Indigenous Climate Action

Youth Needs Assessment

Allan Lissner | Indigenous Climate Action
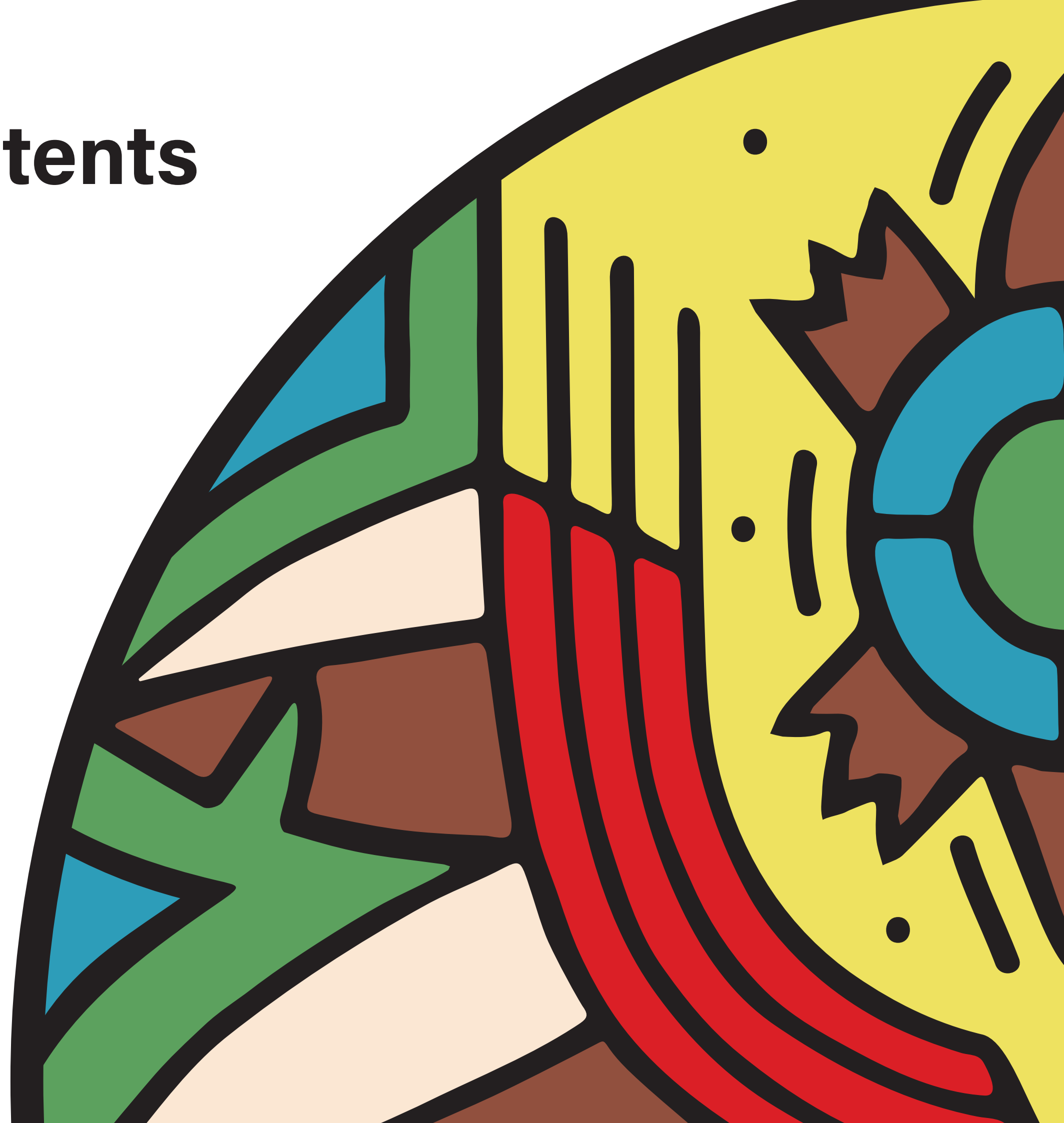
INDIGENOUS CLIMATE ACTION
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INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND CULTURE AS CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

INDIGENOUS CLIMATE ACTION

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Introduction

About
Indigenous Climate Action

Indigenous Climate Action (ICA) is the only Indigenous-led climate justice organization in so-called Canada. We are guided by a diverse National Steering Committee consisting of Indigenous knowledge keepers, water protectors and land defenders from communities and regions across the country. We believe that Indigenous Peoples' rights and knowledge systems are critical to developing solutions to the climate crisis and achieving climate justice.

ICA was formed in 2015 in Amiskwaciwâskahikan, Edmonton, Alberta, Treaty No. 6 by Eriel Deranger, Melina Laboucan-Massimo, Crystal Lameman and Jesse Cardinal. It was created to bridge the gaps between the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples and the policies and strategies being developed to address climate change. Early on, these four Indigenous women could see the shortcomings of the

climate justice movement due to the lack of resourcing to support the involvement of Indigenous knowledge and leadership within strategies for climate solutions.

ICA works on connecting and supporting Indigenous communities to reinforce our place as leaders driving climate change solutions for today and tomorrow. We model our work and organizational structure on systems of free, prior and informed consent and self-determination. Our work is grounded in four main pathways: *Gatherings*, *Resources and Tools*, *Amplifying Voices* and *Supporting Indigenous Sovereignty*. By providing our communities with knowledge and resources, we can inspire a new generation of Indigenous climate leaders building and leading solutions centred around our inherent rights and cultures.

ICA Youth Program

As an Indigenous-led organization, intergenerational relationships involving youth have always been essential to our approach for community engagement and program development. It is ICA's vision that we can inspire and support Indigenous youth to become climate leaders.

Indigenous Peoples have and continue to be disproportionately affected by the legacy of settler colonialism, resource extraction projects, and climate change impacts. At the same time, Indigenous Peoples within the climate justice movement bring

powerful leadership and resilient solutions to the socio-environmental challenges we are facing - this leadership includes Indigenous youth.

The Indigenous population of Canada is relatively young in comparison to the non-Indigenous population, with average ages of 32.1 and 40.9 years, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2018). Given the age demographics of Indigenous communities and existing barriers to youth engagement, the inclusion of Indigenous youth within the climate justice movement is imperative for an equitable, justice-oriented response to climate change.

Goals of Youth Program

Since the emergence of the ICA network we have seen a consistent increase in the interest from young Indigenous people to participate in opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills. At ICA we define youth as anyone between the ages of 18-30. The Youth Needs Assessment is a critical component to our approach in building out our Youth Programming so it is relevant to the needs, experiences and aspirations of Indigenous youth.

Youth Involvement

In 2018/19 we supported over 25 youth delegates from so-called Canada to attend numerous international gatherings, including the Red Tide International Indigenous Climate Action Conference and Youth Summit held on the lands of the Te Whanau-a-Apanui in Aotearoa, New Zealand; the Protecting Mother Earth Conference on the lands of the Nisqually in Washington, DC; and at both our national gatherings: Grassroots Grow Deep and Bringing our Voices Together, in Łue Chok Tué (Cold Lake), Alberta, Treaty 6 territory.

Additionally, in April 2019, ICA Executive Director, Eriel Deranger, was invited to Ecuador by Amazon Frontlines to connect with the Waoroni people and witness their legal challenge against oil concessions in their territories and strengthen an international dialogue between our communities. We were able to include a youth mentor to join her on this trip.

