

it's the **HEART** of the BEAST
WE ARE ALL going After the
HEAD of.

move at the
PACE of COMMUNITY.

TAR SANDS

don't
forget
U.S.



THREATENED by OUR CEREMONIES.

WHAT IS GOING TO
DESTABILIZE
EXPANSION of the TAR SANDS

AT THE
SOURCE.



Bringing Our Voices Together

In-depth Report

March 2020



**INDIGENOUS
CLIMATE ACTION**
indigenousclimateaction.com

Background and Introduction

From August 7 - 10, 2019, Indigenous Climate Action, Indigenous Environmental Network, and the NDN Collective hosted the first-ever invite-only Indigenous gathering, aptly named *Bringing Our Voices Together*. This gathering brought 70 Indigenous participants together - each one involved in different aspects of tar sands campaigns, primarily, work against extraction, pipelines, pipeline routes, and refineries faced by their communities, families, and Nations.

The event was supported by a variety of partner organizations:

- Cold Lake First Nation;
- Honor the Earth;
- Keepers of the Water;
- Institute for People, Place, and Possibility (IP3);
- Native Organizers Alliance;
- NDN Collective;
- Rainforest Action Network; and
- 350.org.

Although there have been a multitude of meetings and gatherings held that address resistance to the tar sands and support of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Rights, and struggles on the frontlines, there has never been an

opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to come together independently to organize and strategize as a collective across borders and territories. There has also never been a prior event for Indigenous Peoples to communicate deep rooted support of each other or to engage in streamlining Indigenous narratives that build a vision for the creation of stronger messaging across tar sands infrastructure movements of resistance. *Bringing Our Voices Together* addressed this void and allowed for this long overdue interaction to occur.

One day prior to *Bringing Our Voices Together*, those who could attend were afforded the opportunity to tour the Tar Sands in Fort McMurray, Alberta. This is important as it allows those who have worked on the effects of tar sands and its infrastructures in their community, but have never been to the tar sands, to see, taste, hear, and feel the tar sands reality. This activity also aids in the creation of an overall holistic vision of addressing the entirety of the tar sands and to focus on strategies to stop tar sand extraction at the source.

The gathering was land based, rooted in ceremony, storytelling, and tradition in order to connect efforts, share strategies, and open traditional lines of communication that have often been broken by artificial and imposed borders and colonization.

The event being land based was important for each one of the participants and crucial to the event's profound



impact and success. As stated on the [Cold Lake First Nation webpage](#):

The First Nations worldview is that everything is connected and that everything comes from the land. Caring for and respecting the land as well as passing on the teachings, stories, language and culture are important roles for community elders. These Lands have sustained the Dene people for thousands of years and must be kept whole if everyone is to share them for thousands more years.

Furthermore, allowing participants - who are committed to tar sands resistance and the protection of Mother Earth - to become part of the very lands tar sands extraction is occurring on further solidified the bonds and commitments of all involved.

Bringing Our Voices Together included Elders, youth, frontline trainers, campaigners, as well as elected, traditional, and grassroots leaders. This diversity of participation allowed for relationship building, strategizing, and learning more about the vast array of work on the ground. This in turn opened the door for the construction of a larger pathway for collaboration and greater allegiances towards a solidified Indigenous Rights and Nationhood movement that fosters inclusivity and support for the most tar sands impacted communities.

These overall goals of *Bringing Our Voices Together* guided and directed the gathering:

1. Create a space that facilitates lasting relationships and provides mutual support amongst diverse movements to stop tar sands projects
2. Streamline narratives and build a bold vision for an Indigenous rights approach to action on tar sands and climate change
3. Support community leaders working to hold Indigenous Nations leadership accountable
4. Continue to build a framework for solidarity to facilitate conversations to move towards solutions that support an Indigenous just transition for communities, families, and Nations

The following sections of the report will paint a picture of the actual gathering and outline plans and steps for moving forward.

The Gathering

It's different to be in these conversations with just Indigenous folks rather than ENGOs in the room - grassroots communities that are building off the spirit of our communities.

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger

Bringing Our Voices Together took place on the Denesuline Territory/First Nation nearby to what is known as Cold Lake in Northern Alberta. The Denesuline Peoples of this area are closely connected to their history, lands, language and traditions.

The event took place From Thursday, August 7 – Saturday, August 10, 2019, with an optional tour of the Tar Sands that preceded the gathering on August 5 - 6, 2019. Participants were immersed in many comprehensive activities and teachings and had time for networking, communication, developing a sense of community, and sharing.

Bringing Our Voices Together brought people from all over Turtle Island, both near and far, transcending borders, silos, and distinct tar sands campaigns. It was truly unique, one-of-a-kind, and long overdue.

There were 70 participants from a variety of places, including: Alberta, British Columbia, South Dakota, Montana, Oklahoma, Manitoba, Ontario, Minnesota, Alabama, North Carolina, Northwest Territories, Ohio, Colorado, Illinois, Texas, New York, Washington, and California. They represented a vast amount of Indigenous Nations and territories.

Below is an outline of the activities for each day followed by a summary of each activity.

Day-by-Day Agenda

Monday, August 5, 2019

Morning and Afternoon:

- Optional Tar Sands Tour Participant Arrival

Evening:

- Supper – Soup and bannock served

Tuesday, August 6, 2019

Morning:

- Optional Tar Sands Tour

Afternoon:

- Tar Sands Tour Concludes - participants head to the *Bringing Our Voices Together* gathering in Cold Lake Denesuline First Nation

Evening:

- *Bringing Our Voices Together* gathering arrival

Wednesday, August 7, 2019

Morning:

- Welcome – Drummers, Cold Lake First Nation Chief and Council, Elder Nancy Scanie, and host organizers: ICA, IEN, and NDN Collective
- Speed Dating – Eriel Deranger
- History of Tar Sands Overview - Tom Goldtooth, Clayton Thomas Mueller, Melina Laboucan -Massimo, and Eriel Deranger

Afternoon:

- Key Issues, Challenges, Needs of Your Campaign- Bineshi Albert
- Intro to Mapping Exercise – Eriel Tchekwie Deranger
- Speed Dating Continued - Eriel Tchekwie Deranger
- Closing Circle - Eriel Tchekwie Deranger

Thursday, August 8, 2019

Morning:

- Highlights from Day One – Eriel Tchekwie Deranger
- Movement Building and Movement Building in our History - Bineshi Albert
- Three-Way Brainstorm. How do we work together? - Melina Laboucan- Massimo and Sarah Sunshine Manning

Afternoon:

- Power Mapping – Robert Chanate, Judith LaBlanc, and Bineshi Albert

Evening:

- Community Sponsored Feast
- Honouring of Brian Grandbois

Friday, August 9, 2019

Morning:

- Highlights from Day 2 – Eriel Tchekwie Deranger
- Beaver Demonstration - Brian Grandjambe Jr

Afternoon:

- Just Transitions - Judith Robert, Melina Laboucan-Massimo, Jade Begay,
- Story Based Strategy Session - Clayton Thomas-Mueller, Jade Begay

Saturday, August 10, 2019

Full Day on Strategy and Next Steps

Morning:

- Highlights from Day 3 – Eriel Tchekwie Deranger
- Youth Prayer - Victora Redsun
- Grounding the Day – Bineshi Albert
- Communications Exercise – Harmony Lambert and Bineshi Albert
- Fishbowl Activity – Bineshi Albert, Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, Tom Goldtooth, Clayton Thomas- Mueller, Melina Laboucan-Massimo
- Break Out Groups Brainstorming Activity - Sarah Sunshine Manning

Afternoon:

- Lunch Hour Presentation – Kanahus Manuel, Tiny House Warriors
- Framing For Strategy- Judith Lablanc
- Stopping It At The Source Strategy–Harmony Lambert
- Closing Session - ICA, IEN, NDN Collective

Day-by-Day Activity Summary

Monday, August 5, 2019

Participants arrived for the optional Tar Sands Tour. They stayed at the Microtel Inn & Suites by Wyndham, Fort McMurray. A soup and bannock supper was provided for the participants. They were also provided with a detailed agenda for the following day and were reminded that the bus for the tour would leave at 9:00 AM sharp. The supper also gave participants time to get to know one another and network.



