



ENGAGING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN CLIMATE POLICY

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

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Environment and
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1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Peoples live in close connection with the land; therefore, they are more directly affected by environmental changes. Consequently, environmental distress is experienced in Indigenous communities from reduced well-being, due to reduced access to ecosystem services, hindered transmission of Traditional Knowledge, and altered lifestyles. Climate-induced changes to the land affect access to important cultural and livelihood resources, which contributes to social vulnerabilities. The repercussions of these social vulnerabilities may lead to cultural degradation through a disruption of intergenerational Knowledge transfer, rooted in culturally significant activities. Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender-Diverse+ (WG2STGD+) People are widely acknowledged as uniquely sensitive to the impacts of climate change. Many the Indigenous WG2STGD+ People inhabit regions that are already experiencing rapid changes in temperature, weather patterns, and species distributions, with impacts exacerbated by legacies of economic, social, and political marginalization.

In response to the altering climate conditions, now and in the future, and to adjust to its adverse (or beneficial) impacts, climate change adaptation has become a priority for policy makers and has broadly received recognition and resources. Global emphases on climate change adaptation, policy makers, and development practitioners contribute to contextual barriers, which alternate adaptation capacities among different nations, regions, and communities. A discourse around barriers is frequently formed around five dimensions, demonstrating how budgetary constraints, unavailable technology, lack of knowledge, multilevel institutional fragmentations, and different values, beliefs, and experiences in societies, threaten adaptation strategies.

¹ W.N. Adger, J. Barnett, Four reasons for concern about adaptation to climate change, *Environ. Plann.* 41 (12) (2009) 2800–2805.

² Adger, W.N., Barnett, J., Chapin, F.S., Ellemor, H., 2011. This must be the place: underrepresentation of identity and meaning in climate change decision-making. *Global Environmental Politics* 11 (2), 1–25.

³ Duerden, F., 2004. Translating climate change impacts at the community level. *Arctic* 57, 204–212.

⁴ Lim, B., Spanger-Siegfried, E., Burton, I., Malone, E.L., Huq, S., 2005. Adaptation policy frameworks for climate change: Developing strategies, policies, and measure. United Nations Development Programme, New York.



2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Notwithstanding a growing knowledge over barriers and strategies for climate change adaptation, there is still much to know about their underlying causes and short- and long-term consequences. It is within this context that Environment and Climate Change provided five-year funding to the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) to examine the impacts of climate change on Indigenous WG2STGD+ People. Specifically, the second year of the project focused on understanding the roles Indigenous WG2STGD+ People's **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)**.

Additionally, the project aimed at identifying what climate change adaptation strategies Indigenous WG2STGD+ People are deploying across Canada. This approach is of importance, as smaller scale political barriers to climate change adaptation—and underlying factors for excluding the interest of minority groups in adaptation decision making—remain less understood. In response, this project examines barriers of climate change adaptation in Indigenous communities, which typically suffer from exclusion and longstanding socio-political tensions.



“ THIS PROJECT EXAMINES BARRIERS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, WHICH TYPICALLY SUFFER FROM EXCLUSION AND LONGSTANDING SOCIO-POLITICAL TENSIONS.



3. BACKGROUND CONTEXT— BARRIERS TO ADAPTATION

A consensus on the concept of adaptation has emerged gradually in climate change literature, which is broadly understood as an, “Adjustment in natural or human systems in response to experienced or future climatic conditions or their effects or impacts—which may be beneficial or adverse.” In the other words, the central purpose for adaptation is to reduce vulnerabilities and build societal resilience. Indigenous Peoples—and in particular Indigenous WG2STGD+ People—have witnessed, endured, and adapted to environmental changes over thousands of years. Yet, recent climate-related extreme event—such as record-breaking temperatures and floods that ravaged British Columbia in the summer of 2022—exceed our capacities to react and adapt, causing substantial losses economically and in health.

The top-down approach to climate change is repeatedly criticized by several scholars from different disciplines. For instance, evidence suggests top-down approaches of Climate Change Adaptation policies is, “Disconnected

to a large extent from communities directly affected by climate change.” Critics argue adaptation narratives mainly focus on technical solutions, overlooking social context, cultures, and power-relations on the ground. They also argue that an emphasis on physical adaptation “depoliticizes” responses to disaster risk reduction, and masks failures in policies that have produced marginalization, exclusion, racism, and other injustices. As a result, the adoption and implementation of higher-scale adaptation strategies often contradict, or devalue, Traditional Knowledge and cultural values.

