

BAD FORECAST:

The Illusion of Indigenous Inclusion and Representation in Climate Adaptation Plans in Canada

by Janna Wale



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Our Matriarchy by
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ARTIST STATEMENT

Grandmother at the top represents our matrilineal governance system.

Our people have only upheld balance when following this way so the beings on each side represent people continuing this way. Then water at the center. People facing one another in truth. All surrounded by our world which sustains us.

ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of Indigenous knowledge in responding and adapting to climate change. In 2022, Environment and Climate Change Canada's (ECCC) released Canada's first ever **National Adaptation Strategy (NAS)** and **National Action Plan (NAP)**, which present a landmark opportunity for Indigenous people to contribute to and lead climate action and adaptation in Canada. This Special Report considers Indigenous peoples' involvement in federal climate adaptation decision-making processes (or lack thereof), and the impacts of this historic and ongoing exclusion.

BIO

Janna Wale is Gitxsan from Gitanmaax First Nation, Cree-Métis & mixed European. She holds a B.Nrs in Natural Resource Science, and a M.sc. in Sustainability, where her research focused on climate resilience in Indigenous communities, using a traditional seasonal rounds model and two-eyed seeing approach. She currently works with the Canadian Climate Institute as a climate adaptation research associate, and participates in climate related work and research whenever she can.



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...when decisions related to climate policy are made by the same people using the same knowledge systems and predisposition towards extraction that has fuelled the climate crisis in the first place, how can we expect different outcomes?

JANNA WALE

“Seven years and three elections since I took my seat here, and I am still the only First Nations woman to hold a seat in these chambers, and serve in our cabinet. Take a moment and think about that.”

MELANIE MARK

Former Government of B.C. Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture, and Sport

Since time immemorial, Indigenous peoples have had dynamic and adaptive relationships with the Land. In fact, the relationship held with the Land is the foundation for many aspects of our cultures.

Songs, traditions, locally held knowledge, seasonal patterns of use, and stories flow from being in a reciprocal relationship, one that is founded on respect, morality, and a spirit of careaking; held by community members and passed down as knowledge, ways of living, being, and doing.

Since Indigenous identities are inextricably linked to the Land, changes on the Land can have a staggering effect on our communities. Across the country, events like catastrophic wildfires, mass flooding, extreme temperatures, and loss of biodiversity are becoming more frequent and more severe as a result of climate change. Climate change is profoundly altering the reciprocal relationships held between Indigenous peoples and their territories, which is impacting health, well-being, self-determination, identity, and aspects of Indigenous culture (Johnson et al. 2021). While the causes of climate change is a global phenomenon, many of the impacts felt today and into the future will disproportionately affect Indigenous peoples.

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the need to respect Indigenous rights in climate policy and the importance of Indigenous knowledge in responding and adapting to climate change (Ford et al. 2020). There is growing interest in the role that Indigenous peoples — and Indigenous knowledges — can play in the context of climate change (Rashidi and Lyons 2021). Environment and Climate Change Canada’s (ECCC) newly released [Canadian National Adaptation Strategy \(NAS\)](#) and [National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) present a landmark opportunity for Indigenous people to contribute to and lead climate action and adaptation in Canada.

Canada is well behind other countries in releasing their climate plans. Finland adopted their climate strategy in 2005, with Germany and Denmark following in 2008. The United Kingdom began their *third* NAS in 2018. Despite Canada’s long delay in coming up with a national strategy, the extra time did not help clarify the role of Indigenous peoples in adapting to climate change. In total, Indigenous peoples are mentioned 51 times in the strategy and 170 times in the accompanying action plan. However, the involvement of Indigenous peoples in drafting both the strategy and action plan remains nebulous at best.

Have there been discussions and action around inclusion and equity at climate decision-making tables, particularly within ministries that relate to the management of Land and natural resources? Indigenous peoples have drawn attention to a lack of representation, decision-making power, and inclusion of Indigenous priorities (House of Commons 2022). This is all exacerbated by an absence of Indigenous voices in research, policy, and decision-making around climate change at local to global scales (Ford et al. 2016;).