In 2019, ICA was able to hire a part-time youth engagement lead to support Indigenous youth to speak and participate in key events, including the Climate Strikes with Greta Thunberg and COP25, in Madrid, Spain. ICA's youth delegation consisted of four youth from communities impacted from tar sands infrastructure expansion, where they were able to participate in the global conversation for climate solutions. At COP25, ICA's youth delegation were critical in the launch of the #RejectTeck campaign, which ultimately resulted in the cancellation of the largest ever proposed Tar Sands mine in Treaty 8 territory, Northern Alberta.

Youth Needs Assessment

To better understand the needs and challenges affecting youth in our community, ICA conducted a "Youth Needs Assessment" for Indigenous youth currently interested or engaged in advocacy work in the areas of climate justice and Indigenous rights.

The main outcomes for this endeavour were to:
- identify barriers to Indigenous youth engaged in climate and Indigenous rights advocacy work
- establish the knowledge base and skill sets of Indigenous youth engaged in advocacy work
- determine the top priorities for where ICA can educate and empower Indigenous youth

Methodology

This project was completed as "Community-Based Participatory Action Research" (CBPAR) in collaboration with a Master's student at the University of Oxford. CBPAR involves collaborative research, community capacity building, and an education and action-oriented research process (Kindon et al., 2010, Christens et al., 2016). CBPAR offers the opportunity for mutual benefit and calls for researchers to participate in respectful and reciprocal relationships with community collaborators (Wilson, 2008; Tobias et al., 2013).

This study was completed using decolonial research practices. Decoloniality calls for researchers to challenge existing narratives operating under colonial, racist, and patriarchal assumptions (Smith, 2012). Decolonial research practices emphasize the value and legitimacy of Indigenous worldviews and recognize the sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples and lands (Datta, 2018).

To reflect both non-Indigenous and Indigenous methodologies, Two-Eyed Seeing (TES) was used to analyse the focus group results. Using Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall's concept of TES, one learns "to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335). This process respectfully and intentionally finds common themes between different ways of knowing in order to understand and respect elements of both perspectives (Hatcher et al., 2009).

ICA was involved throughout the research process - including the research design, project implementation, data collection, and the analysis of key findings. Throughout this process, the ICA Programs Team and the Master's student met regularly to ensure transparency, healthy relationship building, and meaningful collaboration. The findings of this report were derived from the thematic analysis of 82 online survey responses and a focus group transcript. The final analysis consisted of an ICA team member collaborating with the Master's student to identify, compare and discuss identified key themes using the TES framework.

Indigenous youth at COP25 at an action around #RejectTeck

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Survey Demographics

This report includes findings gathered from an online survey and focus group. The online survey was shared across ICA's broader network and received 82 responses from Indigenous youth aged 18-30. Four Indigenous youth from within ICA's youth network participated in an online focus group to share stories of their motivations, challenges, and resiliency.

Demographics summary of the survey:

- there was relatively equal distribution amongst the age ranges surveyed (18-20, 21-23, 24-26, and 27-30)
- the survey was primarily filled out by female-identifying participants (68%) and individuals with First Nations backgrounds (73%)
- geographically, the majority of survey responses were submitted from Ontario (32%) and British Columbia (28%)
- 76% of respondents currently considered themselves engaged in climate activism in some way. 50% of respondents currently work or volunteer for a climate or Indigenous rights related organization.

All demographic data can be found in Appendix A.

Indigenous youth at a COP25 side event. Left to right: Nigel Henri Robinson, Crystal Martin Lapenskie, Ta'Kaiya Blaney, Kalilah Rampanen, Portia Morin

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Findings

The Youth Needs Assessment is a collection of stories and conversations shared by Indigenous youth – their convictions, strengths, challenges, and resilience.

Key Terms

Energy sovereignty: enables Indigenous communities to create, own, and operate our own energy systems.

Environmental racism: occurs when communities of colour are disproportionately affected by environmental risks and harms - indicating that environmental injustice occurs in a racialized context (Dhillon & Young, 2010; Bullard, 2001).

Food sovereignty: the "right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (La Via Campesina, 2007, p. 1).

Healing Justice: a framework that recognizes the impact of trauma and violence on individuals and communities and names collective processes that can help heal and transform these forces. In a system and society that actively targets Black, Brown and Indigenous bodies, with violence, oppression and terror, it is critical to build movements that fight for and achieve justice for all people. This justice includes healing, well-being, and not only surviving but thriving. Resiliency and healing are strategic - we need everyone in our movements to have access to healing from trauma and violence as it strengthens all of us and all of our movements.

Indigenous rights and sovereignty: refers to the inherent, collective rights held by Indigenous Peoples, including the "right to independence through self-determination regarding governance, land, resources and culture" (Henderson & Bell, 2019).

Intersectionality: the interconnected nature of social identities and categorizations (such as gender, race, and class), as well as how those intersections create interacting systems of advantage or disadvantage (Darity, 2008).

Settler colonialism: a hierarchical system of power that perpetuates the oppression of Indigenous Peoples, while reinforcing mainstream beliefs, values, and modes of governance (Coulthard & Alfred, 2014; Burow et al., 2018). The sovereignty and political economy of settler colonial states is built on the dispossession of Indigenous Nations and the exploitation of our lands (Barker, 2015). For example, early assimilation policies in Canada intended to eliminate Indigenous Peoples' distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities through forced displacement from our lands, cultures, and communities (TRC, 2015; Kuma & Tjepkema, 2019).

Systemic oppression: when a person or policy acts unjustly against an individual (or group) because of affiliations with a specific social identity - such as race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, ability, religion or other social identity categories. Oppression also includes the imposition of belief systems, values, laws, and ways of life on others through peaceful or violent means (Baines, 2011).

Socially-determined: phenomena that are adverse and avoidable conditions caused by the unequal distribution of money, power, resources, or other factors. For example, the social determinants of health may include race, income level, and gender (Hajizadeh et al.; 2018, World Health Organization, 2020; Government of Canada, 2020).

Context Provided by Youth

All participants acknowledged the importance of including the voices of Indigenous youth within the climate movement. However, when asked if they felt that the input of young Indigenous people is incorporated into climate activism, 47% of respondents said "sometimes" and 33% said "rarely/occasionally".

45% of respondents "strongly agree" and 25% of respondents "agree" that their Indigenous backgrounds impacted their ability to participate in climate activism. When asked why they felt Indigenous youth's voices should be included within climate activism, the youth expressed the importance of connection to the land, future generations, and traditional cultural values and practices:

Indigenous youth are not only our future, but are our today. We should all be endeavoring to create spaces at all levels to not only include their voices, but also directly link them to decision-making.

Indigenous voices should be the forefront of the climate movement, as well as the climate [and] nature herself. If we listen to the needs of nature, we observe that human beings cannot afford to put our voices first any longer; Indigenous culture allows us to tune into what the climate needs.

We have inherent rights as Indigenous Peoples, we have the right to practice our ways of life and educating on how to be sustainable, as our ancestors were, is important.

Indigenous youth should not only be included but prioritized in the climate movement due to the distinct relationship with the land and often the awareness in how climate justice correlates with other injustices. (i.e. food sovereignty, migrant justice, MMIWG2S+ [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit folks], etc.).

Indigenous youth are powerful and belong to their homelands. There are no better stewards to advocate for their home than the future leaders of communities.