Tuesday August 6, 2019

The optional tar sands tour started at 9 AM. At this time, participants were taken by bus to Crane Lake where they partook in a prayer for the land before venturing out to tour the tar sands.

The tar sands tour involved a slow drive around the Syncrude Loop. The first stop of the tour was at the Syncrude Giants of Mining where participants heard the history of the tar sands from local people and engaged in a prayer for land once more. The next stop was at the Bison Lookout Point where bison live in the middle of the tar sands. Respect was paid to the bison along with a prayer and a song for them. After this was completed, participants took a drive to Fort McKay First Nation. A light lunch was served at the arbour where participants had a chance to meet community members who shared their stories about life in Fort McKay. This culminated the tar sands tour and participants journeyed on to the *Bringing Our Voices Together* gathering, with a rest stop in Lac Labiche.

Once at the *Bringing Our Voices Together* gathering participants had the option of taking part in the first of four sweat lodge ceremonies.

Wednesday, August 7, 2019

The *Bringing Our Voices Together* gathering started with a traditional welcome, which opened with a Dene Honour

Song. Following the Honour Song, the Cold Lake Denesuline First Nation Chief and Council welcomed the participants to their territory. Nancy Scanie, a local Grandmother and Elder from the Cold Lake Denesuline First Nation, said a prayer to lead the gathering in a good way so that participants, organizers, and guests could receive spiritual permission to be on the Denesuline lands. This is of utmost importance for any gathering, and especially a gathering on the land. The prayer also assists those in attendance to participate in a good way with a clear mind and a good heart.

Following the welcome from the people of Cold Lake Denesuline First Nation, the host organizers, Indigenous Climate Action, Indigenous Environmental Network, and NDN Collective, welcomed everyone to the gathering and set the stage for *Bringing Our Voices Together*.

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, Executive Director of Indigenous Climate Action spoke on the purpose of the gathering, "This gathering brings voices together recognizing we are not fighting alone. We need to be having conversations amongst ourselves to strategize about how we are going to work together."

Sarah Sunshine Manning, Communication Director of NDN Collective, stated, "It is a blessing to wake up at the Lake and to be among the Elders at the Gathering." She outlined that the NDN collective was a newly formed cross colonial border organization. Her main role at the gathering was to serve as a storyteller. Sarah invited participants to connect

with her to share stories for the *While Indigenous* podcast she and her media team host.

Tom Goldtooth of Indigenous Environmental Network, greeted the participants in his language and noted, "It's good to be here. I'm a southern Dene, I use this term now as I've been up to Fort McKay and Fort Chip and have learned the stories." He spoke about the need to slow down to consider "strategy and tactics...to have some time to do some deep thinking,"

The first activity of the day was called "Speed Dating." The purpose of this activity was "to get to know each other and open up the areas of campaigning we are working on. We are trying to find ways to talk across not just the colonial borderline, but across communities.... Sometimes we get stuck in our own issue, our own community... we want to find strategic ways to work together." In this activity people were asked to find someone they didn't know and find out the following information from them:

- name;
- Nation/Tribe/Community they are from;
- the issue they are working on;
- fun fact about the person; and
- contact information (email/Instagram/Facebook/twitter/phone number).

Following "Speed Dating," a panel discussion was led by Tom Goldtooth, Melina Laboucan-Massimo, and Clayton Thomas-Mueller on the history of the tar sands. This was followed by a tar sands timeline activity. The timeline activity guided people in creating a collective timeline of tar sands campaigns and events over the last few decades.

The youth had an important message during this activity:

It's not just about climate, its related to housing, land dispossession, to youth in care -can't be really be described in a conference, it's not linear, it's a circle. Those on the streets have good politics, they are practicing sovereignty... it's our responsibility as Indigenous young people, as two spirited people, we redirect the anger from each other and on to Canada...Our culture and language shapes our world view...some of our ancestors kept the seeds of language and culture, bringing back ceremony to the inner city...the land and the water and the relatives can survive without us but we cannot survive without

them.

The panel was thought provoking and educational. Twelve points stood out:

1. People in affected communities must speak for themselves and strategic development can only occur with the grassroots communities upon invitation only.
2. Tar sands is one of the largest developments around the globe. It is far larger than any other development that panelists have seen anywhere
3. There is "environmental racism, even in philanthropy." This raises issues on how we engage with allies and what protocols we use to do so.
4. Critical issues of equity and funding are at the forefront of the work we do.
5. The issues are focused on Indigenous Rights, land, and FPIC.
6. There is a need for bi-national (beyond colonial lines) campaigns.
7. Tar sands extraction became profitable through a Cheney/Bush scam – it is a losing proposition.
8. Indigenous womxn in leadership are a major contributor to effectiveness in campaigns.
9. The Keystone campaign was won on Indigenous Rights, not climate.
10. Storytelling tours in the UK and elsewhere, as well as a focus on divestment, led to victories (RBC divestment).
11. Local organizing needs to be prioritized.
12. Oil and gas sectors have a history of neglect of Indigenous communities in areas such as FPIC, notice of spills, and non-effective clean ups

Wednesday afternoon started out with Bineshi Albert leading a "Key Issues, Challenges, Needs of Your Campaign" session, stating, "People have come a long way. We're all here to work on important issues. In these spaces, we hear people speak, but we don't always get to the meat of the work."

This session placed participants in groups based on a variety of specific issue participants were involved in: KXL Pipeline, Trans Mountain Pipeline, Line 3 Pipeline, source and downstream issues, and refineries. Each group discussed the following questions: What are the key issues

and challenges for your issue in your area?; What are the needs of your campaign?; What are some of the victories? Each group then shared their discussion with the larger group. This activity prompted collective work reflections, including:

- Overall, the groups found common ground within their campaigns and community struggles in areas such as criminalization of activist struggles, community and Nation/Tribal issues, communication and education, food security, government and policy, corporate injustice and lack of accountability.
- Groups also had common themes on the needs of their campaigns, such as communications, funding, capacity, participation, better relationship building, coordination, strategy, and messaging.
- In the area of victories there were commonalities, such as the stopping of projects, the weakening of corporate power, changes in laws and regulations, momentum in building movements, strengthening community power, and in the creation of alternative energy projects.

Our needs are the same, no matter what campaigns we are working on.

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger

Benishi ended the session by asking participants to reflect on “what does this mean for our collective work?”

