LAND BACK IS CLIMATE POLICY

PART 2 OF PHASE 2 OF
ICA'S DECOLONIZING CLIMATE POLICY PROJECT

INDIGENOUS CLIMATE ACTION

Indigenous Climate Action (ICA) is an Indigenous-led organization guided by a diverse group 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 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. By providing communities with knowledge and resources, we can inspire a new generation of Indigenous climate leaders building solutions centered around our inherent rights and cultures.

www.IndigenousClimateAction.com

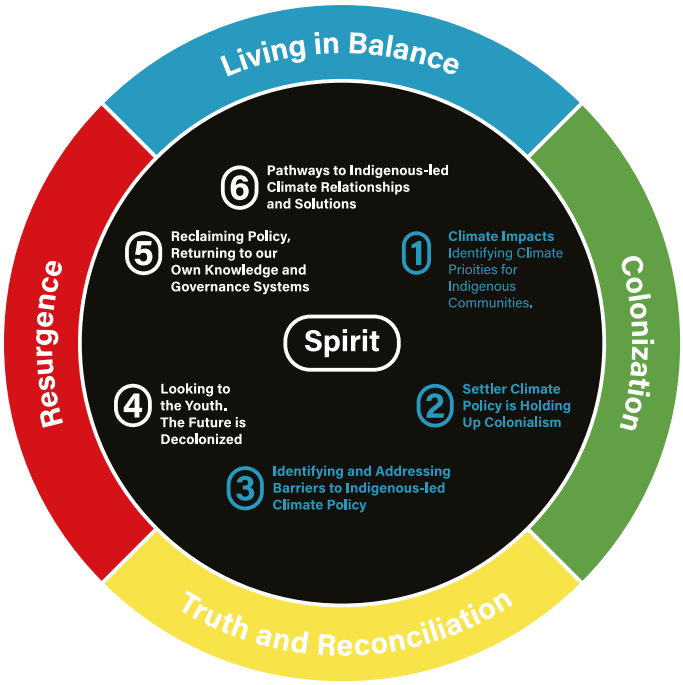
@IndigenousClimateAction

@Indigenous_CA

This is Part 2 of Phase 2 of ICA's DECOLONIZING CLIMATE POLICY PROJECT.

Part 1 was released in December 2023. It shared the first three full length chapters of the report.

This Part 2 you are reading shares the final three chapters.



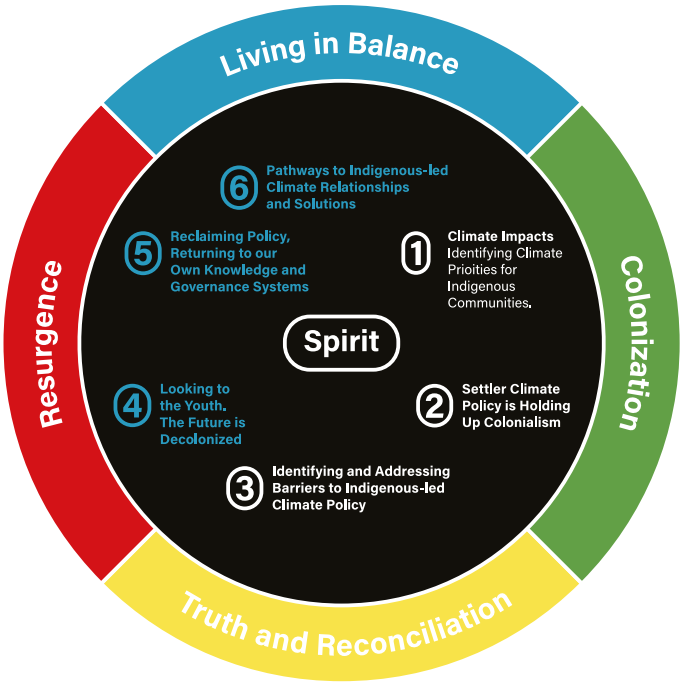


Table of Contents

Introducing This Report

Over the last few years, our research team at Indigenous Climate Action (ICA) has been talking with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples across so-called Canada about climate change and climate policy. We've been reading Indigenous scholars on the subject and our team has been thinking hard and talking amongst ourselves about the real, Indigenous-led climate policy and climate solutions happening and how they can be raised up and well supported.