Participants noted both positive and negative associations between their Indigenous backgrounds and their ability to participate in climate activism. 20% noted both positive and negative impacts, 33% only noted negative impacts, and 29% only noted positive impacts. Positive responses included access to traditional teachings, community support, and connection to the land and waters. Examples of negative responses included racial discrimination, lack of resources and opportunities, mental health impacts, and lack of access to traditional territories and teachings. These sentiments were voiced throughout the Youth Needs Assessment:

I feel blessed and privileged to know our traditional Anishinaabe knowledge systems that are inherently life sustaining. However, I continue to face challenges and barriers as somebody that did not grow up with my culture/disconnected from a lot of my kinship circles/also as somebody living in the urban centre. I don't know the land like all my grandmothers have, I don't know the land like I should and I still struggle to access the land and our traditional skills the way I would like too. The more I learn about our traditional ways, the more it reaffirms what I already know about how Indigenous Sovereignty over our resources, governing systems, education and territories are the best kind of climate solutions.

I think my Indigenous background has both positively and negatively impacted my ability to participate. Positively, being someone who has grown up attending ceremonies and learning my traditional teachings has helped me realize the importance of caring for the environment and supporting other Indigenous Peoples with their problems; having a strong sense of family/community who continue to support my ideas and actions also helps me [actively participate]. There is always balance in life, so negatively, my Indigenous background has barriers like the lack of knowledge, dealing with racism, systematic barriers (which include lack of access to resources, undereducated teachers/curriculum, and lack of funding). As well as being an Indigenous woman (or because I am short - not intimidating, or "young") people don't always listen to me, take me seriously, or believe I am undereducated, which sometimes is a deterrent for me to take action.

My Indigenous background has positively affected my ability to participate through my traditional knowledge, community care and support, and mentorship from other Indigenous activists and organizers. It has negatively affected my participation through lack of career opportunities (especially without formal/Western education in the environmental field) and burnout from having to deal with a multitude of Indigenous issues at once, and constantly.

Being K'atlo'deeche Dene and Métis means my identity is directly connected to my relationship with the land. Our Elders tell us it is [our] duty to be caretakers of the land and the water for future generations. Our people have no conception of ownership, but rather borrowing the land from our children and future generations. The colonial government has fought to disenfranchise us from our land by limiting our use, and limiting our ability to govern ourselves. Extraction capitalism seeks to rob the land of its resources and destroys the land and the water. The colonial structures protect the capitalists, and the capitalists line the pockets of the colonial government to ensure the colonial state uses its police and military to enforce its will on Indigenous Peoples. There is no recourse for us when we try to participate in their colonial court structures, and there is only police and military violence to threaten us when we take direct action to defend the land.

Environmental racism is when communities of colour are disproportionately affected by environmental risks and harms - indicating that environmental injustice occurs in a racialized context (Dhillon & Young, 2010; Bullard, 2001). 52% of respondents stated that they directly experienced environmental racism, while an additional 9% also felt that they indirectly experienced environmental racism through worry and anxiety for their communities. Of those who did not directly experience environmental racism, several indicated that they were urbanized Indigenous youth who were not living on traditional territories or reservations. This is important to note, as environmental racism is more likely to be experienced by Indigenous Peoples living in remote areas and reserves (Dhillon & Young, 2010).

Several participants shared their stories of being impacted by environmental racism:

My territories are home to the largest resource extraction in the world, the tar sands. Disabling my kin to gather our food, berries and medicine. We cannot swim or fish in the water, but those near us who are white, have the privilege to buy their food from global markets, steal pristine land and not experince ongoing genocide.

I have been impacted by environmental racism as the Muskrat Falls Hydroproject is about 40 minutes away from my hometown. This dam is flooding the town where I am from and causing methylmercury poisoning in the water, land, animals, and therefore food chain of myself and other Inuit, First Nations, and Métis people in that region.

People in my area are afraid to go berry picking because of arsenic in the ground from previous projects. Berry picking is an important activity for us, and some of us do not have the means to travel further away from our home in order to do so. Also, transportation infrastructure near our communities is so poor.

Indirect experiences of environmental racism were also expressed by participants:

As an urban Indigenous person, I don't believe I've been physically affected by environmental racism, but I absolutely have been affected mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Even if it doesn't happen to us directly, our home communities, or our relatives and friends that live in other areas are affected.

I do feel impacted by environmental racism I see online and in the news.

I relate it [environmental racism] to colonialism as the governments still haven't given our community our reserve lands, other than one square kilometer, and continue to mine and log our territories with no or little benefit from all these projects. I think that these projects are environmental racism but are also continuation of a slow violence of colonial dispossession.

Motivations for Indigenous Youth Activists

The Youth Needs Assessment found that Indigenous youth are primarily motivated to engage in climate activism because of their connection to the lands and waters, connection to their Indigenous communities and cultures, and their sense of responsibility towards future generations. Other motivations included resisting systemic oppression (such as colonialism and racism), creating equitable and inclusive climate solutions, and supporting Indigenous sovereignty. This sense of conviction was illustrated throughout the survey and focus group:

I want my grandchildren (great-grandchildren and so on) to live on our Mother Earth and be able to go swimming in the lakes or rivers, drink water without it being super expensive, breathe clean air, and freely enjoy the natural beauties of the world. The short answer is: I am motivated to be involved in climate activism because the future generations are depending on me.

I'm taught the Earth is our mother and it is not so much climate activism as taking care of our mother like any person would do.

As Indigenous folks, we are caretakers of this land, and that traditional role also included welcoming all visitors and teaching those who come to live here to respect the land, too. I'm inspired to conserve and protect the land, water and earth because we are all related and connected.

I understood the way my family's displacement and lived experiences of colonial violence come from the colonial culture and intentional conditions of extractive industry and infrastructure. I understand how the wellness and protection of our lands, territories and our place of origin is deeply tied to who we are as people, our languages, knowledge systems, self-determination and kinship circles. I am motivated to defend the land because I know the way our communities become weaker without the land. I know we have an inherited responsibility to protect the land.

There is no way to create sustainable movements without investment and re-distribution of power to young people. Black and Indigenous youth need to front the climate justice movement because we are the ones who will feel the long term impacts of decisions made by both settler colonial violence/resource extraction and Indigenous leadership of older generations. We are a generation that is breaking cycles, fulfilling prophecy, rekindling knowledge and kinship and also picking up what our ancestors have left for us.

The voices of Indigenous youth have a great impact. It is important to remember whose land we live on, and whose voices need to be heard.

The youth have the energy and passion to propel the movement forward. They are the ones who will be affected most in coming years [by] climate change. They bring power, connection and vibrancy to the climate movement.

As an Indigenous youth, there is an inherent connection and [responsibility] to care for the land. In addition to the genocide and oppression our people have faced, there is also an ecological genocide that is ongoing on these lands and our kinships (the waters, the plants, the animals, etc,) are suffering because of it. As a Métis, Two-Spirit youth, my DNA is in the soil and my queerness is mirrored in nature. We look to nature for our lesson[s] and teachings, and this tells me I have a responsibility, a role, to care for our forgotten kinship. It's always been our community, specifically the women and Two-Spirit folk, who have been leading the battle in climate action initiative!

Barriers for Indigenous Youth Activists

Participants expressed that they lack access to resources (predominantly educational and financial resources), lack community support, lack access to opportunities due to remote locations, and suffer from mental and physical health issues. They are also challenged by disregard for Indigenous knowledge within the political landscape and an absence of support from the government and the broader activist community.

These barriers suggest that participation and engagement in activism is "socially-determined." Indigenous youth indicated that their ability to participate in climate activism is linked to adverse socio-economic and political conditions, primarily stemming from systemic forms of oppression, such as racism and settler colonialism.