The next activity was a mapping exercise led by Eriel Tchekwie Deranger. The purpose of this activity was to allow participants to get out of the silos of their work, get to know one another, and build community. Each participant was to place a yellow pin on a map indicating where they live and to place a sticky note to write down the name of their community, their name, and their key issue. Once this was done Eriel Tchekwie Deranger brought attention to the vast areas represented on the map and stated the following:

Look how far we've all come from, just to be here...Look at how far spread out we are. To support each other's work, it's going to take knowing more than your email... We can't do this in isolation. We have to have that deeper understanding of where we're all coming from. And it's going to take relationships...We know more about ENGOs and their strategy than we do as our brothers and sisters.

Participants shared their reflections at the end of this session. One participant spoke about her point on the map and stated the following:

We are suffering from extreme colonization...We're averaging a death a week. Our babies are being born with asthma. People no longer have a place to be...There is apathy because people no longer have an economic base. No one wants to invest where the industry has left such destruction.



Another participant spoke about their point on the map and shared the following:

We're a very isolated community...we're economic hostages in our homelands, hostages to industry. Indigenous people now depend on these industries and yet we are fighting them...Gold mines across our territories. Gold mines build Pow Wow grounds, funds scholarships, youth events...I am so happy to be here, in a place where we're all talking about this...all doing our best with what we have.

A second round of speed dating occurred after the mapping exercise and a closing circle wrapped up the day.

Thursday, August 8, 2019

The day began with a recap and highlights of the previous day's activities.

The first session of the day was on "Movement Building and Movement Building in our History." This session was led by Bineshi Albert and was based on Bineshi's definition of a movement: "focused and sustained work of a broad base of people across nations, a country, globally, focused work on a particular social, environmental, political issue."

Next, movement building was explained and outlined as follows:

1. the issue is clear
2. a broad base of people can relate to it and at different levels, where they are at - diversity of support and tactics
3. reaches past your immediate community and connects with others
4. decentralized

Bineshi then gave examples of a variety of Indigenous movements throughout the years. Participants also shared movements they were involved in or knew about.

A crowd-sourced list of historical Indigenous-led movements emerged from this activity:

Indigenous Movements in History

Tecumseh's War – land reclamation that led to war against the government. This movement tried to engage other

tribal communities.

Red Stick Rebellion - Southeastern United States. A confederacy to fight against the U.S. Government was created.

Iroquois Confederacy – involved a governmental relationship model, encompassed a lot of issues, lifted up Indigenous rights, and led to the creation of Tribal passports.

Battle of Little Bighorn – this was not just something random. The battle was supported by a movement-building process. It entailed relationship building with different Bands/Tribes and the putting aside of Tribal differences.

Pueblo Revolt – planning for this revolt happened over a ten-year period.

Inter-tribal, Native Pride Renaissance – In the U.S. there were relocation programs to take people from Tribal communities to cities to form a workforce. As a result, those who now lived in the cities came together to build Indigenous movements there.

Friendship Centre Movements – In Canada, many Indigenous Peoples relocated to cities. Survival in the cities was often daunting. The Friendship Centre Movement came into being in order to address the needs of Indigenous Peoples living in cities. Winnipeg had the first Friendship Centre in Canada.

Red Power Movement - Occurred in the 1950s and spurred organizations like AIM and Women of All Red Nations.

AIM – 60s, 70s, and 80s

Ghost Dance Movement - initiated after forced removal of Indigenous Peoples in the U.S. in 1887 and led to the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. In 1973 this event spurred the location and passion for the Wounded Knee Occupation.

Environmental Justice Movement - 1980s – 1990s. Many groups rose during this time and IEN was formed in 1990 as part of this movement.

Idle No More - a response to policy in Canada in 2012, which spread to the U.S. and to the Global South using direct action with flash mobs, blockades, and dancing in the streets.

Oka – in 1990 a golf course was proposed on a Haudenosaunee cemetery. This proposal was blocked by warriors who protected the land where their ancestors were buried. Troops were deployed to get Haudenosaunee warriors off the land and an Indigenous movement emerged across Canada to support the Haudenosaunee warriors. Post Oka there was an uprising of Indigenous youth and Peoples who realized they could stand up, and did so within community work, land rights issues, and rights of Indigenous and Urban Indigenous Peoples.

Standing Rock - a movement to protect land from pipelines. Social media reached people from far and wide. People then came to support the movement from all over Turtle Island, Central and South America and New Zealand.

United Native Americans Movement – led the occupation of Alcatraz from November 1969 – June 11, 1971. There are gatherings still held there on the anniversary of the initial occupation.

Zapatista Movement – focuses on regaining land and sovereignty. The organization of this movement is very disciplined, and very decentralized. This movement is large and has affected people worldwide, as it presents models of movement building and sovereignty. People worldwide have learned from this movement and it has benefited many nations.

National Indian Youth Council - started by Herbert Blatchford in Albuquerque. It was modeled and inspired by AIM.

Chemical Dependency Movement – Minnesota-based movement for sobriety and a revitalization of traditional Indigenous ways: Sun Dancing, Pipe ceremonies, and

traditional spirituality.

MMIW movement - a movement to bring forth the large numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous girls and women in Canada. This movement is also happening in the U.S. This movement needs to be revitalized with a land-body sovereignty focus. The movement was politicized and needs to come back to a community grassroots level. A government-led National Inquiry did not meet the needs of communities. However, the Inquiry did raise the issue of genocide in Canada.

Movement for Indigenous Led Education - Communities started their own schools. The students were taught by community members, Indigenous language was at the forefront, students stopped saying the Pledge of Allegiance, and started singing traditional Indigenous songs. As a result of this movement, Indigenous histories are being included in mainstream public and post-secondary education.

Water Keepers Movement - helped launch Indigenous water-monitoring programs.

Dene Gatherings - Initiated in 2002. This brought together Dene Peoples from across Dene territories. It brought pride and unity to the forefront. As one participant stated, "It was the first time I heard our own Dene drum, our own language."

Movement to Address Indigenous Representation in Media – this movement brought about state-wide bans on Native mascots and created Indigenous Peoples' Day to replace Columbus Day.

Indian Education Movement – a movement that traverses several Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. It allows for sharing and for Indigenous Peoples to build power through working together across communities. In this movement Indigenous Peoples educate and portray their true history from their own perspective. It is a broader movement of identity within education.

Movement for Genocide Acknowledgement - *this movement is in Manitoba. It is a movement for an admission of genocide in the Forks area there.*

In Manitoba we have what is called the Forks. For many generations we met there; the old people used to speak 6-9 languages. Back home at the Forks where we met for thousands of years, they opened a huge monstrous glass building on top of our old burial grounds and put a parking lot over our old traditional grounds. The museum claims they will never talk about genocide.

Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Property Rights – a movement to counter cultural appropriation of such things as Indigenous designs, images, music, and any other form of cultural appropriation.

Using Art to Support the Youth Movement - this movement was started by Arthur Manuel in the 1990s. It is a movement to tell Indigenous stories and inspire youth through theatre, film, visual art and music.

