



Native Women's
Association of Canada
L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

CLIMATE CHANGE

Policy Brief

POSITION

As natural life carriers, Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people hold a unique bond with the Earth. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is continuously working to ensure that Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people are at the forefront of the climate change conversation as well as where they can equitably benefit from local, national, and international solutions to the climate crisis.





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Earth's climate has been impacted by industrial-era human activities, which contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gases act like an insulating blanket on the planet, thus trapping heat in the atmosphere, which raises the global mean surface temperature. Observable and measurable climate indicators include the reduction of arctic sea ice, increase in average global temperature, melting and thinning of land ice impacting rising sea levels, and increase in water vapour and ocean heat content in the atmosphere.

Indigenous women and children all over the world are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. Women's traditional roles often mean they are involved in and depend on livelihoods and resources that are put most at risk by climate change. Women often bear the brunt of coping with climate-related shocks and stresses or the health effects of indoor and urban pollution, which add to their care burden. As land, forest, and water resources are increasingly compromised, privatized, or 'grabbed' for commercial investment, local communities and Indigenous peoples, particularly women, whose livelihoods depend on them are marginalized and displaced.

The impacts of climate change, with its associated and unpredictable seasons, are forcing Indigenous communities to adjust their traditions and adapt to this current reality. Environmental changes, such as changed migratory patterns, have forced Indigenous hunters to travel larger distances and incur greater supply costs, including gas. Indigenous communities are having to make changes in where and when they hunt, as unstable sea ice is affecting traditional migratory patterns of animals (caribou, for example). The instability of sea ice also affects the safety of Inuit hunters during their travels to hunt for seal. Climate change, and the resulting change in ice and weather conditions, affect access to traditional food sources—thereby contributing greatly to Indigenous health and food security.

Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people endure the burdens of colonization and recognize the injustices that are harming the Earth and its people. Indigenous women have taken charge to protect the land and their relationship with it. This places them at the forefront of environmental activism¹.



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NWAC'S ROLE

NWAC engages in national and international advocacy climate change work, fighting for the rights and interests of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people. In forums such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, NWAC advocates for the inclusion of Indigenous women in decision-making processes relating to climate change.

NWAC collaborated with Indigenous women and gender-diverse people to provide advice on conservation, climate change, and biodiversity issues. The focus was primarily on water, navigating waterways, safety within waterways, and freshwater's importance for humans and all Earth's creations. NWAC has centred this work on engagement with Elders, Traditional Knowledge Holders, Ecological Knowledge Holders, Indigenous academics, Local Knowledge Holders, and grassroots women.

NWAC staff have attended national and international meetings on biodiversity, conservation, and climate change. The recommendations developed following

these meetings made it into the wording for the Canadian position paper presented by the Canadian delegation at the United Nations meeting on biodiversity.

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ROLE

The Government of Canada has created two major climate change plans, the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change, released in 2016, and A Healthy Environment and Health Economy, released in 2020. Indigenous People were "structurally excluded from decision-making tables where plans about our future were made." Both plans were developed without direct engagement, consultation, or participation of Indigenous communities or nations. The two plans include 168 references to Indigenous People and their rights and knowledge, but no tangible steps to "actualize this empty recognition."ⁱ

More recently, the Government of Canada announced more than \$1.3 billion in climate action funding targeted to Indigenous People through



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a strengthened climate plan, A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy, and through additional investments announced in Budget 2021. This investment includes measures to:

- support First Nations and Inuit as they manage the health impacts of climate change, such as the impacts of extreme weather events and mental health impacts on youth
- improve food security in the North, including in Inuit Nunangat
- help transition rural, remote, and Indigenous communities from diesel to clean energy
- support greener and more resilient infrastructure, including for large-scale adaptation or mitigation projects
- protect biodiversity through the creation of Indigenous protected and conserved areas and partnerships to restore and enhance wetlands, peatlands, grasslands, and agricultural lands to boost carbon sequestrationⁱⁱ





RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Government of Canada must recognize the disproportionate impact that climate change has on Indigenous women and gender-diverse people; apply a culturally relevant gender-based analysis to all environmental and climate change policies; and examine the unique impacts that environmental policy has on Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.
2. Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people need to be central to conversations about environmental protection, climate change, and land stewardship so that the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous People are protected.
3. The Government of Canada must implement UNDRIP and pay particular attention to Article 29(1): "Indigenous peoples have the right to the conversation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for Indigenous peoples of such conservation and protection, without discrimination."
4. The value of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and the role that TEK plays in solutions to the climate crisis must be acknowledged.

Funding for this document is provided by Indigenous Services Canada. The opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of Indigenous Services Canada.

- i Tchekwie Deranger, Eriel. (July 2, 2021). The Climate Emergency & The Colonial Response. The Yellowhead Institute. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2021/07/02/climate-emergency-colonial-response/>
- ii Government of Canada. (2022). Canada's Partnership with Indigenous Peoples on Climate. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/climate-change/indigenous-partnership.html>