Part 1 of the Full Report was released in December 2023 sharing Chapter 1, 2 and 3 from the Colonization and Truth Reconciliation Quadrants.

What you're currently reading is Part 2 of the Full Report and shares the Resurgence and Living in Balance Quadrants and includes three chapters:

4. Looking to the Youth: The Future is Decolonized
5. Policy Can Be Something Different: Reclaiming Policy, Returning to Our Own Knowledges and Governance Systems
6. Pathways for Restoring Balance and Indigenous-led Climate Solutions

Part 1 of this report investigated the problems of climate change, how it is exacerbating existing challenges in our communities and how colonial capitalism is not only driving the crises but erecting barriers to our own solutions. In Part 1, we explored the role policy plays in upholding colonial capitalism.

Now in Part 2, we reclaim policy as our own, exploring how it can serve our own transformative, decolonial goals. In Chapter 4, we start with hearing from the youth who envision and are forging a future beyond settler colonialism. In Chapter 5, we discuss what it means to develop our own policies through our own diverse governance systems to serve our own needs and visions. Finally in Chapter 6, we explore many kinds of Indigenous led-climate solutions and think through the pathways (that can overcome the kinds of barriers identified in Part 1) that can facilitate the flourishing of our own Indigenous-led climate policies and solutions.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the incredible people across these lands who spoke to us, in the surveys and interviews. We'd like to acknowledge the Advisory Council who guided this work: Tiffany Traverse, Pam Beebe, Katherine Whitecloud, Deborah McGregor, Bryanna Brown, and Jesse Mike. We are deeply grateful.

We would like to also acknowledge the support of ICA staff who have contributed to this project over the last few years: Eriel Deranger, Jayce Chiblow, Alexa Metallic, Rebecca Sinclair, Sarah Hanson and the entire ICA team that has helped to bring this project to life.

Thank you to the research volunteers and coordinators at **Research for the Front Lines** for their supportive role in preparing this report for publication: Jen Gobby, Cat Renaud, Gerda Kits, Kay Pettigrew, Amy Janzwood, Lou Pingeot, Maeve Botham, Mary Stuart, Katherine Robitaille, Sophie Krowse, Sachkeerat Grewal, Kody Crowell, Ann Mcquarrie, Andrea Miller-Nesbitt, and Victoria McGrath.

Executive Summary DCP Part 2.2

Indigenous peoples have been advocating for transformative approaches to policy-making from the ground up that centre our own ways of relating to the land, waters and territories.

Throughout the Decolonizing Climate Policy (DCP) research project, our Advisory Council emphasized the need to centre the voices and vision of our youth in our work. In the final quadrant of our research, we prioritized youth perspectives, weaving their knowledge into the exploration of what reclaiming climate policy looks like. This approach guided us in our efforts, ensuring we are working to restore balance to our lands, our waters and our peoples.

This final installment of the DCP project continues to prioritize deep listening through group workshops, discussions, surveys, and one on one interviews. In this phase, we asked participants to examine what decolonial climate policy futures could tangibly look like, and identify potential next steps toward decolonial, sovereign and Indigenous driven climate governance models in so-called Canada.

The conversations we've engaged in have resulted in a wealth of beautiful ideas, insights, and solutions rooted in traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge.

Chapter 4 is where we heard from Indigenous youth who highlighted that our relationships with and responsibility to our lands and waters should be central to climate action. They raised the urgency to centre youth voices in climate conversations and the gifts they hold that have the potential to challenge current systems. They argued that the need to restore and support youth connections to land is inherent to climate policy. It became clear—these responsibilities are not merely cultural customs or worldviews, they are our laws that have never been extinguished. This is the foundation of Indigenous-led climate policy. This is fostered through ceremony, language, and relationships with human and nonhuman kin.

The youth offered a balance of critiques of educational and governance systems, with a vision of institutions grounded in our original instructions and our ancestral connection to the land, fostered through ceremony,

language and relationships. They highlighted the need for a bottom-up approach that fights for and cultivates governance and political systems that:

- Centre the leadership of Indigenous folks, communities of colour, and youth;
- Centre the needs and decisions of the people and communities most impacted by the issues being addressed;
- Provide support and funding for impacted communities to make their own decisions and design and implement their own solutions;
- Structure our processes around consent, not consultation;
- Prioritize care and well-being for Indigenous communities;
- Ground themselves in local places, interests, and needs that determine what's happening at wider national and international scales;
- Engage whole communities in collective responsibilities, so that we're all shaping policies and feel invested in them rather than having them be imposed on us;
- Ground themselves in our rights, sovereignty, and self-determination over our own lands (i.e., Land Back);
- Ground themselves in ceremony and protecting sacred places and processes.