A lack of Indigenous representation hurts good climate policy. Of course, it is the government's role to drive policy forward and generate real and lasting outcomes on climate adaptation.

Governments frame the representation of climate problems, develop strategies and set targets. Unfortunately, lack of knowledge related to how climate change affects different groups creates the potential for maladaptation, further driving unequal climate impacts.

In other words, governments can also “produce and reinforce societal power relations by distributing resources and promoting specific norms and values by including or excluding certain groups’ needs and knowledges” (Singleton et al. 2021).

Is Canada replicating this trend in their approach to climate policy? In her resignation speech from the B.C. Legislature, Melanie Mark was right. We need to take a moment and think about this: when decisions related to climate policy are made by the same people using the same knowledge systems and predisposition towards extraction that has fuelled the climate crisis in the first place, how can we expect different outcomes?

This Special Report considers Indigenous peoples’ involvement in federal climate adaptation decision-making processes (or lack thereof), and the impacts of this historic and ongoing exclusion.

Power and Climate Policy: Unequal from the Start

TO UNDERSTAND where we are headed, we must first understand a little bit about our shared past. One of the problems of the settler-Canadian state is the fundamental belief in an economy that relies on capitalist extraction to generate revenue and to fund the strategies for climate mitigation and adaptation. A partial explanation for this approach flows from Canada’s riches of natural resources; home to 563 freshwater lakes larger than 100 square kilometers, roughly 1,200 species of fish, and the country generated 380 billion dollars in GDP from extractive activities in 2022 (Statistics Canada 2022).

But since the beginning of the uncomfortable co-existence between Canada and Indigenous people, there has been a fundamental difference in belief of how the Land should be treated. “The Land Question,” as it is sometimes called, began when settlers arrived in Canada some three hundred years ago. Policies created shortly thereafter included the legislated conversion of traditional territories into enforced postage-stamp-sized reservations, the removal of children from their families into the residential school system, the imposition of European culture and languages, a stripping of personal and community autonomy and governance, and forced restrictions on religion, sexuality, gender, and associated spiritual practices (Johnson et al. 2021).

Many of these policies were designed to remove Indigenous people from the land and guided by concepts of “*Terra Nullius*” or the belief that the Land was empty. Indigenous people and their thousands of years of stewardship were not visible to those wanting to use the land in extractive ways and so did not count. At the time, Indigenous people were viewed as a part of the Land that needed to be civilized rather than as people deserving respect.

The widely-held perception of “Indians as Savages” underpinned a lot of subsequent policies that would be foundational to the basis of the *Indian Act* — which further defined the unequal relationship between Indigenous people and the settler government and the associated unequal access to decision-making and control over Land and territories. One-third of the *Indian Act* pertains to resources and the environment. Additionally, the *Indian Act* remains largely unchanged from when it was tabled in 1876, which legally defined Indigenous peoples as “wards” of the state — resigning them to having roughly the same status as children in the eyes of colonial law (Harding 2006).

Treating Indigenous people as subordinate has had lasting implications on the Land. Reducing autonomy and decision-making to that of children, coupled with the outlawing of many cultural stewardship practices rooted in reciprocity, such as the traditional burning done by the Interior Salish peoples or clam gardening done by Coastal Nations, led to a tragedy of the commons over the public resources in Canada. Transformed from being viewed relationally by Indigenous peoples to a public good for trade and extraction by settler governments, the Land began to suffer.

Since the days of explicitly violent colonization, and due to our resistance to it, Indigenous people’s relationship with Canada has changed but not transformed. Indigenous peoples have shown incredible resilience but continue to endure the lasting effects of a relationship built on unequal respect, unequal power, and unequal control. As a result, our contemporary collective relationship with the Land remains unbalanced. We are now experiencing climate impacts at a rate that could surpass the worst-case-scenario-climate projections. Environmental catastrophes are happening more frequently and severely than many climate scientists thought possible.

Today, Indigenous peoples and western governments are trying to work together to fight the climate crisis.