This activity painted a broad picture of Indigenous movements across colonial borders and the relationships needed to sustain these movements. Participants left this session with some of the following ideas and thoughts:

- There is not one organization that “leads a movement.”
- “One thing complicated about movements is that not one organization can control the direction of the movement... Movements create a new normal, and gives opportunities for grassroots organizations to respond and figure out how to respond” – Judith La Blanc
- When we organize, we have to be conscious of with whom we are forming movements.
- Crisis can lead to movement building - examples are Standing Rock, Idle No More, and Oka.
- *Oka crisis was a huge movement builder, we basically shut down Canada in the Haudenosaunee territory* - Melina Laboucan-Massimo
- As we work in our communities and create movement building, we need to think about the following:
 1. How can I talk about this in a way that will be relevant to other people?



2. How can I give people options to support in different ways?
3. How can I network with other groups/communities engaged in the same issue?
4. How do we build movements through person-to-person and peer-to-peer connection and still create momentum? What is the wildfire that can carry the issue forward?
5. How do we use technology to build relationships and at the same time not become dependent on it to facilitate these relationships?

After participating in the movement building session, Melina Laboucan-Massismo and Sarah Sunshine Manning led a three-way brainstorm session to engage participants in focusing on tools and strategies needed to build a sustainable, powerful, collaborative tar sands movement. This exercise created a focus on themes that can and will assist in working towards shutting tar sands down at the source: community support and base building; just transition; and amplifying voices through direct action.

The three-way brainstorm involved placing participants into four groups. Each group brainstormed a list of seven to ten tangible and effective ways that would assist "building this bad ass, sustainable, powerful movement - collaborative tar sand movement." Next, the completed list was passed on to the group to the left of them. The next group was to pare down the first list by choosing four items on the first list. The lists were then shared with the larger group, along with a discussion on how priorities were set. The four groups had many similarities and included concepts, such as the following:

- avoidance of pan-Indigeneity;
- Ceremony integrated into every aspect of what we do;
- decolonizing Ceremony;
- education;
- food sovereignty;
- healing spaces
- Indigenous control of Indigenous Knowledge;
- Just Transition;
- legal strategies;
- movement protocols;

- relationship building;
- respect for diversity of tactics;
- security culture;
- strategic planning;
- traditional governance;
- transformative justice; and
- unifying narrative.

Participants felt this exercise was challenging, but it helped them "be clear about what we were saying, knowing it's [the list of their thoughts] going to go elsewhere."

In the afternoon, participants were introduced to a session on Power Mapping by Judith LeBlanc and Robert Chanate. This session allowed participants to build relationships and provided a "good collective picture of who they are working with and what their roles are."

Power mapping was introduced as a tool to help participants think about "how to be a good relative" by mapping relationships.

We need to understand each organization's role and its relationship with grassroots and with leadership...Power mapping helps build a 'good collective picture of who we are working with and what their roles are,' Power mapping is a common practice in settler organizing circles, but in this session the focus is on Indigenous approaches to power mapping.

Participants were asked to form groups organized by the issue they put most of their energy into, resulting in groups focused on KXL, Line 3, source extraction, and refineries.

Once participants were in their respective groups, the activity was explained:

The exercise is based on 2 frameworks:

- One is a map of 3 concentric circles, describing the relationships that exist between organizations. Which groups are at the core, which are on the periphery and which are on the wish list-who you want to work more closely with.
- The second framework is based on 5 roles that are needed in a movement: Service, Resist, Create, Repair, and Govern. This role map helps see and



describe the different roles being played.

The groups formed and were given an hour for the power mapping activity. This consisted of placing sticky notes in the appropriate frameworks and identifying who holds power to help; who is already helping; and whom do we wish to engage in our issue and where each of these individuals would belong to within service, resist, repair, govern, and create. They then placed sticky notes on the three concentric circles that represented rings of influence (made up of a core, middle, and periphery circle). Upon completion of the activity two people from each group were to give a “Gallery Walk” presentation explaining their choices and rationale. A summary of the main themes of the Gallery Walk presentations is found below:

- Creation of a narrative with arts and culture;
- Integration of warrior societies in urban communities;
- Line 3 folks are learning from KXL folks; and
- Relationship building with other agencies.

The activity was concluded with an exercise to exemplify the importance of working together. Bineshi Albert had participants of all abilities place themselves on a tarp. The object was for everyone to work together to flip the tarp over without stepping off the tarp.

We are as a community, as a movement community, building relationships, we are going to work together to flip the tarp over, without stepping off of it.

Participants had to cooperate to accomplish the exercise. They had to communicate and it could not be done individually. At its conclusion, participants had a clear understanding of the importance of not working in silos and how everyone is important and interconnected within movement building.

On Thursday evening participants took part in a Feast and an honouring ceremony for Brian Grandbois, a long-time Mother Earth Protector who left to the Spirit World.

We had a wonderful feast – I love the lake trout, it’s the number one fish ever – I really want to acknowledge all the young men who honoured Brian with a Dene Honour Song and the men and women who came up to speak in honour of Brian last night.

Clayton Thomas-Mueller

Friday, August 9, 2019

The day began with a recap of the previous days’ highlights and then moved on to a “Cultural Practices and Indigenous Knowledge Demonstration” by Robert Grandjambe Jr., a local Cold Lake Denesuline First Nation member. This



entailed a demonstration on traditional protocols and teachings for beaver hunting and processing, and the overall importance of maintaining and protecting these practices and traditions.

In Robert Grandjambe's presentation he explained that after inspecting the beaver as he processed it, a picture of the beaver's life and death - as well as the beaver's health and suitability for consumption - emerges. The skill he possessed was a result of the transmission of knowledge, earned over generations, and continuous practice on the land.

A circle check-in followed Robert's presentation, where participants once again introduced themselves and where they came from.

In the afternoon the documentary, *In Danger - A Call to Save Wood Buffalo National Park* was shown. This documentary outlined the Mikisew Cree First Nation's efforts for the preservation of Wood Buffalo Park.

Following the documentary, Melina Laboucan-Massimo led a Just Transition session. In this session Melina painted a picture of her community, her life within her community, and the work she has been involved in to help her community and other communities to transition away from a reliance on fossil fuels.

When I talk about just transition...I talk about transitioning our community. When I went to city for the first time...I saw they had drinking water, libraries, swimming pools. I saw the inequity that exists between rural to urban... all the money extracted from Lubicon community...none of it comes back...So much inequity.
Melina Laboucan-Massimo

Melina put Just Transition into action by bringing solar power to her community.

*I wanted to put up solar...in the last place you'd see solar - the tar sands...so, I said, f**k it I am going to put solar to power the health center, with no government funding, no corporate funding...community owned and run. We trained young people...we worked with people with hard skills, labourers...*

The link to the Sacred Earth Solar Project was shared with participants and can be found here: <https://sacredearth.solar/>

During the activity Melina also shared trailers of the TV show she has been hosting: [Power to the People](#). The show entails travel to 26 Indigenous communities across Turtle Island where communities are transitioning from fossil fuels and relying on alternative energy. In total, there are 23,000 Indigenous small-scale projects and 160 large-scale projects across Canada, spanning Coast Salish to Mi'kmaq territory. These alternative energy transitions are Indigenous led.

For too long there were so-called experts coming in and imposing 'solutions'... this is about our own people implementing our own projects in our own communities... We are our own experts. We've lived sustainably on the land since time immemorial.
Melina Laboucan-Massimo

Melina ended her presentation with a short video that *Power to the People*, in conjunction with the Tiny House Warriors, had just released about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) and man camps.