It often makes me nervous not having sustainable financial support in the work we do. I find myself doing unpaid work because I want to, but also struggling to support myself. "Climate justice" work often works at a pace that leaves people behind, including young people, disabled people and femmes/Two-Spirit/ non-binary people. I often feel inadequate and unseen outside my circle because sometimes these spaces question the legitimacy of our knowledge, value and labour.

Living in a city takes me away from all that I know and love in the land. It disconnects me from the connection that is the energy movement in an ecosystem and my integration to that when I eat wild food and live as one with the land. [...] Why do we not go back to the land where we are welcomed, where we are part of something and accepted wholly as we are, for what we are. It is because we have created a system through greed that traps us here in debt, seeking acceptance in a society so focused on perfectionism and success it has completely missed the point of life, to live in joy every day.

I think that maybe if myself and the whole of Nunatsiavut was more connected to our culture (spiritually, land knowledge), I would be able to look back on it and build off of it. But I am unable to do that because the colonization has impacted us so greatly.

I have disabilities due to a pedestrian-vehicle accident. I had trouble accessing healthcare due to systemic racism in the healthcare system and as a result had much trouble completing my university and working. I am vulnerable due to poverty.

Mental health is a big barrier because it impacts hopefulness and belief in change. [...] It is hard to prioritize activism when you are struggling and your family is struggling to stay healthy.

Funding and financial resources directly correlate to lack of training and lack of transportation. People that dedicate their lives to direct action are mostly unpaid, and low income, and these barriers prevent us from continuing and increasing the work.

It's difficult to engage in work that you have to create yourself if [you're] in a more rural setting. I always get to hear about all of the great organizing in large cities and never get to engage. University has been a good space to be able to have these conversations and some support but there are still a lot of barriers when I feel isolated in my community and feel like the only one or only few. It's the question of linking Indigenous youth in rural and small cities into conversations that they don't have access to.

Many of these challenges stem from past traumas associated with intergenerational trauma.

We also live in [a] system that is built against us, and so many folks trying to do this work can't afford it (whether that's financially, physically, time-wise, capacity wise, etc.). The resources are just not there and it's hard to sustain momentum.

Kalilah Rampanen singing at a COP25 event around the need for the inclusion of Indigenous rights within Article 6 of the Paris Rulebook

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Solutions

When asked what they felt would be appropriate solutions for the barriers they face, the youth primarily suggested increased availability of resources and opportunities, community support and community building, and the legitimization of Indigenous knowledge. Resources and opportunities of particular importance included cultural and Indigenous-led resources, educational resources, financial resources, mental health support, networking and collaborative projects, online events and opportunities, and skill or training opportunities.

These findings were also represented in the survey data and focus group. When asked what they perceived as potential solutions, participants noted:

taking Indigenous youth out on the land with mentors, medicine people and ceremony carriers to facilitate a deeper connection within themselves, to each other, the spirits in the bush and Mother Earth herself

Mentorship to help inform decision making, strategy, conflict resolution, etc...or just somewhere to go for advice to reaffirm our own struggles, grief and frustrations. I would like to learn more about how to create sustainable financial outlets. I would like to see more intersectional narratives of disability justice, Black solidarity, Two-Spirit and queer relationship building. I would like to see more trainings because trainings have been really valuable to me. Arguably, trainings are why I feel comfortable with where I am today and confident in my resources available.

The government must do more to engage with Indigenous communities in good faith to give Indigenous Peoples land rights and self governance. Mental health and burnout are prevalent for frontline land defenders.

It's supporting those local communities and those young people in exploring their own culture and their own sovereignty within their communities so then they can actually start making a localized approach for Indigenous climate activism.

If we really want to radically change our own communities so they can take hold of their own sovereignty, we need to support people in making those radical changes within their own ceremony, within their own knowledge transfer, within their own traditions, too.

Funding can help because it frees some time to rest without working so hard all the time. Once you get out and participate it helps mental health because you feel nourished by the energy around you. You also see that you are among many. I think access to ceremony and Elders' knowledge in city spaces would be most helpful.

respect, increased genuine understanding and caring for Indigenous ideas and issues, and increased education and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples

For me, feeling welcomed and valued for what I bring to the movement is so important. Also, training opportunities would help me enhance my skills and increase my confidence/self-efficacy.

If each challenge and not symptom was solved at the root, the movement would maintain more widespread support. Educating, funding, enabling, supporting Indigenous minds, the youth will be better equipped to take further strides for positive change.

Community support and mentorship. Not all youth are so lucky to have positive mentors in their lives, we should continue to share our lessons learned through activism with the younger generation.

Youth leadership, more training and in-person mentorship with youth. We need healthier intergenerational relationship building.

Indigenous Climate Action COP25 delegation with activist David Suzuki. Left to right: Nigel Henri Robinson, David Suzuki, Portia Morin, Ta'Kaiya Blaney, Kalilah Rampanen, and Eriel Deranger

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The Youth Needs Assessment was used to gauge which topics and skill sets Indigenous youth are interested in. The majority of survey participants indicated that they were "very interested" in the following topics:

- Indigenous rights and sovereignty (94% of respondents) - e.g. understanding Indigenous Nations as sovereign and acknowledging inherent rights to self-determination
- Healing Justice (73% of respondents) - e.g. culturally and spiritually appropriate healing practices for trauma
- Food sovereignty (61% of respondents) - e.g. encouraging local food security and supporting access to culturally appropriate foods
- Energy sovereignty (57% of respondents) - e.g. creating local energy security
- Climate policy (53% of respondents) - e.g. understanding climate policy and environmental politics at the local, national, or international scale.

Participants noted that they were "very interested" in gaining experience or training in the following areas:

- Community organizing (73% of respondents) - e.g. nurturing community relationships
- Strategic communications (72% of respondents) - e.g. engaging media, online engagement
- Creating strategic campaigns (71% of respondents) - e.g. research, ally engagement
- Creating art (59% of respondents) - e.g. banners, posters, placards, screen-printing, poetry, political theatre
- Non-violent direct action (59% of respondents) - e.g. blockades, protests

Indigenous youth at COP25 from all over the world

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Conclusions

Implications and Insights

Through the Youth Needs Assessment, ICA learned that Indigenous youth are strongly motivated by their sense of love, care, and responsibility for the lands and waters, and their communities. The youth spoke to the importance of these connections for the intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge, understanding culture and identity, building community relationships, and preserving the environment for future generations.

Indigenous youth shared stories of barriers they face when engaging in climate activism - often noting that increased availability of accessible, inclusive, and supportive spaces is needed to provide resources and opportunities for all. In particular, the youth noted a lack of educational and financial resources, as well as a need for mental health support. This coincides with recent census data, which found that Indigenous youth struggle with adverse mental and physical health issues, lower levels of educational attainment, inadequate housing, lower income levels, higher death and suicide rates, and higher levels of incarceration (Statistics Canada, 2018; Kuma & Tjepkema, 2019; TRC, 2015).

The effects of systemic oppression, such as settler colonialism and racism, pose significant challenges for engaging in advocacy work. Throughout the Youth Needs Assessment, it became apparent that systems of oppression and dispossession perpetuate cycles of disempowerment, which permeate the lives of Indigenous youth. Urbanized and displaced youth expressed that limited access to traditional land and cultural teachings results in loss of language, cultural values, and knowledge of the land. This is important to note, as Indigenous resurgence and cultural revitalization is often centred on reclaiming, restoring, and regenerating relationships to the land,

communities, and cultural practices (Corntassel & Bryce, 2012). Others noted that although youth may want to be involved in advocacy work, they may have limited capacity to participate when having to prioritize their basic needs. This speaks to a larger theme of capacity building and addressing social determinants of participation to increase engagement opportunities for Indigenous youth.