At all levels of government, there is an acknowledgement of the necessity of cooperation, coordination, and collaborative action toward both climate mitigation and adaptation.

In Indigenous communities, knowledge sharing is a sacred responsibility. Different people have traditionally held different kinds of knowledge within communities; women, men, children, people on the Land, and two-spirit folks all have unique roles to play in guiding and furthering knowledge for the next generations (Hall and Smith 2000; Sponsel 2007; Vinyeta et al. 2015; Whyte 2016a; Wale 2022).

In many traditional forms of governance, leadership was guided by diverse voices. By including varied perspectives, communities were able to create stronger and more equitable decisions based on a deep understanding of how each knowledge should be used.

Removing the people from the equation who hold Indigenous knowledge and trying to include only aspects of Indigenous perspectives dilutes their meaning and impact. But that seems to be Canada’s approach.

In many government documents, Indigenous knowledges are held up as being able to help to solve the climate crisis. Concepts like “two-eyed seeing” are often cited by governments when speaking about using Indigenous knowledges and western sciences together. Other times the approach is called “braiding knowledges”; in both cases, this method is held up as the way forward in climate action and planning and as an example of how Indigenous communities and colonial governments can work together. However, without considering each knowledge equally (or simply cherry-picking or distilling from Indigenous knowledge), the “braid” will unravel.

While we are now included in dialogue, we still do not have an equal voice nor an equal weight within decision-making. This is an issue of representation.

There are many promising statements related to Indigenous knowledges and their ability to fight and adapt to climate change, but they have not yet been grounded in action. Seeking Indigenous knowledges to inform climate decision-making without including Indigenous peoples in these conversations implies that Indigenous people are stakeholders, as opposed to self-determining nations with rights and responsibilities related to their knowledge systems and traditional territories (Whyte 2014; Latulippe 2019; Johnson et al. 2021; Rashidi and Lyons 2021). Having so few Indigenous people within higher levels of decision-making bodies makes it almost impossible to include and advocate for Indigenous sovereignty within an institution born from an us versus them dichotomy that continued throughout our shared histories.

Indigenous Engagement in Canada's National Adaptation Strategy

THE PROCESS to create the NAS and the NAP included targeted engagement, five expert advisory tables, partner and stakeholder engagement and wider public engagement; all before the strategy's release. In 2021, ECCC hosted a visioning forum in order to steer the beginning of the development of what would become the NAS and decide the five themes that are the focal point of the strategy and plan: Health and Well-being; Resilient Natural and Built Infrastructure; Thriving Natural Environment; Strong and Resilient Economy; and, Disaster Resilience and Security. Participants at the visioning sessions included representatives from all the provinces and territories as well as two National Indigenous Organizations (NIO). However, they did not include or list any Indigenous communities in the visioning process and even the NIOs were not identified (Government of Canada 2021a).

Within the five themes of the NAS and NAP, five advisory tables were convened to offer advice and suggestions for the writing and direction of the final product. Of the five tables and 110 total members, Indigenous representation — in the form of those

representing Indigenous organizations — numbered 17. This was approximately 15 percent. Indigenous peoples currently comprise approximately five percent of the total population across Canada, so this number seems positive, though it is misleadingly so.

While including two National Indigenous Organizations is a step forward, the crux of the matter is that these organizations are not rights and title holders. In fact, none of the people from the Indigenous organizations on the advisory tables have listed community ties.

This is problematic for two reasons: First, without a connection to place, it is difficult to distinguish that person's authority and the context of their knowledge; second, it creates an illusion of Indigenous inclusion that may not be accurate. It is true and important to remember that non-Indigenous people have a key role to play as allies in working with and for us. However, choosing non-Indigenous people who only *work within* Indigenous organizations to sit and speak on our behalf does not truly reflect Indigenous experiences of climate change.