As a follow up to Melina's presentation, Andrew Bentley from NDN Collective presented on another inspiring Just Transition project - the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation - located in the Porcupine District of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

It's grassroots, a bunch of initiatives...which grew out of youth revitalizing culture...an ecosystem of opportunity - food sovereignty, housing, workforce development, language development...worker-owner hubs, leadership training...Educating our youth. It started with 10 acres... with 21 single family homes, a community center... a net zero community. We're wrapping up this phase. The next phase will involve a youth shelter and a grocery store... We're developing solutions to address many of the issues our people are facing.

Before moving on to the next activity and to keep the momentum and energy up, Nigel Henri Roinson led a chant – Land Back! Land Back!

The next activity engaged newly energized participants in a "Story-based Strategy" session led by Clayton Thomas-Mueller and Jade Begay. This session introduced participants to the importance of oral tradition and storytelling for Indigenous Peoples and movement building.

Story-based strategy is an important tool for organizers. Direct action stories are powerful and reach the heart of the listeners.

One thing we're fighting beside exploitation and extraction is this invisibility of who we are... sometimes people don't even know that we exist...this story telling work is done to align our purpose with our message... having strong clear messengers is important...having a strong narrative is important.

Jade Begay

A principle of environmental justice is that our people speak for themselves. One thing in the environmental movement...[there is] colonialism in story telling... extractive story telling. We are trying to do storytelling that is not extractive. To share our world views as Indigenous people with the entire world. This last decade, we see this global uprising of the power of Native story... Citizen journalism at Standing Rock and Idle No More... telling stories through video; people telling their own stories...we didn't need corporate media or famous white people. We were our own validators...Our voices translate across race and gender.

Clayton Thomas-Mueller

Clayton let participants know that this workshop was about sharing some frameworks created by the Center for Story-based Strategy. It was a place for participants to share stories they heard that inspired them to take action, and to then examine how to draw from elements of a story so they could better develop their stories and dissect opponents' stories/narratives.

First, the building block elements for the creation of a powerful story were introduced to the participants:

1. **Conflict** - what defines the drama?
2. **Characters** - your message is only as strong as the person delivering it. Spokespersons need training. We often skip over this skill because we are so focused on the tactics. Communications and media are often the last thing to come together... This is key and is just as important as other elements of organizing. Take Melina's video... what are the characters you saw? The Chief...the hero... leaders, and matriarchs. We didn't see too much of the opposition. That's strategic. Do we want to give our opponents airtime?...The hero, enemy, the victim. How are we lifting ourselves out of the victim narrative to the hero one?
3. **Images** - Make the story tangible. Instagram is an

important storytelling tool because images are so powerful. On our list of priorities... we capture images... to change hearts and minds... invest in your media people, your communications people. At the end of the day the opposition puts billions in their marketing and branding.

4. **Foreshadowing** - This is the way a story provides hints for the outcome. If you're fighting fracking... think about the narrative. It's important to not put it all out at once. How does the strategy escalate? Little steps with actions, build capacity... willingness to take action... foreshadowing.... drop hints.... And then release the campaign... build the intrigue, the tension...then drop the story.
5. **Underlying assumptions** – This is asking ourselves: is this clear? Are we assuming too much? These are the unstated things in our story that need to be accepted in order to believe the story. For example, in *No Tar Sands*, what do we need you to believe - you don't need oil? There are other ways to get energy? Do you even know what the tar sands are?...These kinds of questions help us boil down the message and make sure it leads people to believe in no tar sands.

Next, participants were introduced to the seven (7) key elements of story based strategies:

1. **Cornerstones of the strategy**
 - *Goals* - what's the change you are trying to accomplish?
 - *Audience* - who do want to reach?
 - *Target* - who is the decision maker that can make this desired change happen? Your opposition is often a target.
 - *Constituency* - allies, communities, our people
2. **Break down the opposition's story into its components**

Use the five building block elements of story to do so. Use them to show possibility. We are not the media and don't have to give both sides. Our opponents' stories are often just the status quo. We are going against the status quo, so we need

to break down their stories and be prepared to do this at all times.

3. **Put your audience in the front row**

The answer is never the general public...imagine the audience in detail...what are their dreams, fears, hopes, lives? Here in Canada, 80% of people are white presenting people. We have to understand that demographic...An 80% white audience is going to have some biases. See the world through the eyes and hearts of your audiences. Because of this you need to start with how you're perceived and not with your intentions (how most people start).

4. **Crafting the story**

Integrate the five building block elements of storytelling within the body of your work.

5. **Choose where to intervene**

This is where you change the narrative and examine the following before you proceed:

- Places of production: impacting profits, leveraging power
- Place of consumption: malls, Walmart, flashmobs
- Point of construction: stopping the bad (the mine, the pipeline)
- Point of decision: town halls, City Councils

6. **Choose how to intervene**

Standing Rock...a shared moment to teach the world that water is life. Action logic is so important. Does what you are doing or saying make sense; are people going to understand? Make sure there is a relationship between story and place of intervention. Look for cracks in the opposition's story. For example, they always promote jobs and foreshadow (something people want). What can you do to foreshadow benefits?

7. **Frames**

Framing the issues: make sure to reframe the

common story; make sure your story is not reinforcing the opponent's frame. Is what you are telling or writing accessible to the audience, memorable, and does it have an emotional impact? Make sure your story and message are simple and short; get to the core and essence of the issue and always keep it succinct. Make sure to change the narrative (story). Just telling a new story isn't enough. Show your audience, just don't tell them. Remember to paint a picture with your words.

After learning about building blocks and elements of storytelling participants formed small groups where they discussed elements of the story of their opponents and the groups they represented. They were also reminded to include assumptions in the activity they did. Upon completion of the activity the groups shared their work with the larger group.

The activity ended with Jade reminding participants that "these companies have huge [marketing] departments. We can't let this kind of work fall to the wayside. We need to invest in storytelling. It's central to our work here." She encouraged people to check out the Center for Story-based Strategy (<https://www.storybasedstrategy.org/>) to learn more.

Saturday, August 10, 2019

The day began with a prayer from one of the youth, Victoria Redsun, a member of Strawberry Heart Protectors. This was followed by Clayton Thomas-Mueller setting the tone for the final day, where there would be a focus on learnings, strategies and actions so that everyone could and would leave *Bringing Our Voices Together* equipped with plans for moving forward.

Due to the large tasks at hand for the day, Bineshi Albert led a session for participants to ground themselves.

What we are facing is overwhelming and even exhausting. We want to acknowledge that. We know this work is tiring. This work can sometimes be stressful to our families. We want to acknowledge that despite the challenges, the long hours, forgetting to eat in the day sometimes, that you show up. That you are here. That you are carrying your communities with you, you are carrying your grandmothers with you, you are carrying your little brothers with you.... We've come here to connect with

others and to figure out what we need to do together, collectively.
Bineshi Albert

The exercise consisted of people grounding themselves to their surroundings and to the lands they were on.

We've come here to connect with others. To think about what we need to do together. Plant your feet on the floor. Sit tall, shoulders loose. Feel it form the earth. Feel it. We're all connected to our homes and people, but we can also be connected to places we travel to. These places too can fill us with the energy we need. Find that moment, feel what Mother Earth feels like...find a way to feel connected, wherever you are.

