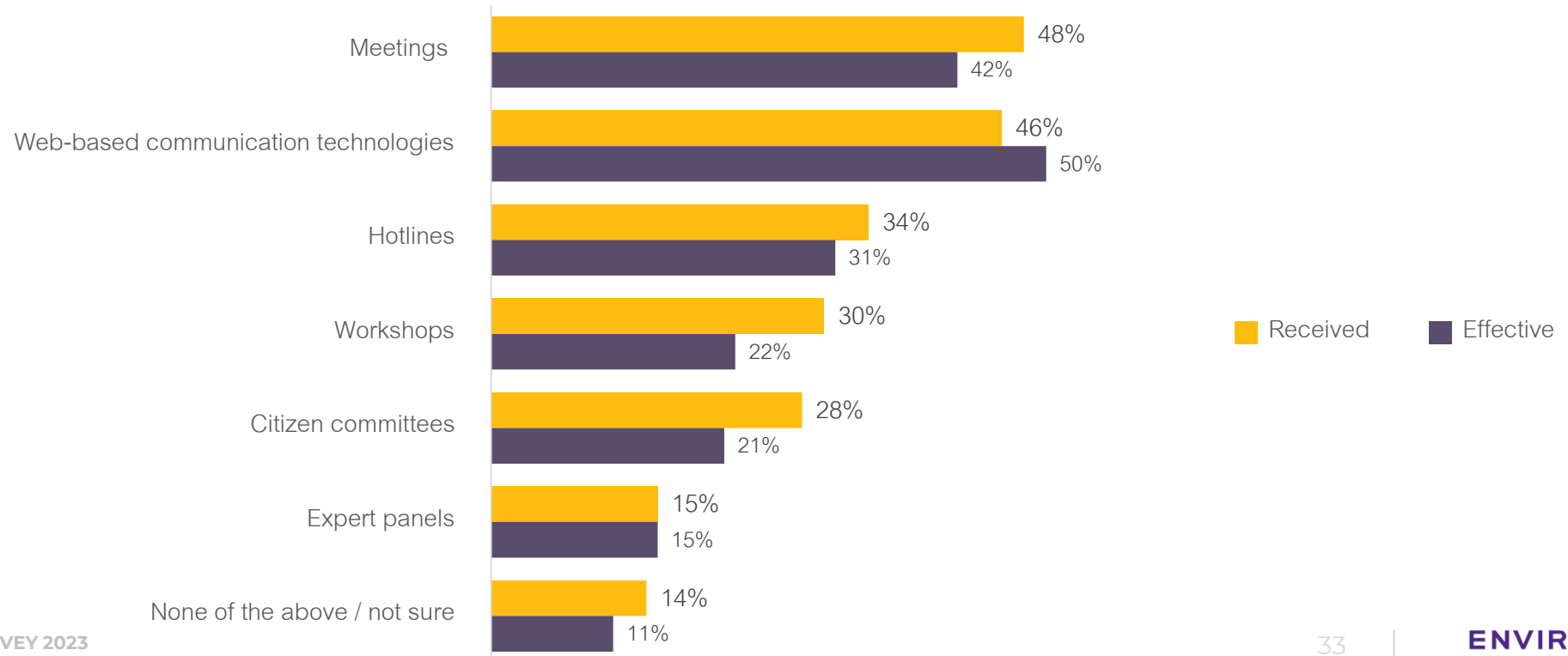


# Policy | **Communication methods and effectiveness**

Respondents have received information about water mostly through meetings (48%), web-based communication technologies (46%) and hotlines (34%). Web-based communication technologies (50%) are perceived as more effective in transmitting information than meetings (42%).

Q18 *In the past two years, in what ways, if any, have you received information and/or updates about water policy changes and boil water advisories in your community? (Select all that apply)*