Second, while Indigenous organizations are composed of community members, they are not communities themselves. Indigenous organizations are not elected by community members and do not operate under hereditary leadership, traditional laws, practices, and protocols that vary from community to community. To put this in perspective, being part of a group of 17 people tasked to represent the concerns, priorities, and values of over 600 diverse Indigenous communities across the country would be daunting for anyone. Therefore, these members cannot and do not represent communities' knowledge, fear, hope, and resilience related to climate change actions and strategies. While their inclusion is important, it is insufficient in including Indigenous voices, visions, and priorities within the development of the NAS and NAP.

Policy analysts within the ECCC wrote the NAS and the NAP. While the advisory offered suggestions,

Provincial Ministry	Indigenous Middle & Other Managers (TOTAL)	Indigenous Senior Managers (TOTAL)	Women Middle & Other Managers (TOTAL)	Women Senior Managers (TOTAL)
Agriculture & Food	<3 (34)	<3 (9)	10 (29)	<3 (9)
Emergency Management	<3 (55)	<3 (8)	26 (55)	<3 (8)
Environmental Assessment Office	<3 (30)	<3 (17)	15 (30)	Suppressed ¹
Energy & Mines	<3 (61)	<3 (28)	28 (61)	10 (28)
Environment & Climate Change	5 (119)	<3 (25)	64 (129)	Suppressed
Finance	8 (275)	<3 (54)	138 (275)	23 (54)
Forests	15 (528)	<3 (70)	217 (528)	22 (70)
Health	4 (266)	<3 (67)	172 (266)	31 (67)
Indigenous Relations & Reconciliation	3 (68)	3 (26)	37 (68)	7 (26)
Transportation & Infrastructure	7 (219)	<3 (228)	91 (219)	Suppressed
Totals	46 - 50 (1655)	12 - 21 (322)	798 (1655)	97 (262)

Table 1: B.C.'s provincial ministries and proportion of Indigenous managers, and proportion of women managers

it was up to the discretion of the policymakers and analysts to steer the direction of what would become Canada's first NAS. Here, we arrive at a similar problem: Within both the federal and provincial governments, the data presented implies that we are making significant progress. However, upon further investigation, ministries related to the Land (and therefore more climate-focused ministries) appear to be lagging significantly in increasing representation of Indigenous peoples' leadership positions, where they can influence decision-making tables.

For example, across ten ministries within the Government of British Columbia, approximately 50 middle managers self-identify as Indigenous, out of a total of 1,655 (Table 1). The number of self-identifying senior managers is even lower — approximately 20,

from a total of 322. Particularly, within the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, fewer than three senior managers self-identify as Indigenous. Federally, the same depth of statistics is not available; however, the 2022 Canadian Employment Equity Promotion Rate Study confirmed that Indigenous peoples continue to have lower relative promotion rates compared to non-Indigenous peoples, which have remained consistently low across the various assessment periods (Government of Canada 2022). Further, in many of the ministries related to Land, there is a gap between the expected and actual number of Indigenous employees working within the public service (Government of Canada 2021b).

¹In the context of this representation chart, "suppressed" means that this information is not publicly available by the BC government, and does not include those who are not self-identifying as Indigenous.

While there has been great promise within new plans, like the NAS, in looking to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into climate action, there is confusion around which federal department is engaging Indigenous people on the NAP and whether parallel Federal initiatives, such as the [UNDA Action Plan](#), have any bearing on this process. More, there has been very little progress towards deconstructing the power politics that continues to subvert Indigenous ways of knowing and being to western quantitative sciences.

The fact is, climate legislation and policies in Canada have been steeped in racist ideologies and biases created and perpetuated by settler-colonial society (Latulippe 2019). Indigenous knowledges continue to be treated as additional to what are considered the true and accurate theories, data sets, and methodologies of western sciences, resulting in theft, misappropriation, and commodification (Latulippe 2019; Rashidi and Lyons 2021). Once it is extracted and separated from Indigenous communities and, therefore, from Indigenous people, it is easier to remove the pieces of Indigenous knowledge that connect to morality, spirituality, and balance, which often do not fit with the extractive nature of settler-colonial relationships with the Land.