Indigenous Peoples—in particular, Indigenous WG2STGD+ People—have been cited as more vulnerable to climate mediated changes in their environment because of, in part, their strong biophysical and cultural connection and dependency on the land. For example, Inuit communities are sensitive to negative impacts of climate change due to a dependency on wildlife for sustenance foods, and terrain conditions for infrastructural integrity of

⁵ N.J. Turner, H. Clifton, “It’s so different today”: climate change and indigenous lifeways in British Columbia, Canada, *Global Environ. Change* 19 (2) (2009) 180–190.

⁶ D. Morchain, Rethinking the framing of climate change adaptation - knowledge, power, and politics, in: S. Klepp, L. Cahvez-Rodriguez (Eds.), *A Critical Approach to Climate Change Adaptation - Discourses, Policies, and Practices*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2018, pp. 55–73.

⁷ M. Scoville-Simonds, H. Jamali, M. Hufty, The Hazards of Mainstreaming: climate change adaptation politics in three dimensions, *World Dev.* 125 (2020) 104683.

⁸ A. Downing, A. Cuerrier, *A Synthesis of the Impacts of Climate Change on the First Nations and Inuit of Canada*, 2011.



buildings, which requires permafrost; as well as for transportation as ice bridges. In Canada, many Indigenous communities have experienced undesirable changes resulting in hardships, and even death. Some consequences have included debilitating disease epidemics, drastically reduced access to Traditional lands and resources, erosion of Traditional languages, reduced intergenerational learning, loss of food security, and declining health.

This project seeks to enhance our understanding on how Indigenous WG2STGD+ People perceive, understand, and respond to climate change. In fact, historical and contextual complexities that underline Indigenous Peoples' experiences with climate change is extremely critical for advancement in climate change policies in Canada. Although several proximate factors, such as poverty, ill health, social deprivation, and marginalization, are usually recognized as limits to adaptation in Indigenous communities, there still lacks sufficient understandings of historical, political, social, and economical root factors.

To better understand barriers and identify strategies to adapt to climate change

“SUCH FACTORS AS POVERTY, ILL HEALTH, SOCIAL DEPRIVATION, AND MARGINALIZATION, ARE USUALLY RECOGNIZED AS LIMITS TO ADAPTATION IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES.

in Indigenous communities, this project predominantly relies on the concept of vulnerability. The discourse of vulnerability has a rich and long history in research on poverty, entitlement, food security, and more generally, on environmental change. With respect to climate change, scholars have incorporated social and contextual factors into the discourse of vulnerability. In hazard-related studies; however, a critical conception of vulnerability is produced with specific attention to contextual vulnerabilities and root causes at local and broader scales. This context-sensitive understanding of vulnerability is important, as vulnerability does not simply depend on assets, or capacities individuals or groups possess, but is produced and experienced through historical, political events, from local to national scales.

⁹ M. Tremblay, C. Furgal, V. Lafortune, C. Larrivee, J.-P. Savard, M. Barrett, B. Etidloie, Communities and ice: bringing together traditional and scientific knowledge, *Clim. Change: Link. Tradit. Sci. Knowl.* 289 (2006).

¹⁰ W.N. Adger, P.M. Kelly, Social vulnerability to climate change and the architecture of entitlements. *Mitigation adaptation strategies for global change*, *Global Environ. Chang.* 4 (3–4) (1999) 253–266.

¹¹ A. Raseanen, S. Juhola, A. Nygren, M. Keakonen, M. Kallio, A.M. Monge, M. Kanninen, Climate change, multiple stressors and human vulnerability: a systematic review, *Reg. Environ. Change* 16 (8) (2016) 2291–2302.

¹² Natcher, D.C., Davis, S., Hickey, C.G., 2005. Co-management: managing relationships, not resources. *Human Organization* 64, 240–250.