To disrupt the cycle of disempowerment, this study compiled insightful and hopeful narratives on the resiliency and resurgence of Indigenous voices. As one participant expressed, "If it's for youth, it should be by youth." The youth voiced that solutions should be grounded in asserting Indigenous sovereignty and rights, creating inclusive spaces for engagement, building stronger relationships to the land, building community support and relationships, legitimizing Indigenous knowledge, and increasing the accessibility of resources and opportunities. Moving forward, Indigenous youth hope to see increased availability of cultural and Indigenous-led resources, educational resources, financial resources, mental health support, networking and collaborative projects, online events and opportunities, and skill or training opportunities. Despite enduring centuries of systemic discrimination, Indigenous Peoples remain resilient and continue to defend our rights, lands, and cultures (Barker, 2015).

Future Work and Youth Program Direction

ICA will use the findings of the Youth Needs Assessment to direct future programming and better support Indigenous youth. Throughout 2020-21, we will be building a long-term strategic plan and establishing a more intentional process for engagement that introduces youth to the resources and opportunities available through ICA.

A Youth Engagement Lead will be hired in January 2021 to further build our relationships with youth, strengthen our abilities to be responsive to their needs, and continue to offer opportunities and support for more young people to participate within the climate justice movement. Future work at ICA includes:

- Creating a **Youth Council** to support the creation of specific programming and sharing of opportunities for youth participation.

- Curating the **Indigenous Worldview Climate Change Toolkit**, which addresses a gap in climate change information by respecting and reflecting Indigenous rights, worldviews, and knowledge to provide youth-specific trainings. The toolkit is also being adapted into a larger **Train the Trainer Program** that will train Indigenous community climate leaders to take ICA resources into their own communities and develop localized climate strategies.

- Supporting **Youth Gatherings and Delegations** to conferences, workshops, and other convenings. These may be hosted by ICA, by our partners and allies, or large conferences like the UNFCCC COPs.

- **Additional trainings, resourcing, and capacity building** by hosting topical webinars, amplifying critical narratives and supporting fundraising for community projects.

- Exploring a **Youth Mentorship Program**, which would aim to generate a cohort of youth and youth mentors. Participants in the Youth Mentorship Program would be supported by ICA to attend opportunities with their mentors to grow through a participatory learning process.

- Healing justice is an emerging area in ICA's work, and we will be nurturing **Healing Justice pathways** to create culturally and spiritually appropriate healing practices for intergenerational trauma. This responds to the mental health support and culturally appropriate resources that Indigenous youth expressed a need for.

- Expanding our ability to **give reciprocity** for contract work and youth participation in ICA initiatives, including honorariums for volunteer work and additional training support or mentoring for professional development, in relation to ICA work.

ICA is embarking on an ambitious task of decolonization, supporting Indigenous community members as they deserve, and nurturing opportunities for Indigenous leadership to inform and direct climate solutions. We want to nurture the infrastructure that supports our networks so that we are modeling values of Healing Justice and sustainability. We are confident that by investing in building the foundations of an Indigenous youth program, we are nurturing the capacities that are essential for our long-term vision of supporting Indigenous Peoples as agents of change for climate solutions.

Indigenous youth at the Bringing Our Voices Together gathering

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Appendix A

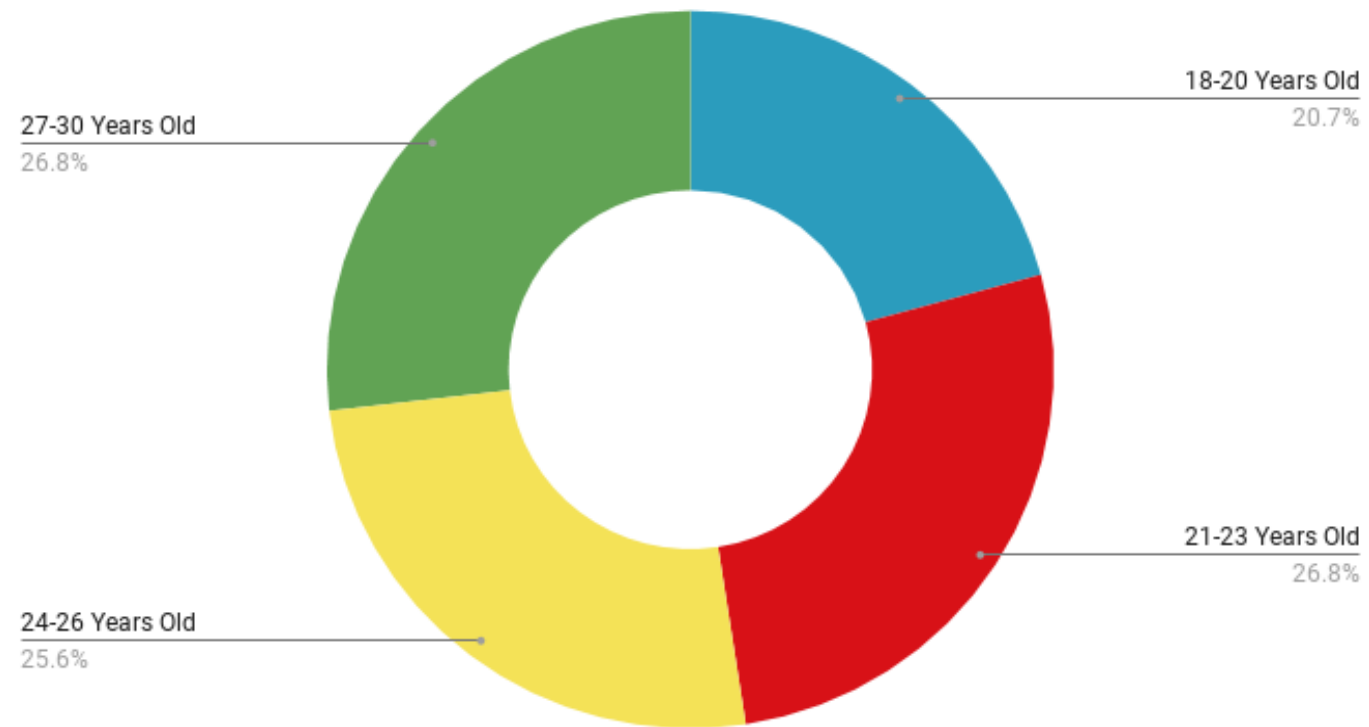**Figure A: survey respondent age distribution**