Much like the advice given by the advisory tables, this diluted knowledge is then considered a tool, concept, framework, or framing that can be read about in reports or articles, that decision-makers can choose to use or disregard, rather than as a way of knowing and being (Latulippe 2019).

Intersectionality & Adaptation: The Value of Equitable Representation in Climate Policy

HISTORICALLY, climate policies in Canada have been mainly focused on environmental impacts and outcomes without giving equal consideration to the social dimensions of climate change (Singleton et al. 2021). In other words how climate

change affects us as individuals and communities and how we respond, is rooted in our identities and experiences. A tool to help understand this dynamic is intersectionality. Drawing on the reality of our unique identities that in turn, hold different knowledges, viewpoints, or belongings, intersectionality explores how power relations change based on the crossroads of different identities like age, gender, class, and race can interact (Crenshaw 1991).

Intersectionality is relevant to discussions on the causes, effects, and power dynamics present within climate change and adaptation, because climate change impacts vary across geographic locations and across social dimensions.

Related to this, intersectionality surrounding gender plays an important role in climate outcomes and adaptation potential. In Indigenous communities in particular, women, gender-fluid, and non-binary community members hold special responsibilities and knowledges related to decision-making. Many Indigenous societies are matrilineal, where high-ranking women serve as respected decision-makers and knowledge-holders. Two-spirit people also hold special roles and considerations when there is a decision to be made. While colonial governments are beginning to catch up by empowering more woman-identifying decision-makers within Land and climate ministries, they still make up less than 50 percent of the total number of people in power (Table 1). Furthermore, these statistics remain starkly binary: The information presented here indicates either man or woman, and does not create space for other forms of identity expression, which could influence how decisions are made and what the outcomes of those decisions look like.

Interestingly, the Government of Canada has been committed to using inclusivity metrics like Gender-Based Analysis plus (GBA+) since 1995. In 2022, ECCC reported that the [Climate Adaptation](#)

Program, which houses both the NAS and the NAP, had ‘nothing to report for 2021-2022’ related to the GBA Data Collection Plan. While GBA+ is mentioned² within the NAS, the term does not appear anywhere within the NAP, even though one of the guiding principles of the NAP is ‘advancing equity and environmental justice’. Given that there are no associated metrics (nothing to report anyway), or any explanation of how either the NAS or NAP plans on implementing its guiding principles, it is difficult to imagine we will see any progress on creating inclusive policy outcomes.

When thinking about communities that are particularly vulnerable to climate change, there are often racial, ethnic, gender-based, and socioeconomic considerations that can influence community climate resilience (Wale 2022). Combined, these characteristics of identity can either amplify or reduce the ability to adapt to climate change. While it is true that Indigenous people will experience disproportionate impacts of climate change, the focus placed on climate vulnerability and the perpetuated rhetoric of Indigenous victimhood downplays Indigenous people’s strength, agency, and ability to adapt (Johnson et al. 2021).

Indigenous victimhood narratives do not accurately portray how Indigenous communities see themselves in relation to climate change, and yet these narratives are often perpetuated by governments in adaptation strategies and action plans. Projects created from this perspective can unintentionally perpetuate white saviorism and downplay how Indigenous peoples *are* adapting to climate change, by furthering the view that Indigenous peoples need to be rescued from the most damaging impacts of the climate crisis, rather than have an active and important role in solving it. The focus should not be on perpetuating the Indigenous helplessness trope but rather on Indigenous strength and resilience that can build adaptation efforts.

² When mentioned, GBA+ and similar terminology is preceded by terms like ‘should’, rather than ‘will’.

An invitation to participate in climate planning that is contingent on shape-shifting our knowledge to fit within the narrow space of ‘Indigenous inclusion’ in current climate engagement and planning can no longer be an option for how communities work together with governments to adapt to climate change.