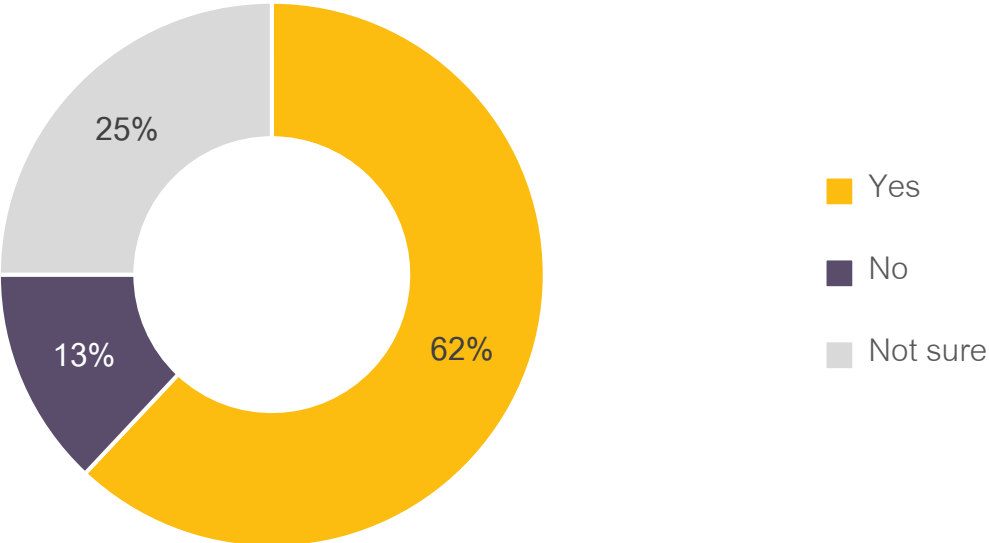
Q19 *Which of these methods have been effective in transmitting information and/or updates within your community regarding water policy changes and/or boil water advisories? (Select all that apply)*



# Policy | **Water policy at local/regional level**

Six in ten say their community or region has a dedicated water resource policy at the local/regional level.

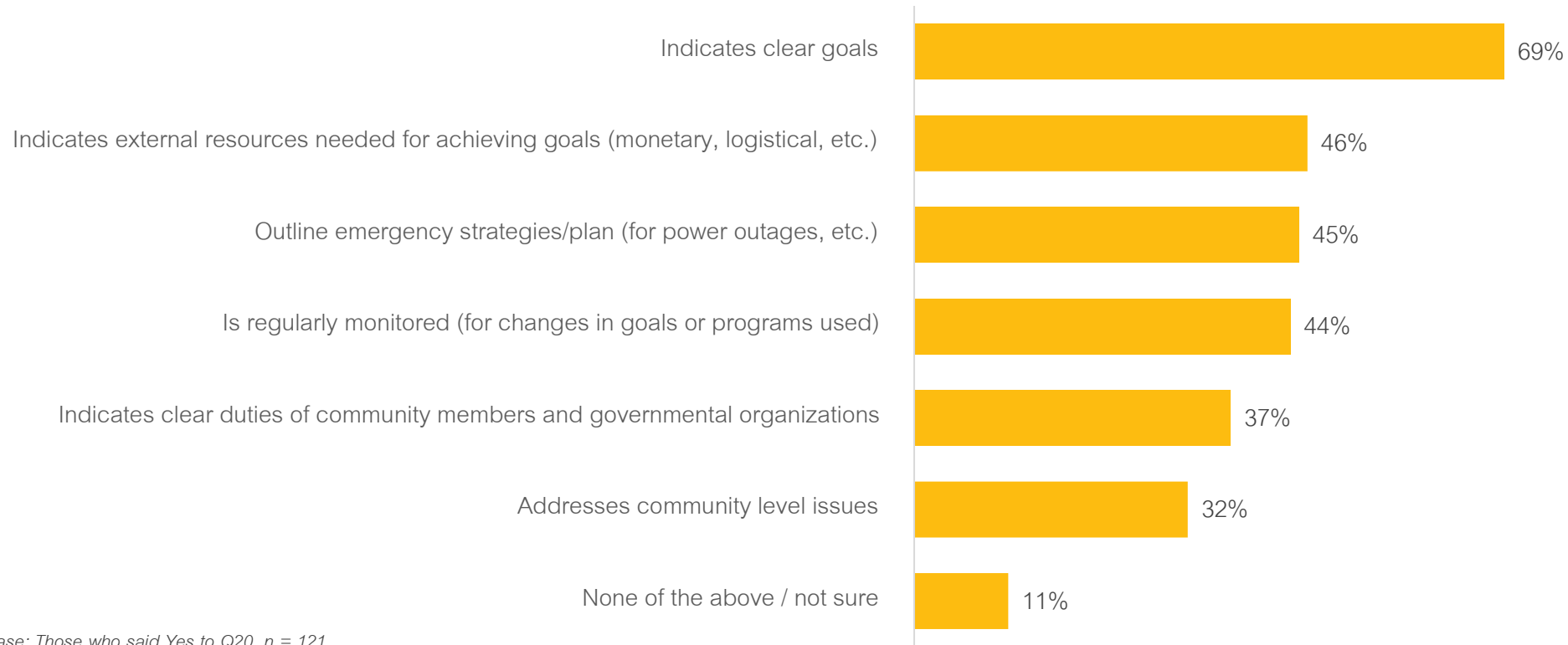
Q20 From what you know or have heard, does your community/region have a dedicated water resource use or management policy at the local or regional level?