18-20 Years Old
20.7%

21-23 Years Old
26.8%

24-26 Years Old
25.6%

27-30 Years Old
26.8%

Figure B: survey respondent community background

Other
4.9%

Métis
14.6%

Inuit
7.3%

First Nations
73.2%
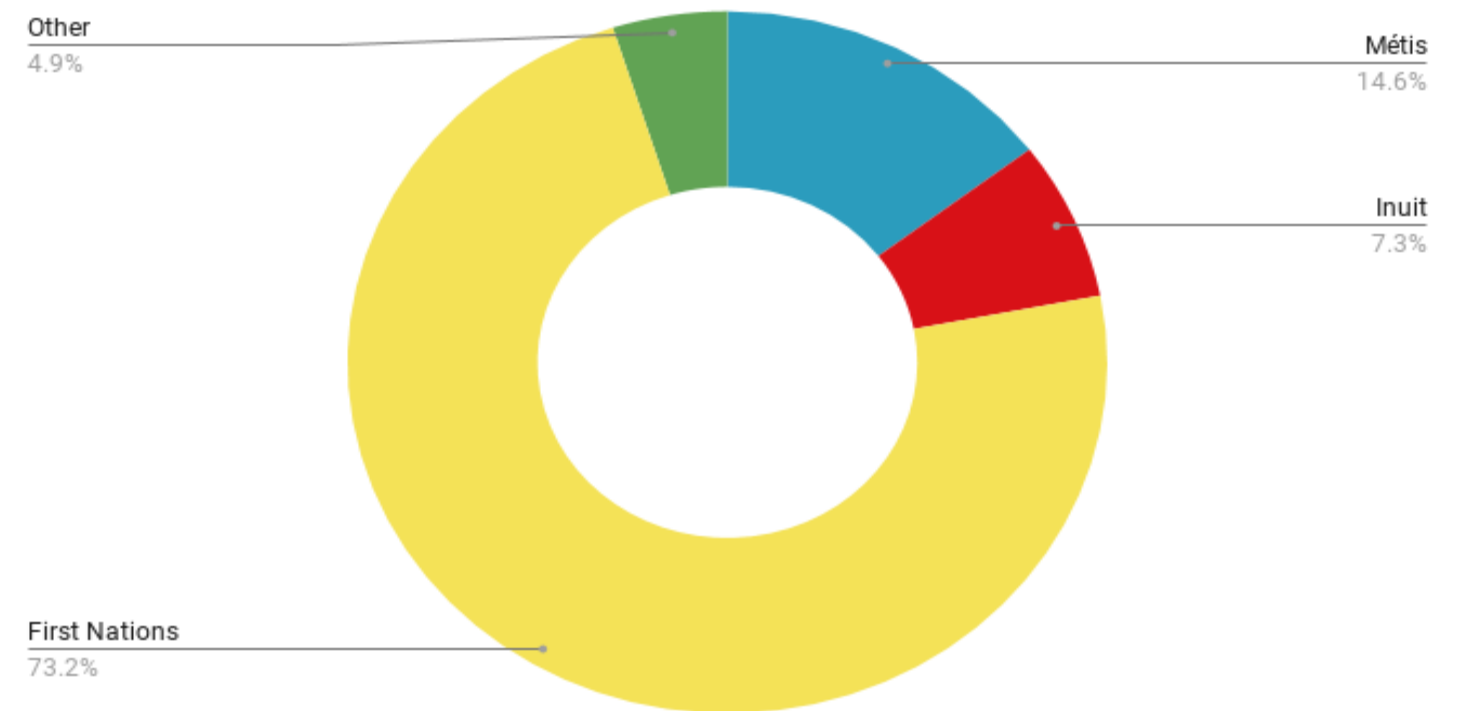
Figure C: survey respondent gender identity

Prefer Not to Say
2.4%

Two-Spirit
11.0%

Non-Binary/Third Gender
4.9%

Male
13.4%

Female
68.3%
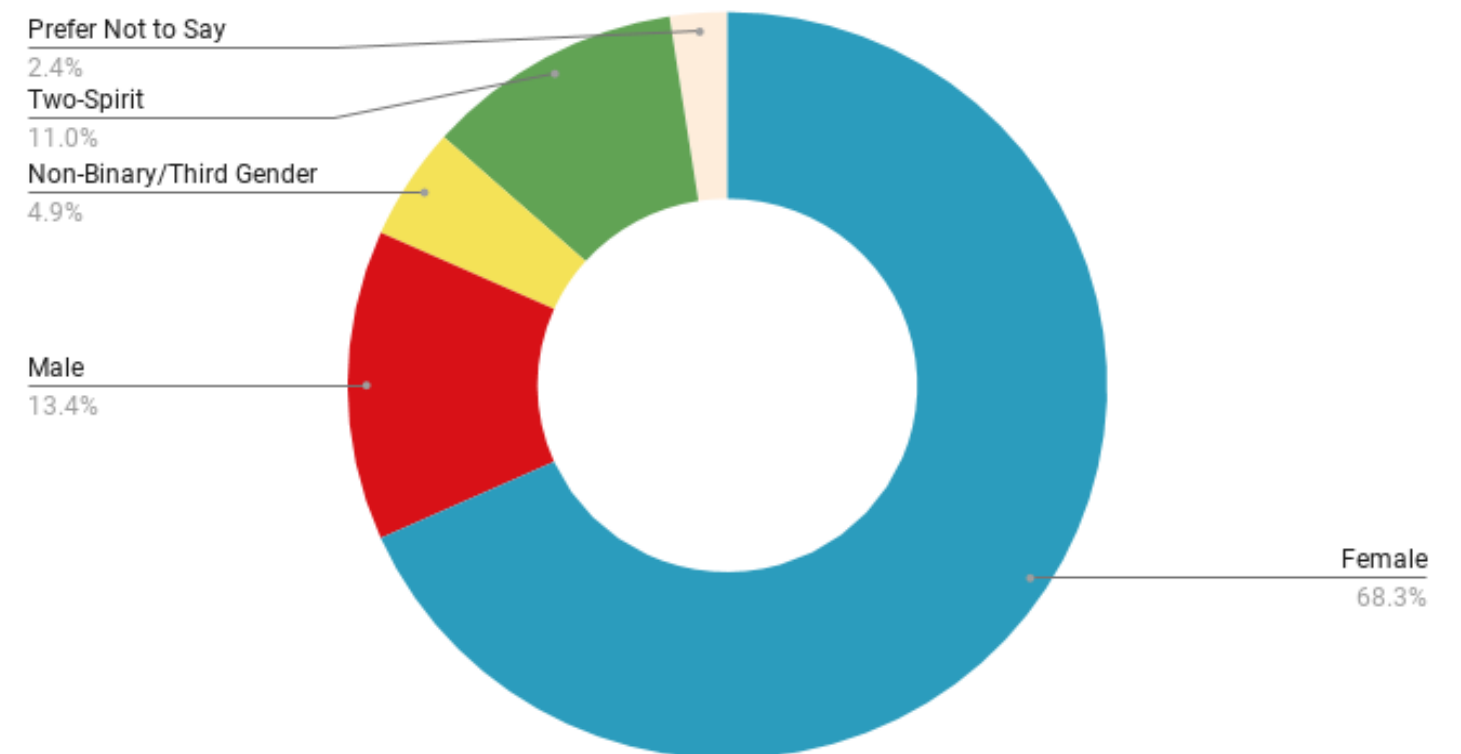
Figure D: survey respondent geographic distribution