Following the grounding exercise, Harmony Lambert engaged people in a few icebreakers to lighten the mood and ready people for the overwhelming tasks of the day in a good way.

The first session was a fishbowl activity led by Bineshi Albert and involving the participation of Eriel Tchewkie Deranger, Melina Laboucan-Massimo, Tom Goldtooth, and Clayton Thomas-Mueller. They had a discussion among themselves about the history of the tar sands strategy over a 10-15-year time frame. They shared their thoughts on its progress, strategies, and effectiveness. During and after the discussion, Bineshi brought up some points for the audience to ponder. This exercise assisted participants in thinking about the development of strategies as the day moved forward.

The discussion started with explaining a graphic that came to be the previous night (featured on the cover of this report) and how it exemplified the fight.

"The graphic reminds us that the fight is at the source and the heart of the beast must be attacked."

This gathering was an invitation gathering, checking in with community organizers and saying come help us figure this out. We are asked to be here, and so we came.

When I think about the context of the monster, what is being asked from the tar sands communities is to not give up the fight battling the heads, but the front line organizing that is happening (at source) is a close battle fist fighting at the heart, but we need our long battle fight – our spears and arrows—to support the hand-to-hand



combat battle and a long-range battle... we need to think about how we are adding to the long range battle... how can we lift up and say yes we are fighting the pipeline, but that we must also fight the source - we know the people, we've shared food with them, and ceremony, we've danced with them, and they need ... collective solidarity.
 Bineshi Albert

After the completion of the fishbowl activity, Sarah Sunshine Manning broke participants into breakout groups. Each group was to develop a strategy to work with each other and their communities to efficiently deal with tar sands resistance, with an emphasis on stopping it at the source, and share their strategy with the whole group.

I'm so happy to be here with organizers...what privilege to witness that conversation...it's time to start taking what we learned from these folks who've been doing this for a long time and apply that learning... this great metaphor of the monster we've been fighting, it was really grounding to find where those tentacles reach...as Indigenous folks we talk about interdependence and yet we talk in silos...because we understand and pan out we see a bigger perspective. In this next activity we are going to identify activities that can stop the heart... this morning we got into pairs. Start with that pairing and then find another pair and make a group of four. In that group of four...to take what you've learned and identify targets and opportunities to destabilize the heart...this entire gathering is a tar sands gathering...
 Sarah Sunshine Manning

Report back from the groups emphasized some of the

following strategies:

Mapping - a way of pointing out Indigenous presence on the land. As Tom Goldtooth said, "It lifts up that we are living people. We are in a system that doesn't want to recognize us as living people."

Education - people need to learn more about "the gas tank of America" (the tar sands).

Communications - it is important to have a shared narrative of "stop it at the source" and to disseminate this message strategically. At the same time, it is important to remember that although there is a common and unified message, there is a diversity in tactics, and "more than one way to get to the solution."

Social Media - important to use this strategically and look for secure ways to communicate.

Divestment - important to identify a common target in divestment.

Ceremony - very important in all that we do. Ceremony needs to come first. We need to connect with all our relations and heal the disconnect that colonization brought with it.

We have to put prayer first and ceremonies, we had Pipe Ceremony here and Sweatlodge...what we are up against is a very negative, powerful spirit...we live in a time where we are separated, a time where the people – even our own

people - are eating their own spirit. It is a very powerful monster that we are up against. This is the time we live in, no dinosaurs, the monsters went under the earth...the thunder beings 'without thunder there is no life on earth,' this thunder being has a purpose, it shoots down that bad energy, it chases it way back down, when it flaps its wing it scares it... the reason I am using this analogy is that when we use the drum we have protection medicine. We have medicines, red ochre, to protect you in your struggles. Bringing Our Voices Together participant

One of the most moving statements at the end of this activity was made by a participant who lived in a tar sands impacted community who reminded everyone "the tar sands weren't always the tar sands, they were somebody's home." This was followed by a statement from a person from a tar sands area, "Tar sands is where I come from. Tar sands is a derogatory word. [But] that area is my sacred land...That's my homeland territory you're talking about."

Kanahus Manuel and her relatives from Secwepemc Territory gave a special presentation during the lunch hour about the Tiny House Warrior Movement.

Before the afternoon sessions started a group of youth presented impromptu improv comedy. Laughter is good medicine and survival for Indigenous Peoples worldwide. This was a welcomed surprise.

Judith LaBlanc facilitated the final afternoon session on framing strategy. This session brought together all that one learned and took part in during the *Bringing Our Voices Together* gathering. It gave participants tools to think about, create, and develop a plan for systems change to transition away from fossil fuels and to reframe current narratives.

...We need to hear what you have to say about building movements... because we are so deep into the work in our communities, we'd lost focus on the overall strategy. Fishbowl helped us review the blood, sweat, and tears... of breaking down systemic racism in the ENGOs. And that every victory that we've had has been when we continue to argue the narrative of the tar sands and the pipelines... the connection between them... this exercise is to stay focused. This afternoon we're talking systems change that's related to dependency on fossil fuel...so we have to connect it to what is happening at the tar sands and build solidarity with the struggles there. There is lots of discussion about pipelines and we need to honour all the

work that has been going on all over Canada that has been driving the narrative, doing the work... In the U.S. someone said, maybe pipeline fights haven't worked... but no, there is a new norm now...when a pipeline is proposed, people rise up and resist. Truth is that this is a new norm. Before, pipelines would be built... but now people start to circle up... Connect the KXL to the tar sands... Frankly we're talking about systems change. After Standing Rock, when we all went home, people have been looking at how to have their own Standing Rock... we need to help people think about system change.

Harmony Lambert facilitated the exercise part of the session. It was built around the morning sessions target of stopping it at the source and utilization of the five themes that emerged in the fishbowl activity:

1. Community support and base building
2. Just Transition
3. Amplifying voices through direct action
4. Education
5. Communication

Participants chose one of the five themes they wanted to focus on and had an hour to apply their theme to their community targets as they developed an eighteen month action plan. While doing so, they were to focus on how their theme could leverage collective power that could and would destabilize the expansion of the tar sands. Once the hour for planning was up, each group reported back to the larger group.

Charted below is a summary of the report back from each group.