# Policy | **Water policy at local/regional level cont.**

Seven in ten say their local/regional water policy indicates clear goals. Pluralities say that the policy indicates external resources needed for achieving goals (46%), outlines emergency strategies/plan (45%), and is regularly monitored (44%).

Q21 *If answered yes to the question above, To the best of your knowledge, which of the following applies to your community's/region's dedicated water resource use/management policy? (Select all that apply) If your community/region does not have a dedicated water resource use or management, please select 'Not applicable'.*



Base: Those who said Yes to Q20, n = 121.

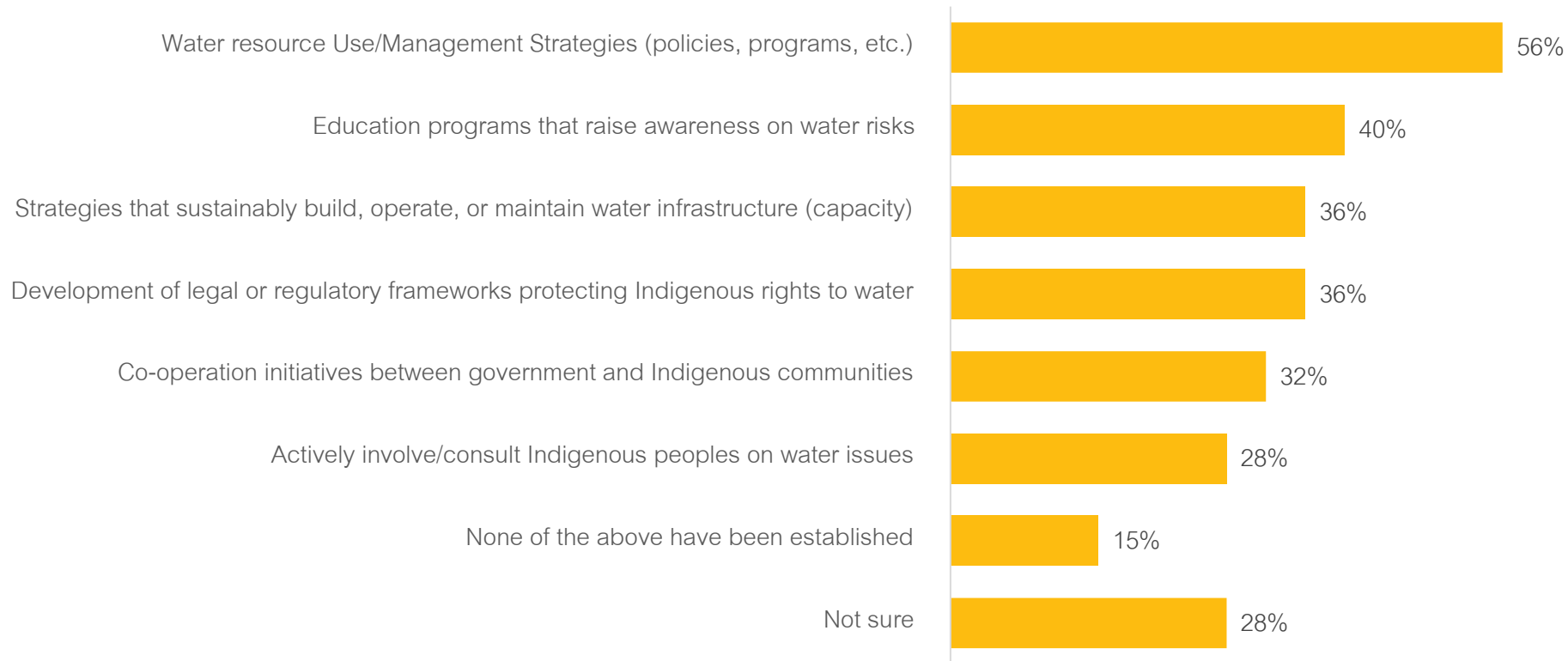
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# Policy | Initiatives addressing future water challenges

Over half say water resource use/management strategies have been established. About four in ten say education programs that raise awareness on water risks (40%), strategies that sustainably build, operate/maintain water infrastructure (36%), and development of legal/regulatory frameworks protecting Indigenous rights to water (36%).