- Quebec 2.4%
- Ontario 28.0%
- Northwest Territories 3.7%
- Newfoundland and 2.4%
- Manitoba 13.4%
- Alberta 15.9%
- British Columbia 31.7%
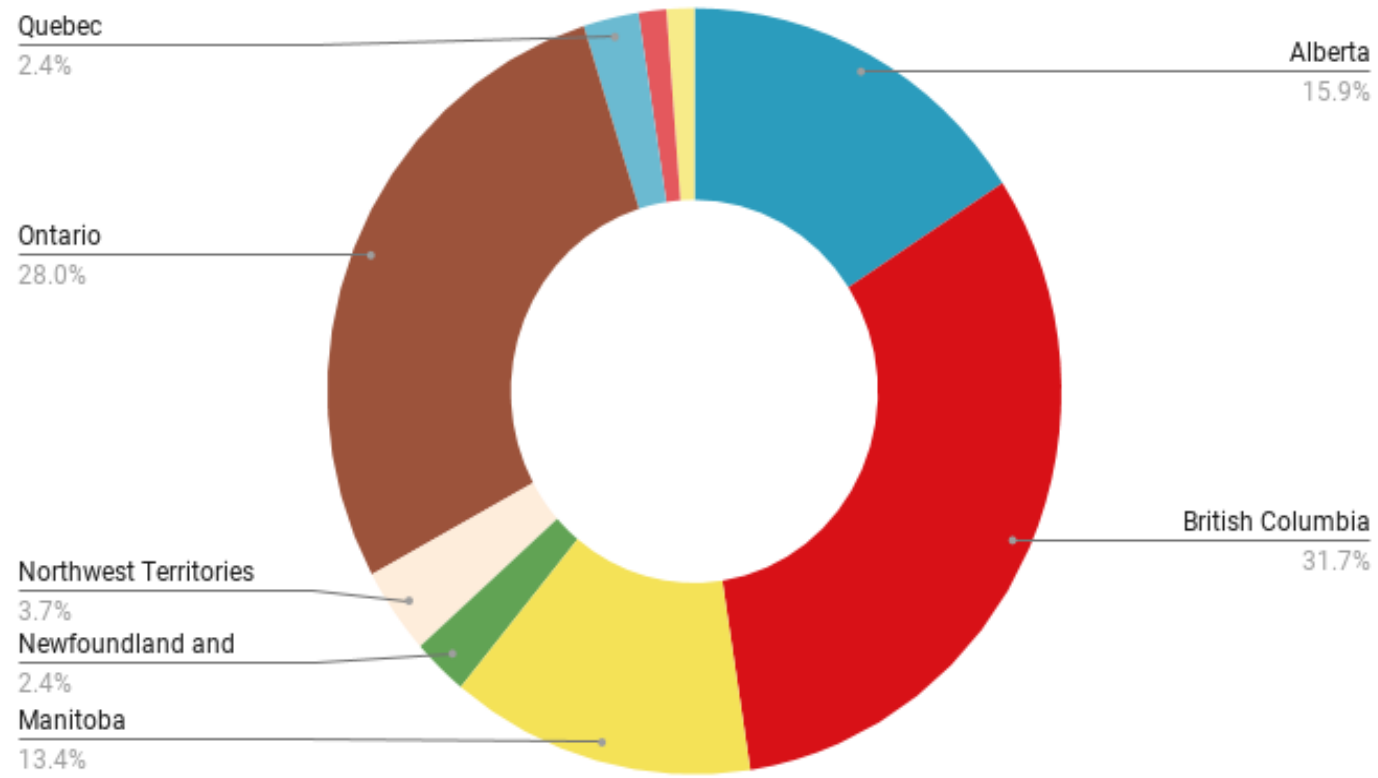
Appendix B

Figure A: survey respondents experiences of environmental racism

- Unanswered 3.7%
- Unclear 1.2%
- Not Affected 34.1%
- Indirectly Affected 8.5%
- Directly Affected 52.4%