In fact, studies have shown that failing to include an intersectional lens in creating climate action plans can result in maladaptation, or in other words, outcomes that are more harmful than helpful (Whyte 2016b). It stands to reason, then, that a greater engagement of intersectionality and other ways of knowing within climate policy and decision-making can create more just and inclusive climate adaptation (Johnson et al. 2021)

Communities are leveraging western science and traditional knowledge to generate climate resilience in a way that fits their worldviews, cultures, and values. Where Indigenous peoples have worked collaboratively with each other or with government organizations, there have been many good examples of adaptation to climate change in ways that meet the needs of communities while increasing overall climate resilience (Deranger et al. 2022). For example, Tea Creek located in Gitxsan territory, or the mentoring and capacity building programs run through the Indigenous Clean Energy (ICE) Network.

Indigenous knowledges are time tested and locally rooted; there is no shortage of Indigenous voices to guide the appropriate use and engagement with Indigenous knowledges for climate adaptation and climate adaptation policy (Latulippe 2019). Intersectional approaches to climate policy can encourage social and political transformations, which can help to address the causes of vulnerability and reduce the potential for maladaptation (Johnson et al. 2021). However, Indigenous voices are still not looked for in positions of power, or as decision-makers.

Moving Towards Equitable Decision-Making

FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL governments have placed a public emphasis on working towards reconciliation with Indigenous nations. Over the past couple of years, all levels of government are beginning to wrestle with the dark colonial legacies that became foundational to much of the legislation that built “Canada,” and what it might mean to begin to reconcile with Indigenous peoples in a good way. Time will tell if these efforts are genuine and result of transformation.

While we desperately need Indigenous leaders within government to create and uphold holistic and change-inducing climate strategies, navigating the role of personal culture and knowledge related to at-work expectations is extremely challenging. An increasing number of powerhouse Indigenous people within government — such as former Ministers Jody Wilson-Raybould, Melanie Mark, and recently Governor General Mary Simon — are sounding the alarm on the inappropriate and racist experiences of working in the public service. To quote Mary Simon’s experience:

“If [women] can't take the joke, stay out of the line of fire. Others will say online abuse is part of the role of a public figure, even though the equivalent spoken words would be condemned. I must respectfully disagree. I cannot and will not just brush off or ignore comments, or offer a platform for the spreading of stereotypes and tropes that I have spent a lifetime opposing. These words hurt Indigenous peoples and damage the progress we have made together towards reconciliation.”

For Indigenous public servants, holding space within a system designed to cause Indigenous pain can be incredibly challenging.

However, many Indigenous people continue to step up as leaders to fight for space and respect in the

policy arena. Governments have a responsibility to engage with the intersectional knowledge Indigenous peoples have to offer, and should seek out those with the experience to bring this knowledge into climate adaptation policy by creating or including more Indigenous people who hold Indigenous knowledge in leadership positions. While the Indigenous identity is important, hiring and promoting people who hold specialized knowledge related to the Indigenous identity is at the core of creating climate adaptation policy that can be done in ways that are respectful to Indigenous values, protocols, and cultures.

Indigenous knowledge is intrinsically linked to respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and caretakership of Land and traditional territories. Governments should prioritize investing time, energy, and resources into relationship-building with Indigenous peoples both within and outside of government bodies to create the potential for “sustaining, shared, intersectional action in response” to climate change through developing and building capacity (Whyte 2016a; Latulippe 2019). Additionally, Indigenous peoples should be internally supported within the public service in order to build internal capacity and support their increased emotional labour.

Community-centric approaches to climate change are also needed to address the social-ecological dimensions of climate change we are now experiencing. Too often, equity-deserving people fall through the cracks in climate adaptation planning; climate policy needs to include not only more Indigenous voices but the voices of those who have been historically marginalized and excluded due to the assumption that the needs of many should outweigh the needs of the few (Figueiredo and Perkins 2013).

Indigenous governance and self-determination should be central to any conversations related to climate adaptation happening in Canada and should inform hiring decisions when considering who to promote to leadership. Governments need to ensure that Indigenous people are being considered and retained

at leadership levels; to do this, governments need to build capacity internally to both support Indigenous staff, while educating non-Indigenous staff. This could mean creating Indigenous hiring streams, building in mentorship opportunities, and creating Indigenous partnerships at all leadership positions levels, where an Indigenous person works alongside executive level directors. For non-Indigenous people already in leadership positions related to Land and climate change, there should be cultural competency metrics in place to ensure decision-makers are properly equipped to approach decisions with humility and respect. These competencies should be a hiring prerequisite, and should be regularly assessed.