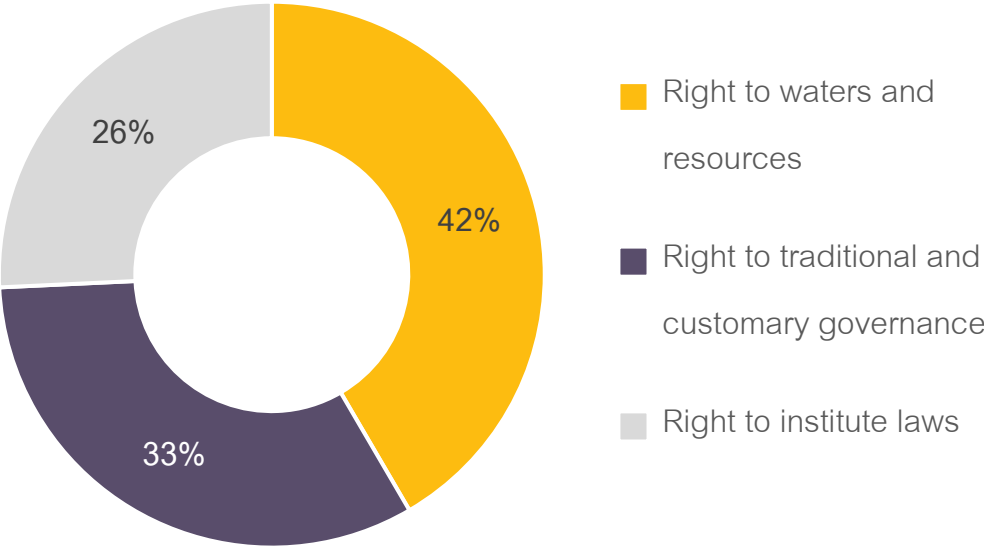
Q24 From what you know or have heard, have any of the following initiatives been established in your community or region to address future water challenges? (Select all that apply)



# Policy | **Protecting waterways without violating the treaty**

Four in ten think policies that protect/promote the right to waters and resources would best protect waterways without violating Indigenous treaty rights.

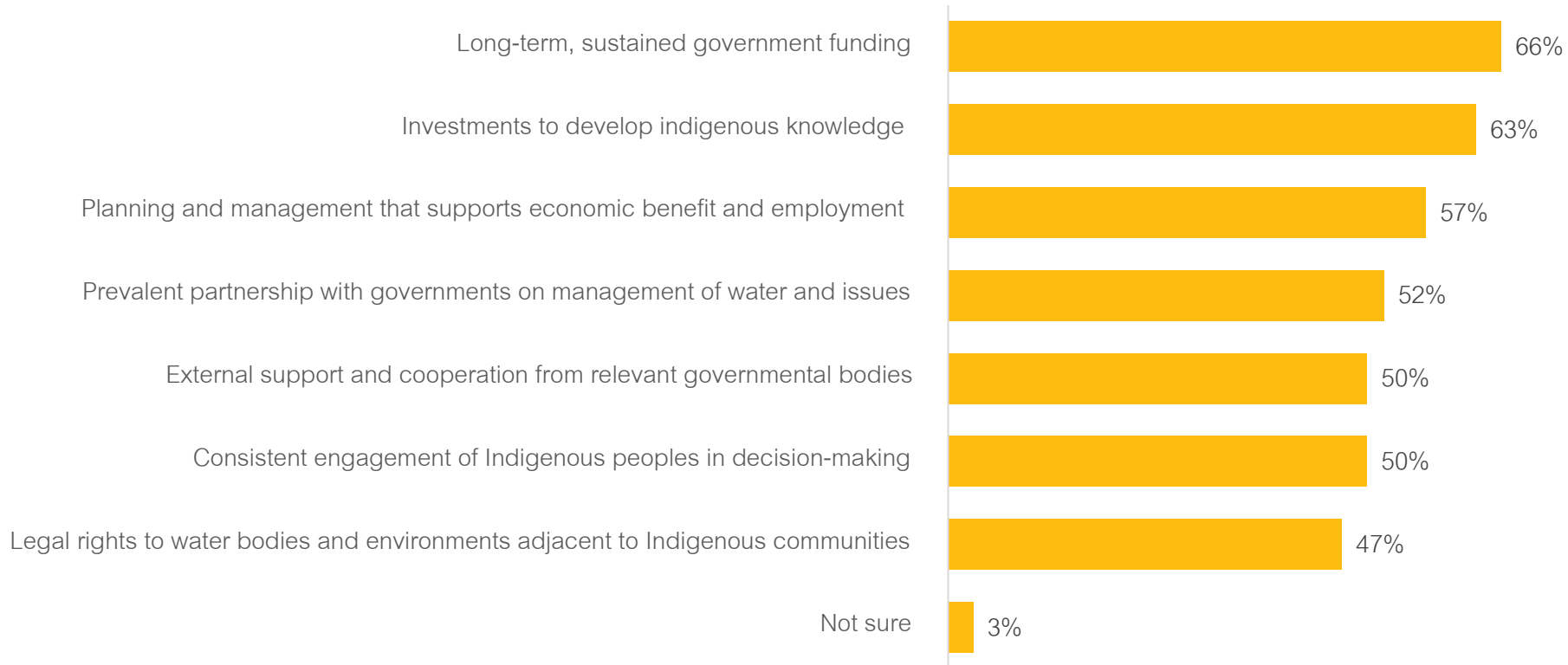
Q26 *In your opinion, which of the following three options would best accomplish the goal of protecting waterways without violating Indigenous treaty rights? (Choose the best option in your opinion)*



