

What is Indigenous Knowledge?

Indigenous Knowledge is often referred to in the plural to reflect its distinctiveness among Indigenous Peoples. However, there are some characteristics that are widely shared. Indigenous knowledge:

- reflects the interdependence between Indigenous Peoples and the lands they call home, including all Creation and beings (animate and inanimate) within that land;
- is developed from observations, lessons, and skills acquired over many generations through direct experience in the traditional territory;
- is a living process that is still developing, including knowledge acquired in the present; and
- is critical for community survival as well as resource management and sustainability.

What are Indigenous Peoples' Rights Relating to Climate Change?

First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples are rights holders. Key Indigenous rights that affect climate change action are the:

- inherent right to self-government over lands, natural resources and ways of life; and the
- right to participate in decision-making about climate change responses.

These rights are defined in Canadian and international laws and policies, including the Canadian constitution and the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which Canada has adopted.

This recognition means that the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous Peoples over their lands, natural resources and

ways of life must be respected, protected and incorporated into climate change policy and research. Success will depend on using an Indigenous-led, distinctions-based approach – that is, one that acknowledges the unique rights, interests and circumstances of Indigenous Peoples.

What are the Knowledge Gaps?

There are significant knowledge gaps that undermine the successful integration of Indigenous knowledges into climate change action. Some examples of these gaps include:

- lack of research on climate change and Indigenous Peoples in regions outside the North (a region recognized as a global hotspot for climate change);
- under-representation of youth, children, Métis people, and urban Indigenous Peoples in climate research;
- limited examination of Indigenous resilience and protective factors;
- lack of research on how Indigenous knowledges have been used in climate adaptation initiatives – and the effectiveness of community-based adaptation initiatives; and
- research by non-Indigenous researchers.

“It is our right to keep on living the way we used to and also [our] right to adapt for a better future.”²



“We must correct the path we are walking on and return to the special relationships, the teachings, the knowledge and practice that [maintain] respect, honor, and relationship with the natural world.”³



Success Stories

Effective projects to integrate Indigenous knowledges into climate change action generally share some key characteristics. For example, they are usually community-led, use participatory methods, and combine Indigenous knowledge and Western science. Examples of effective integration of Indigenous knowledges include the following:

Hazard mapping in Kashechewan First Nation

Kashechewan is a Cree community in Northern Ontario that is prone to flooding. A hazard mapping project there used Indigenous knowledge about the seasons, snowmelt and runoff – along with data from geographic information systems – to gain a better understanding of flooding and its effects on the community. Community members identified factors that increased the impact of flooding, such as an inadequate water treatment facility and nearby resource development work. Findings will be used for flood monitoring and risk reduction activities.

Peavine Metis Settlement FireSmart Program

Peavine Metis Settlement in northern Alberta is one of many Indigenous communities located in a forest where the risk of wildfires is increasing due to climate change. The community works with FireSmart Canada on projects such as training a volunteer fire department; creating fire breaks; and creating an Aboriginal Junior Forest Rangers crew to help with activities such as vegetation management. Work reflects the community’s cultural values, such as helping Elders, participating in traditional activities on the land, and passing on knowledge to younger generations.

Selkirk First Nation and Salmon Protection

The Selkirk First Nation in the Yukon is facing a dramatic decline in the salmon population. This decline threatens the Nation’s food security and also the essence of its cultural identity, which is centred around the tradition of fish camps. With funding from the federal Climate Change and Health Adaptation Program, Selkirk conducted a community-

based project to maintain food security as well as traditional knowledge and culture. Activities included youth carrying out fish surveys and learning traditional skills at a winter fish camp.

Sources

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2. Sam Hunter, Weenusk First Nation, Ontario, as quoted in: Human Rights Watch (2020). “My fear is losing everything”: *The climate crisis and First Nations’ right to food in Canada*. New York, NY. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/21/my-fear-losing-everything/climate-crisis-and-first-nations-right-food-canada>
3. Roxane Landry, Dene, Fort Providence from *Summer of Smoke* <https://vimeo.com/373958783>