Finally, Indigenous communities must have a meaningful and intentional role in co-creating climate adaptation strategies and plans.

While the NAS is certainly a positive start, subsequently developed action plans need to include a government-to-government approach with each and every Indigenous Nation in Canada. Pan-Indigenous approaches to climate action will be inadequate in addressing both regional and cultural differences in climate impacts and associated actions.

One way this could be achieved would be to create regional engagement sessions either by priority risk or language group, where communities are able to both offer priorities and suggestions to governments, while building relationships and knowledge sharing with other communities experiencing similar climate impacts. Another way this could be achieved is through the creation of an annual provincial-wide Conference of the Parties (COP), where communities could come together regularly to work on climate adaptation in conjunction with governments.

Canada's success at reconciling with Indigenous peoples is tied to the efficacy of climate adaptation.

If the same viewpoints continue to be reinforced by the same decision-makers, nothing will change. The climate crisis will continue to escalate. When leadership can fully speak to gaps in adaptation plans through the use of taught knowledge and lived experiences, the more comprehensive and effective adaptation strategies will become. If Indigenous peoples are being held up as well-positioned climate leaders by colonial governments, then it is time for those governments to create space, capacity, and understanding for Indigenous leaders within their ranks.

Concepts like “two-eyed seeing” are often cited by governments when speaking about using Indigenous knowledges and western sciences together. Other times the approach is called “braiding knowledges”; in both cases, this method is held up as the way forward in climate action and planning and as an example of how Indigenous communities and colonial governments can work together.

However, without considering each knowledge equally (or simply cherry-picking or distilling from Indigenous knowledge), the “braid” will unravel.

JANNA WALE

A Few Definitions...

Climate Justice

While there are various interpretations of climate justice, depending on the specific community, generally, climate justice is a concept in the international climate movement that is underpinned by the principles of “equity, non-discrimination, equal participation, transparency, fairness, accountability and access to justice.” In other words, a transition out of the climate crisis must be just, recognizing the disproportionate consequences of climate change – and efforts to mitigate them – on marginalized communities (United Nations, March 2023).

Climate Justice from an Indigenous perspective challenges colonialism and settler colonial involvement as the driving forces of climate change and crisis. Moreover, colonialism and settler colonialism continue to prevent Indigenous efforts at climate mitigation and adaptation, especially by way of land displacement and disruption of knowledge transmission (White, 2017, 153-155). As such, Indigenous sovereignty and the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge is central to Climate Justice.

Climate Mitigation

Climate Mitigation is often defined simply as the strategies and attempts to reduce, capture, or off-set greenhouse gas emissions and limit the negative impact human societies have on the climate, thereby mitigating some of the consequences of climate change. Mitigation at a global level has effectively stalled and policymakers are turning instead to adaptation. From an Indigenous perspective, mitigation is still possible but requires transformative and systemic changes to global economic, social and political structures. Moreover, it requires individuals, industry, state governments and international institutions to dramatically change consumption habits and instead pursue an ethic of caring for the land (an ethic found in many Indigenous worldviews).

Climate Adaptation

The Government of Canada defines Climate Adaption as “planning for and acting on the anticipated impacts of climate change. It involves making changes to how we live and what we do before climate change impacts happen to reduce their impact (anticipatory) as well as being more ready to respond to increasingly likely and frequent extreme events (reactive)” (NAS, 2022). From an Indigenous perspective, adaptation requires the restoration of Indigenous sovereignty, which is a pathway to maintain (and even enhance) biodiversity. Enhancing biodiversity ensures ecosystem resiliency, giving the best change to the widest variety of species to adapt to climate change.

*Indigenous people globally are incredibly diverse and have distinct mitigation and adaptation strategies. These definitions are general and as such pan-Indigenous, but draw on those strategies nonetheless.

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