# Policy | **Tools to help develop local water strategy**

Long-term funding (66%) and investments to develop Indigenous knowledge (63%) are noted most often as tools that would help communities establish water management strategies.

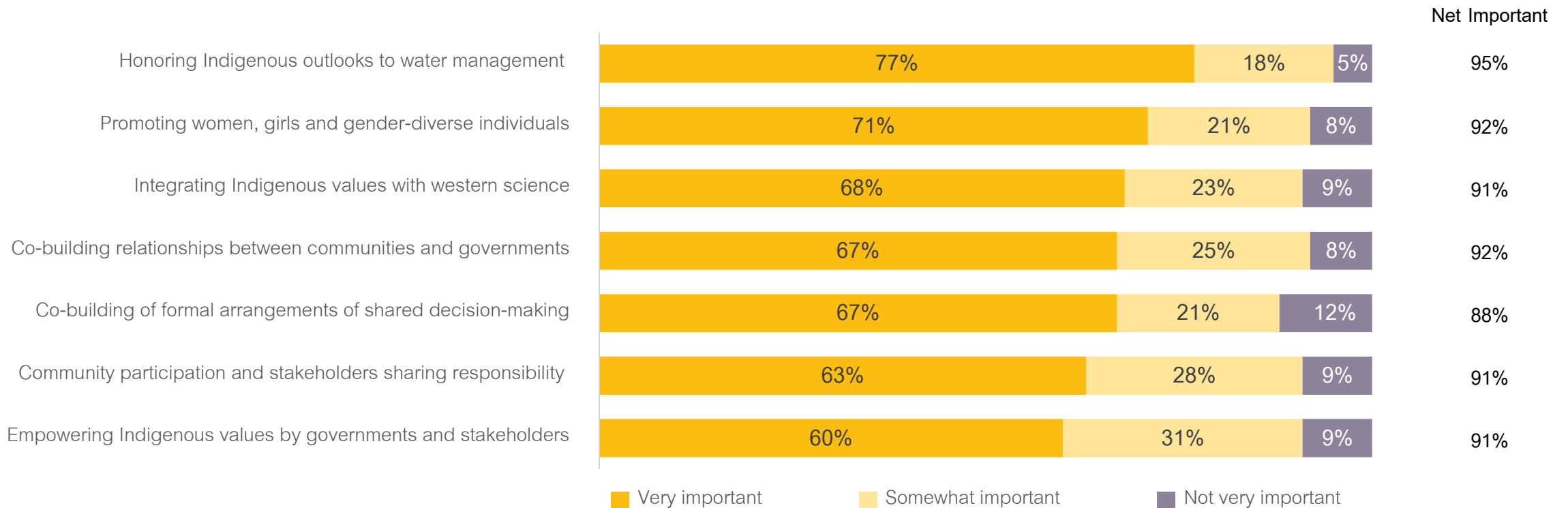
Q28 *In your opinion, what tools or supports would help your community in its efforts to establish a reliable local Water Management/Use strategy? (Select all that apply)*



# Policy | Approaches for a resilient water strategy

Majorities find all value approaches examined to policy making for a resilient Indigenous water strategy important, including at least six in ten who say very important across all. The top two are honoring Indigenous outlooks to water resource management, and empowering/promoting women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals into managerial roles.

Q29 How important is it to include each of these value approaches to policy making for a resilient Indigenous Water Management/Use strategy?



# Thank you.

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