4. PROJECT ACTIVITIES

To achieve the objectives of the project, the following activities for 2022 to 2023 were conducted, as per the contribution agreement. These activities included:

➤ **Annual national survey, focusing on biodiversity and conservation in the context of impacts and adaptations to climate change:** NWAC launched a survey on Dec. 7, 2022, which was available until Jan. 31, 2023. The survey was designed by NWAC and ECCC, and was filled by 1,069 Indigenous WG2STGD+ People across the country. Broadly speaking, the survey focused on perceptions of Indigenous WG2STGD+ People. **Questions focused on awareness of climate change, importance of ecosystems, impacts of climate change on Indigenous WG2STGD+ People, responses to climate and environmental impacts, Indigenous TEK and climate change, and governance. Work on this survey, and subsequent analyses, were completed as planned.**

The following activities can be described as, “awareness raising activities.” They aimed to disseminate credible knowledge on climate change, its impacts, and possible adaptation strategies. These activities include:

- Development and maintenance of a website,
- Monthly newsletters,
- Continued work on the toolkit
- Relevant and regular social media posts.

These activities were informed by cross-cutting research.

The goal of these activities were to familiarize leaders with core dimensions of nature-based climate solutions, promote an exchange of ideas around opportunities in their areas, take stock of local needs, and encourage follow-up activities to move conversations forward. Awareness raising activities aim to systematically spark climate change in as many communities as possible. This was achieved through development of accessible communication products for local use, encouraging greater awareness through online paid promotion, hosting webinars, organizing regional workshops, generating a national statement of support from hundreds of local nature organizations, and identify and supporting emerging leadership. This encompasses ongoing support for emerging groups advancing climate change adaptation strategies in their communities, developing



policy templates local organizations can draw on and insert into local policy processes, supporting local efforts to engage with decision-makers, and providing support for digital engagement and communications at local levels. Connect initiatives across regions for the purpose of fostering learning and promoting increasingly sophisticated approaches.

1 ECCCO website maintenance and continued development: The website was updated with project goals, and other important resources on climate change. **Work on this survey, and subsequent analyses, were completed as planned.**

2 Monthly electronic newsletters (academic research, and other information, including an international component). NWAC runs its own central, digital engagement (for example, targeted Facebook ads, etc.), and also works with Indigenous organizations to share communication material, digital literacy, and provide specialized training on communications and messaging strategies geared toward rural constituencies. NWAC developed eight newsletters to share with our network. **Work on the development of this toolkit was completed, as planned.**

3 Continued work on existing climate change and conservation toolkits. The toolkit was updated to reflect impacts of climate change on biodiversity. Given that Canada hosted the Biodiversity COP Conference, we updated the toolkit to include facts on biodiversity loss and Indigenous strategies to adapting to biodiversity loss. **The work on this toolkit was completed, as planned.**



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NWAC RUNS ITS OWN CENTRAL, DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT, WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS TO SHARE COMMUNICATION MATERIAL, DIGITAL LITERACY, AND PROVIDE SPECIALIZED TRAINING ON COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGING STRATEGIES GEARED TOWARD RURAL CONSTITUENCIES.



The following activities can be categorised as research to inform decision-making.

These include:

- Conduct and facilitate cross-cutting research,
- PTMA/regional/grassroots capacity and research.

In this project, we sought to identify, and examine, opportunities for adaptation policies to reduce vulnerability for Indigenous WG2STGD+ People in climate change, and increase adaptive capacity. In doing so, NWAC built upon completed, community-based, vulnerability to enhance understanding of how Indigenous WG2STGD+ People experience, and respond, to climate change in identifying and examining policy entry points. Specifically, NWAC analyzed how multiple levels of government in Canada can establish, and strengthen, conditions favourable for effective adaptation to reduce negative impacts of climate change on resource harvesting, travel, food systems, and community infrastructure.

① Conduct and facilitate cross-cutting research: Research informed every aspect of this project—from the design of the survey, to sharing social media post of NWAC’s Facebook page. **This activity has been completed as planned.**

② PTMA/regional/grassroots capacity and research: NWAC was successful in engaging two out of the three planned PTMAs to conduct research on climate change within their regions.