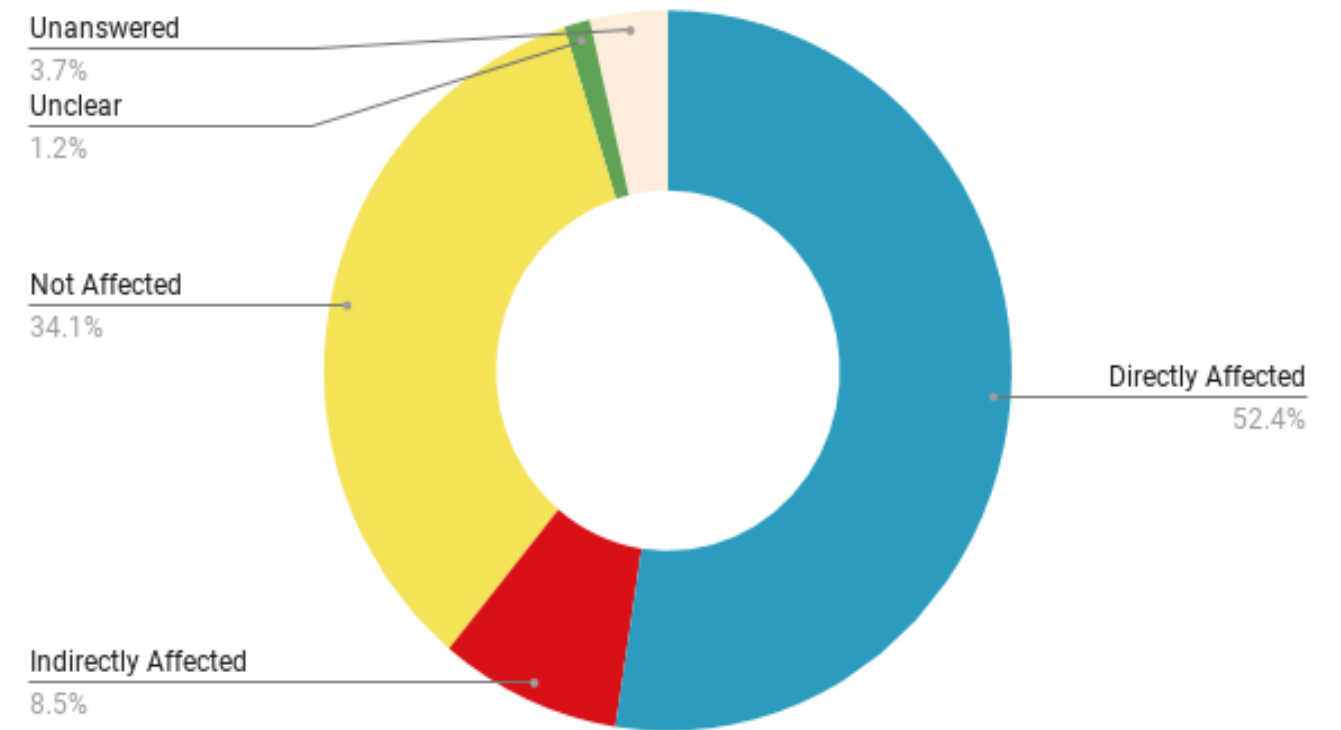**Figure B: participant perceptions on the impact of their Indigenous background on their ability to participate in climate activism**
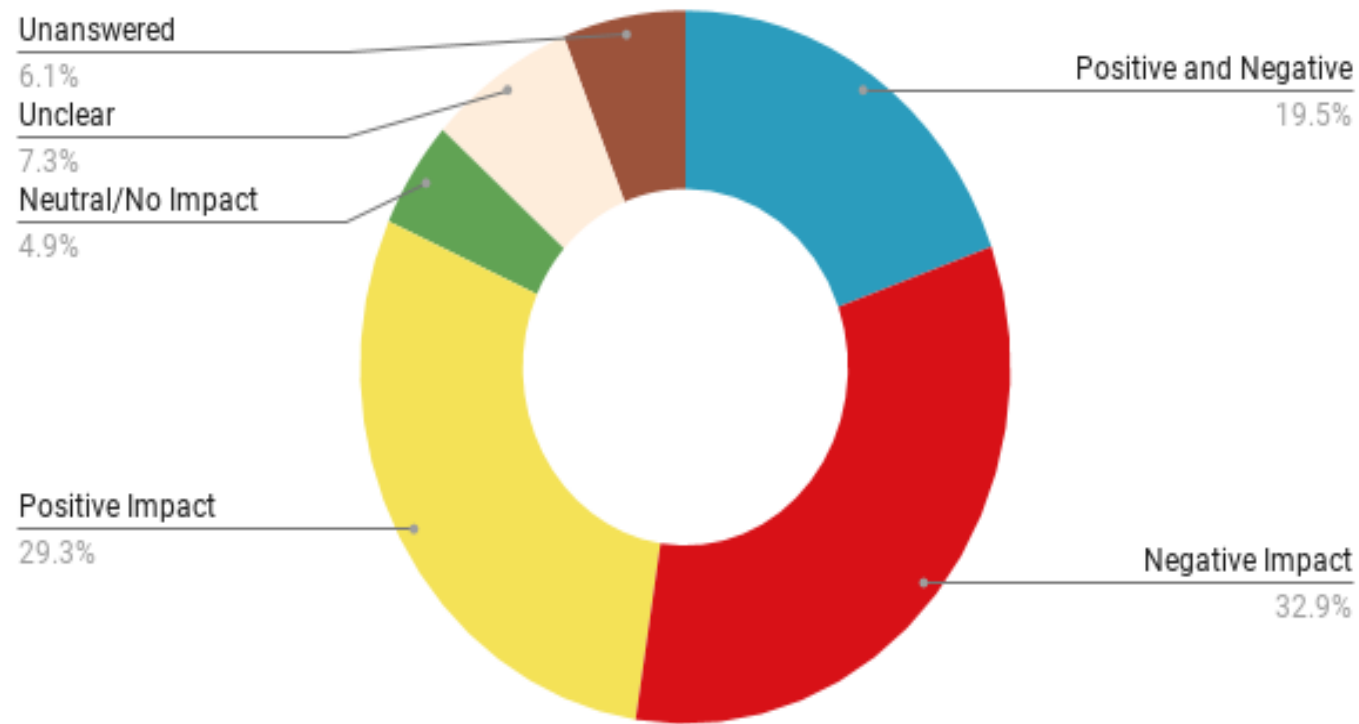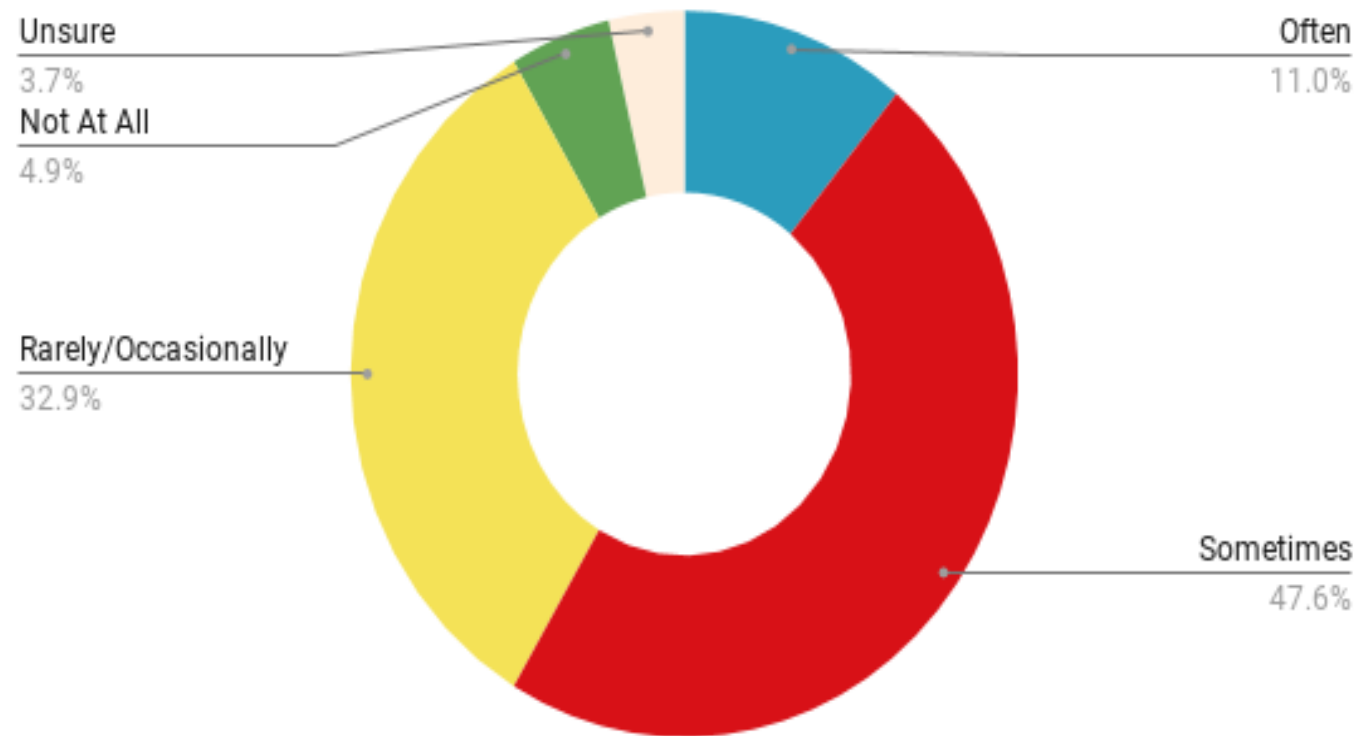

- Unanswered 6.1%
- Unclear 7.3%
- Neutral/No Impact 4.9%
- Positive Impact 29.3%
- Positive and Negative 19.5%
- Negative Impact 32.9%

Figure C: Indigenous youth perceptions on whether the input of young Indigenous people is incorporated into climate activism

- Unsure 3.7%
- Not At All 4.9%
- Rarely/Occasionally 32.9%
- Often 11.0%
- Sometimes 47.6%

Appendix C

Figure A: participant interest in potential areas of future programming and training opportunities

Legend: % Very Interested | % Somewhat Interested | % Not Interested | % Unsure

Area	% Very Interested	% Somewhat Interested	% Not Interested	% Unsure
Community Organizing	73	22	5	0
Strategic Communications	72	22	6	0
Creating Strategic Campaigns	71	24	5	0
Creating Art	59	30	10	1
"Non-Violent Direct Action"	59	28	10	4
Public Speaking	39	33	23	5
Fundraising	34	48	16	2

Figure B: participant interest in potential areas of future programming

Legend: ■ % Very Interested ■ % Somewhat Interested ■ % Not Interested ■ % Unsure

Category	% Very Interested	% Somewhat Interested	% Not Interested	% Unsure
Indigenous Rights & Sovereignty	94	6	0	0
Healing Justice	73	21	4	2
Food Sovereignty	61	38	1	0
Energy Sovereignty	57	39	2	1
Climate Policy	54	43	4	0
United Nations Advocacy Work	30	43	22	5

Connect with ICA

4 ways to support Indigenous-led climate action and solutions:

1. Follow ICA and share our work
2. Volunteer with the network
3. Support Indigenous communities taking climate action
4. Donate and/or become a monthly sustainer

To learn more about Indigenous Climate Action, connect with us at:

 @IndigenousClimateAction

 @IndigenousClimateAction

 @Indigenous_ca

 Indigenous Climate Action Network

indigenousclimateaction.com

Indigenous Climate Action c/o Polaris Institute
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Ottawa, ON K2P 0G5
Unceded territories of the Algonquin, Haudenosaunee, and Anishinabek