Education Group	<p>What do we want people to know? What the tar sands is, what it does. Who is our main audience? Is it the public? The tar sands people? How are we going to teach them? – 18 month plan- Speaker tour, pitching stories to media, etc.. 4-6 month plan -Create a curriculum or tool kits. Website of resources, Statement of principle, theory of change...speaking tour, partnering with allies. 2020. Funding... make sure we have enough funding...Webinars. How to support escalation, evaluations. Pre-assessment tools. Reiterate what we learned... oral tradition, we pass down the stories. We pass on information we know. We are not here alone. We want youth to know so they can be present.</p>
Direct Action Group	<p>We've divided our plan into 6-month increments with a total of 50 actions. For example: leadership development and training, helping people learn how to do direct action themselves; Targeting investor; Toronto bank action in fall 2019; Making public placards; using social media; using drones; tree sits, rail yards; Blockades; Land-based language teachings; Get our people to the tar sand -toxic tour, round dance, block stuff in Edmonton, target man camps; Healing walk of 2020. "Actions, that people can mobilize around. Especially in small groups or isolation".</p> <p>"Targets – production, transport, refineries, terminals, pipeline route. These are all places to intervene. Use direct action locally and regionally. Not necessarily at the source... what can we do in our communities to help people here [in tar sands region]?"</p> <p>The necessity of traditional ecological knowledge... involve youth... and assist people in understanding their connection to land and ecosystems...without that it's hard to get people out.</p>
Just Transition Group	<p>8 actions for the 8 Sacred Fires</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A health report for workers. A tar sands health report. 2. Aboriginal wear - promote all indigenous t-shirts. Indigenous messages on hemp... a just transitional fabric...tar sands messaging on them 3. Doing resistance and knowledge camps... put the youth in with the Elders, reconnecting. 4. Tar sand resistant hour/day/time. Taking time out of your day to shut off electricity, for hours or a day and using that time that you're not on the grid... going out and picking medicine, holding a Feast, learning from an Elder... unplug....and restore those relations. Messaging: We are doing this because tar sands are the gas tank of America... in solidarity with tar sands impacted communities. 5. Re-establishing old trade routes. "We had ways to get from here to here... re-establishing those in our communities to help become more self-sufficient. 6. Indigenous Climate Change Crisis Database -to gather information on what climate changes are happening in different communities... connecting that to tar sands. 7. Tribal legislation as an act of sovereignty. To not have tar sands infrastructure come through territory.

<p>Communications Team and Grassroots Storytelling</p>	<p>Actions: Education website; YouTube; podcast; mobile radio; Tar sand media network; Indigenous-led media- "having control over our narrative"; Speaker tour; going to Pow Wows; A video that pulls all the narratives together. Media that is amplifying cosmovision... prophecy. Incorporating just transitions into messaging...It is important to pay speakers fairly.</p> <p>Messengers: Pow Wow super stars?</p> <p>Audience: Indigenous folks who are not yet engaged... intersectional outreach.</p> <p>Media partners: Netflix? APTN in Canada, POV in US.</p> <p>Red Rising, printed resources.</p> <p>"We have all these ideas. But would need someone to coordinate all this... So, we need funding, and an advisory committee to hold this media network accountable."</p> <p>"The big idea is a Tar Sand Media Network for anyone who identifies with story telling.</p>
<p>Base Building/Community Organizing</p>	<p>Principles: intention with healing, ceremony, meeting people where they are at.</p> <p>Actions: Educational sheets; surveys; webinars; food summit, film nights, and festivals, Tour in tar sand communities Winter 2020; street ceremonies in Fall 2019. Healing Walk in summer 2020. Tech building; Apps. Network for oil workers; Elders retreat; culture camps; Good Medicine Camp; Talking Circles; finding resources for communities that is without strings. Indigenous organized Town Halls that do not talk at people. Socials; activities; dances, solidarity dance,, fun runs; and webinars for international discussions.</p>

Upon completion of this activity Harmony asked people to post their ideas for the next eighteen months on the timeline that was constructed at the beginning of the gathering.



Once the *Bringing Our Voices Together* activities and sessions were complete, a moving closing wrapped up the gathering. Representatives from ICA, IEN, and NDN Collective made closing remarks.

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger from Indigenous Climate Action let participants know that this gathering was just the beginning for future innovative and exciting work. She mentioned that there is a wish for the rebirth of the Tar Sands Healing Walk, and perhaps that would be the next large event. She also said there was lots of work ahead of everyone, but all each person had to do was use the skills they already work with along with the new tools and strategies acquired at the gathering. She asked people to register their contact information, if they wanted to receive an in-depth report.

We can commit to host a call in three months time (hosted by NDN Collective, ICA, and IEN) to talk about potential next steps and other outcomes: direct actions, tar sands Healing Walks, tar sands media network... This is a big commitment from a lot of us... it's going to require you all showing up. By continuing this work, we can also support your work. The Healing Walk could be not only a healing walk, but a follow-up meeting to this one.

Bineshi Albert from Indigenous Environmental Network mentioned that continued work in spaces like *Bringing Our Voices Together* is a must.

These are the places we can plan so that we're not working in isolation, spinning our wheels, getting exhausted. We're here putting our minds together for creating that world we want for our children... We need to create more opportunities to strategize together.

Alberta Eagle from NDN Collective thanked the Cold Lake Denesuline First Nation for having them as guests on their land and stated, "It has been such a learning experience, and an honour to be in the presence of people on the front line... We are here to help in any way that we can."

Andrew Bently of NDN Collective added that it was an honour to participate and to learn more about the tar sands. "NDN Collective, we're building and promoting Indigenous power... we're seeing here that our voices are not being silent. Our voices can be very powerful, thanks for inviting us in."

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger from Indigenous Climate Action thanked the cooks and volunteers who were an essential part of the gathering.

Tom Goldtooth from Indigenous Environmental Network brought the gathering to a close in a traditional way. He passed out gifts, filled the Pipe for the closing Pipe Ceremony, and sang a song to honor the Pipe.

We've been involved in the process of strengthening the sacred hoop. It's very important that we come together... it's been prophesized. Many in here believe in this. Strengthening that sacred hoop of life. Everything in that relationship with Grandmother Earth. This came together – word and actions...

Findings

The *Bringing Our Voices Together* gathering brought people together on the land. This was essential and one of the biggest factors of its success in building relationships; this was reiterated many times.

Ceremony is the heart and soul of Indigenous Peoples and gatherings. This was an integral part of *Bringing Our Voices Together*. Ceremony guided and grounded the gathering and p mentioned their immense appreciation of this. They also said ceremony must be included in everything that everyone does, and must be part of every action and strategy.

Most importantly, *Bringing Our Voices Together* was for Indigenous Peoples by Indigenous Peoples and a gathering that was the first of its kind. This process was long overdue, and the dream of its attainment was discussed for many years. Planning and strategizing needed to feel safe, which is not always possible across cultures and differing worldviews.

It's different to be in these conversations with just Indigenous folks rather than ENGOs in the room - grassroots communities that are building off the spirit of our communities rather than off big money.

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger

The gathering met its overarching goals as outlined below:

1. A space was created for the facilitation of lasting relationships and provision of mutual support amongst diverse movements to stop tar sands projects. This was accomplished through the bringing together of Indigenous Peoples representing many Indigenous Nations and tar sands campaigns from all over Turtle Island. The work done in the sessions also allowed for networking, relationship building, and collaboration.
2. Narratives were streamlined and bold visions for an Indigenous Rights approach to action on tar sands and climate change were built. This was accomplished through the sessions and especially the strategizing and final activity that guided planning for the next eighteen months.
3. Community leaders were given support on how to work effectively to hold Indigenous Nations leadership accountable through hearing stories, strategizing, and examining tools for doing so.
4. A framework for solidarity was built to facilitate conversations to move towards solutions that support an Indigenous just transition for communities, families, and Nations. This framework occurred from the beginning to the end of the gathering.

The gathering provided great opportunities for exchanges, sharing stories, and deep reflection. Time away on the land, and away from the day-to-day organizing created a space to breathe, take a step back, and reflect. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the creation of a space for Indigenous voices encouraged people to speak from the heart with no perceived or unperceived barriers. The fact that settlers were there only as support also created an atmosphere of solidarity, caring, and time for Indigenous Peoples to be fully immersed in the gathering.