③ Annual NWAC regional engagement sessions on climate change impacts, adaptations, and mitigations with an eye on local projects, successes/preferred practices and feedback provision to be communicated to ECCC: Regional engagement sessions provided an opportunity to explore in detail what participants see as important and valuable about their lives, including their community, Way of Life, and resources supporting them. Responses to these open-ended questions gave a glimpse into what matters most to participants with respect to where and how they live. **This activity was completed as planned.**



“ IN THIS PROJECT NWAC SOUGHTS TO IDENTIFY, AND EXAMINE, OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADAPTATION POLICIES TO REDUCE VULNERABILITY FOR INDIGENOUS WG2STGD+ PEOPLE IN CLIMATE CHANGE, AND INCREASE ADAPTIVE CAPACITY.

ACTIVITY	INITIAL WORKPLAN	PROGRESS ACHIEVED
NWAC capacity – Director/manager, and project coordinator (Indigenous youth mentorship position).	Hire a project officer and a project coordinator (Indigenous youth mentorship position).	A project officer, as opposed to a director or manager, was preferred since NWAC already had a senior director and senior policy advisor working on the project. A project coordinator was filled through the Indigenous youth mentorship position.
Annual national survey, focusing on biodiversity and conservation in the context of impacts and adaptations to climate change.	Conduct a survey to be completed by at least 500 respondents.	Survey was filled by 1,069 respondents.
ECCCO website maintenance and continued development.	Updated website, and shared relevant content on the project, and on climate change.	Completed as planned.
Monthly electronic newsletters (academic research and other information, including international components).	Develop six monthly newsletters.	A total of eight newsletters have been developed and shared on our website. Two more newsletters are being developed.
Continued work on existing climate change and conservation toolkits.	Update toolkits with relevant, accurate, and up to date, information.	Completed as planned.
Conduct and facilitate cross-cutting research.	Research was conducted in partnership with the PTMAs. Research also informed social media posts.	Completed as planned.
Annual NWAC regional engagement sessions on climate change impacts, adaptations, and mitigations, with an eye on local projects, successes/preferred practices, and feedback provision to be communicated to ECCC.	Three engagement sessions were planned–BC PTMA, Sask. PTMA, and NWT PTMA.	One annual, regional, engagement session was held with the BC PTMA. Because of challenges associated with engaging regional PTMAs, this approach was changed to incorporate engagement sessions with research being conducted by the PTMAs.
PTMA/regional/grassroots capacity and research, and PTMA/regional/grassroots research, position papers, and virtual engagement, to provide input into Government of Canada processes on an as-needed basis.	Conduct research with the BC PTMA, Sask. PTMA, and NWT PTMA, on regional patterns of climate change and associated impacts.	Research with the BC PTMA has been completed. Research with the Sask. PTMA is ongoing. The NWT PTMA does not have the capacity to participate in this year's activities.
Relevant and regular social media postings.	Post relevant articles on climate change on NWAC's social media channels.	Completed as planned.



5. SUMMARY OF PROJECT FINDINGS FROM EACH ACTIVITY

Summary results of each activity have been categorised into three main themes: Research findings, awareness raising, and community engagement. Research findings provide an overview of insights from the national survey and research conducted by the PTMAs, while awareness-raising focused on findings from the newsletters and relevant social media posts shared. Community engagement theme summary results, from engaging with PTMAs and regional engagement sessions.

5.1 Research findings

Dealing with many barriers to effective adaptation, and creating an enabling environment for reduced vulnerability of Indigenous WG2STGD+ People will require a comprehensive and dynamic portfolio of approaches, covering a range of scales and issues. However, two main strategies for climate change adaptation policy can be discerned:

- 1 **Enhancing existing adaptive strategies**
- 2 **Introducing new strategies.**

Firstly, Indigenous communities are autonomously adapting to climate change. This is mostly being done by using behavioural and technological adaptive strategies. Many of these responses have been reactive in nature, although there is emerging evidence



of proactive planning, particularly in the subsistence hunting sector. Given that climate change will be expressed via changes in climatic variability, adapting policy targets for reducing vulnerability to current climatic risks will, inherently, reduce vulnerability to future climate change.

Financial resources are important component of a means to adapt and are one of the main barriers preventing Inuit from adapting. Many adaptations are costly, exceeding financial abilities of Inuit households, communities, regional governments, and land claims institutions. While adaptation assistance will inevitably require financial support, other options involve assessing effectiveness of current policies and programs in the context of a changing climates, developing institutional capacities, improving decision-making processes, and integrating climate change into long-term strategic planning. One main challenge is institutional capacity. For example, all levels of governance in northern Canada experience high staff turn-over, making strategic long-term planning challenging, in this context.