A clear need for better communication among one another and within each campaign and community is essential. There was also a demonstrated need for training for participants and for others within their campaigns, Nations, Tribes, and Communities. Additionally, common threads of needs for the campaigns were as follows:

- education;
- outreach;

- funding for gatherings; and
- more financial support.

There is a great disparity in funding for Indigenous campaigns. Additionally, there often exists problems between the work of ENGOs and Indigenous grassroots campaigns. Along with this comes issues that arise from the ENGOs and allyship. Both these issues need to be addressed. As Tom Goldtooth so aptly stated during the panel discussion on the history of the tar sands movement:

Large ENGOs were beginning to get involved with tar sands campaigning but were failing to consult local communities. Where ENGOs were getting millions of dollars of funding to work on these issues, frontlines communities were not. They are well intended allies, but it's something we have to continue to deal with. There were problems and challenge as NGOs parachutes into communities with their own narratives. Clearly, there was a need to address environmental racism, even in philanthropy. To help counter this, IEN did lots of work on developing protocols of respect, and protocols of engagement for building allyships.

A clear need arose around the need to build relationships with allies and other non-Indigenous organizations. However, this relationship building needs a lot of thought and protocols. Some reflections related to this are outlined below:

- "Sometimes we are working with people who are allies, but they work for agencies that are our opponents. Allies on the inside... sometimes we can do things on the outside that can help them."
- "As organizers, we don't have the right to close doors. If we encounter difficult things, if we are representing communities, we can't just close doors, we sometimes have to work with assholes, sometimes when people bring that intensity, that's not coming at you, you need to speak from the base. Don't take things personally."
- "We start from the power within – relationality, reciprocity...have an open heart, open mind, but be discerning ... when a relationship with an organization is not good for the movement.... What we're building is an ecosystem. And every group will have a role and there will be dynamics that are constantly changing... but we go with open ears, open mind, and a discerning analysis."

There was a strong reinforcement of building relationships with each other in the movement community and of creating strong bonds in order to work together in collaboration and unity.

The tour of the tar sands impacted the people who participated in it. As Lisa Tsessaze, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Dene Lands and Resource Management Director and a participant and speaker at the Tar Sands Tour, stated in an interview, "The participants came from all over and it was good to see youth involvement in the tour. The people on the tour didn't have prior knowledge and learned a lot from the tour which gave them a passion to move forward."

Holding the meeting on the lands of a tar sands impacted community was very meaningful. The opportunity to learn about the history of the tar sands movement, along with plenty of time allotted for engagement in discussions about tar sands campaigns elsewhere solidified people's understandings of the varied work each of them was involved in. This further allowed for participants to connect the dots and accentuated the fact that all campaigns led back to the source (tar sands). It reminded people that the area where the tar sands exist are "somebody's home."

A clear need for the Healing Walk came out of the gathering. The tour that some participants took part in was amazing, but a sentiment came forward of a need for more time for people to feel the full effects of the tar and meet more

people from the area. Another sentiment was more people needed to have the experience. The tour and the overall message of *Bringing Our Voices Together* certainly added spark to the idea of re-establishing the Healing Walk.

Participants realized they often work in silos and it isn't necessary to do so; collaboration is more effective, less stressful, and less overwhelming. Along with this is the understanding that colonial borders do not have to divide the movement, nor does separation of communities.

Graphic storytelling, mapping, and the fishbowl activity stood out for many of the participants and were great skills for the gathering to have provided. Many participants want to engage in mapping of their communities. Overall, the gathering equipped participants with skill building as they built relationships and networks. Skill building is a necessity and needs to continue.

Systems change is another essential element that participants felt is important, with a recognition that a just transition from fossil fuel dependence is essential. Much discussion arose in this area and is a key factor for all. The action plan activity accentuated this.

A focus in one session was on victories. This is an important application. An opportunity to examine success assists in motivation to move forward. Participants who had felt hopeless from time to time left the gathering with renewed hope.



Participants left *Bringing Our Voices Together* feeling uplifted, empowered, and less isolated. A common theme that emerged was the needs of participants were much the same and solutions could be found together.

In one of the closing circles, participants were asked to state one word to represent how they were feeling as a result of participation in *Bringing Our Voices Together*. These are some of the words used:

- able to breathe;
- aware;
- connected;
- educated;
- excited;

- grateful;
- honoured;
- inspired;
- peaceful;
- proud;
- united; and
- welcomed.

However, participants didn't leave the gathering without next steps, but instead left with some ideas and commitments to move forward. They left with an understanding of their abilities, strengths, and values. As a member of NDN Collective stated, "Our voices are powerful."

Next Steps/Moving Forward

Bringing Our Voices Together aimed to bring Indigenous Peoples together to network, strategize, and move the tar sands campaign forward with a focus on Indigenous Rights and Nationhood. In so doing, it would be remiss to leave participants with skills and tools but no plans for moving forward. To avoid this, *Bringing Our Voices Together* allowed for forward planning and ended with concrete next steps in which to move forward, with a focus on stopping it at the source.

Bringing Our Voices Together concluded the gathering with a final session on planning for the next eighteen months, leaving participants with plans and processes to enact. They also noted the desire for more gatherings, such as this, to dig deeper and to revisit and deepen strategy, tactics, and organizing. The organizing committee is currently discussing this possibility and would like to continue the momentum established at the gathering in order to "keep the fire lit."

In order to move forward in the immediate future, the following steps will occur:

- a final report will be made available to participants;
- a listserv for participant use will be established;
- a call-in to participants will happen within three months of *Bringing Our Voices Together*; and
- a webinar will be created for participants, along with a potential video on *Bringing Our Voices Together*.

More excitingly, there is a proposal that has been put forward to all for the revival of the Tar Sands Healing Walk. This could be an avenue to bring participants back to the source, allow them to participate in the organization and delivery of this endeavour, and to reconvene and follow up with the work of *Bringing Our Voices Together*.

A survey is in development to allow *Bringing Our Voices Together* participants to reflect on their time at the gathering. The survey will include questions, such as the following:

- What impacted you the most?;
- What did you feel most engaged with or inspired by and want to continue working on?; and
- Are there any pieces/learnings that you brought back to your community that you have implemented in your work at home?

The survey will serve as a guide for the call-in and help to focus on priorities, tactics, and action items that are occurring in participants' communities. The call will also include a look at potential outcomes, such as direct actions, a tar sands healing walk, and tar sands media. Finally, the call will lead to further steps for moving forward collectively.

The next steps are ambitious but doable. The commitment, energy, and passion generated will lead to bigger and better things in the grand scheme of *Bringing Our Voices Together* and it is exciting to see this all unfold.

Conclusion

A new way forward is emerging, and Indigenous Peoples are leading the way.

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger

Bringing Our Voices Together was a one-of-a-kind long overdue gathering of Indigenous Peoples from the four directions of Turtle Island. It superseded colonial borders and territories and it brought together people resisting tar sands from many different Nations/Tribes. It allowed for participants to communicate, network, streamline Indigenous narratives, and most of all, to build a vision for the creation of stronger messaging and actions across movements of tar sands resistance, with a focus on Indigenous Rights, Nationhood, and stopping tar sands and its infrastructures at the source.

Bringing Our Voices Together is the beginning of a collective Indigenous way forward armed with ceremony, culture, empowerment, history, language, skills, and collaborative strategies. Its spirit will continue, grow, and strengthen.

Bringing Our Voices Together is only the beginning.