5.2 Awareness raising

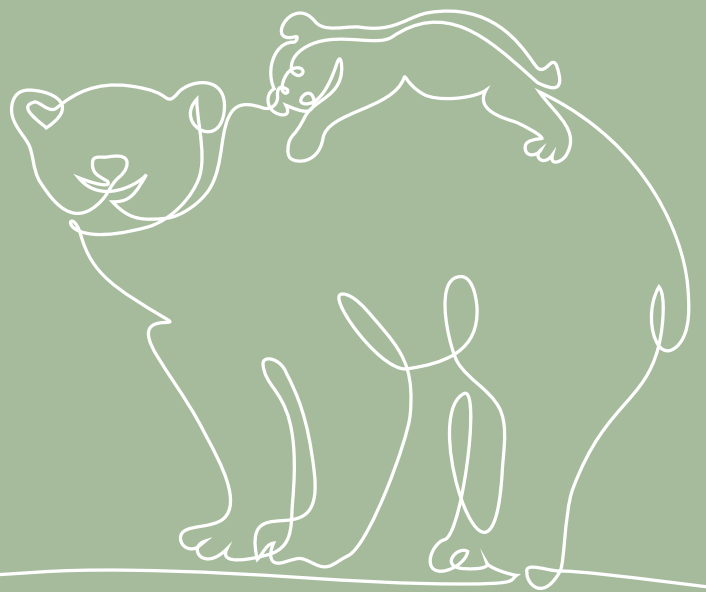
The objective of awareness-raising activities was to share effective strategies on climate change adaptation in Indigenous communities. More specifically, these activities focused on climate change trends, projections and expected implications on Indigenous WG2STGD+ People. We also expected to systematically spark conversations many communities. These efforts included: Development of accessible communication products for local use, encouraging greater awareness through online paid promotion, organizing regional workshops, and generating a national statement of support from regional PTMAs.

5.3 Community engagement

Policies may be more effective when driven by Indigenous experts, as opposed to directed by federal or provincial governments. Federal and/or provincial, and other funding opportunities, can include funding sources set aside specifically for unique needs of Indigenous communities. This ensures funding is available to Indigenous communities without significant competition from non-Indigenous applicants. A practical, simplified, application process, including requirements, potential training, and technical assistance during the application period, would further benefit communities of smaller sizes, or with less capacity. This approach has been successful with other federal and provincial departments, which uses a relatively short funding application form and informative webinars during the application window to assist potential applicants.

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6. COMMUNICATIONS

NWAC used its social media accounts to recruit participants for online surveys. To do this, we created and distributed a poster explaining the purpose of the survey and the project's goals. A generic call for participation enabled us to get interested participants from all over the country. NWAC has also been able to share all the newsletters, social media posts, and research reports, on the project website.

7. PROJECT CHALLENGES

We experienced one major challenge: Engaging with the PTMAs. Due to a lack of capacity within the PTMAs, it has been extremely difficult to directly engage the PTMAs to conduct research and participate in engagement sessions. For example, only two PTMAs participated in the project this year, despite rigorous planning to ensure four PTMAs could participate. However, given the important role of the PTMAs as politically important in bridging organizations, we will need to explore other effective strategies to better engage PTMAs.

8. CONCLUSION

Adaptation is needed to protect the livelihoods of Indigenous WG2STGD+ People in a changing climate. Acting on adaptation can bring near-term benefits, reduce current climate vulnerability, and target socio-economic policy objectives, alongside managing effects of current and future climate change. Historically, political action and lobbying by political actors, at all levels, was dominated by a focus on illustrating impacts of climate change and mitigation; however, new initiatives have started to focus on adaptation. Similarly, at a national level in Canada and internationally, mitigation has dominated policy discussions on how to respond to climate change. Scientific research has largely focused on documenting climate change vulnerabilities, but has rarely taken a next step to identify policy options in Indigenous communities. This is insufficient considering vulnerabilities of Indigenous WG2STGD+ People experience, and what could be classed dangerous climate change, and future climate projections.



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