The youth clearly outlined that policy can be something different. Chapter 5 dives into this more deeply by exploring: What would climate policy-making look like (and what it could do?) if it were led by Indigenous people, and was grounded in our own worldviews, laws, governance systems and our relations with the land?

The people we interviewed made it clear that there are aspects of the policy and policy-making in this country that are inherently colonial, controlling and working against our well-being and rights. In contrast, people reimagined what climate policy could and should be rooted in: the understanding that Indigenous approaches to policy are grounded in self-determination and sovereignty of each Indigenous Nation. Our conversations with the youth allowed us to identify foundations for Indigenous-led climate policy, such as being inclusive, equitable, and rooted in an understanding of truth and reconciliation. It's important to note that there is no single "Indigenous policy", rather, policies should be respective to each diverse Nation. This approach encourages communities to draw from their own ancestral knowledge to develop laws and ecological frameworks that support their unique cultural survival and sovereignty.

Throughout this report, we outline three important caveats towards the shift of political and economic systems from colonial towards Indigenous land-based solutions.

1. The term "Indigenous-led solutions" doesn't excuse settlers and allies from the responsibility of implementing these recommendations;

2. While many of the proposed solutions are grounded in traditional knowledges, they are innovative;

3. And finally, while this report is framed around decolonizing climate policy, it is not only climate policy that requires these transformative, Indigenous-led approaches.

Chapter 6 goes on to explore the ten categories of climate solutions that Indigenous peoples in so-called Canada are already enacting:

- Relocalizing governance and economies
- Reconnection to Land, Culture and Language
- Indigenous Food Sovereignty
- Energy Sovereignty; Taking Care of the Water
- Taking Care of the Forests
- Taking Care of our Animal Relatives and Their Habitats
- Taking Care of Our Cities
- Taking Care of Our Waste
- Transforming Legal Systems to Protect What We Value and Require.

Additionally, we highlight Six Pathways to support the fundamental shift to Indigenous-led solutions. They are:

- **Pathway 1:** Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being (Decentering Settler Ways).
- **Pathway 2:** Asserting, Defending, and Respecting Indigenous Self-Determination, Sovereignty, and Consent.
- **Pathway 3:** Redistributing Power, Wealth, and Land (Relinquishing Settler Control of Lands and Lives).
- **Pathway 4:** Decentralizing Climate Governance and Building Community Power.
- **Pathway 5:** Building Powerful, Intersectional, Inter-National Movements.
- **Pathway 6:** Ensuring Accountability and Reparations.

The First Nations, Metis and Inuit we spoke to made it very clear: Indigenous peoples already have the alternatives and solutions to address the climate crisis. We need to allow the space, time and funding to support the solutions and framework shifts we are calling for.

We conclude the report with calling upon our allies to:

- stop making this work harder for us through your colonial policies, industries and false solutions;
- demand that your governments uphold Indigenous rights and title;
- fight for land back. Land must be returned to the communities from who it was stolen, so we have the spaces to enact these solutions, and;
- find active ways to actively support Indigenous-led land stewardship and climate action, including supporting our full sovereignty.

Our diverse ways of knowing and being are powerful climate solutions.

For these solutions to flourish, we need our lands back.

Land Back is Climate Policy.


ATER
IS SACRED
NO PIPELI

Looking to the Youth: The Future is Decolonized

“I have this vision of youth leading the way. Youth taking the initiative. I just see so many strong youth leaders in my community — young children who aren't afraid to speak up and fight for what's right.”

Anonymous Respondent

Champagne and Aishihik First Nations | Tundra Biome

This chapter raises up youth voices and visions toward Indigenous-led climate policies and solutions. From the beginning of our project, our **Advisory Council** has been guiding us to centre youth in this work. This included bringing in Sarah Hanson, Youth Research Intern, to help lead the research project and reach out to Indigenous youth across all five biomes for interviews.

In June 2021, we also hosted a virtual workshop with eight youth of the **Yukon First Nations Climate Action Fellowship:** Autum Skaydu.û Jules, Jennifer Mierau, Dustin McKenzie-Hubbard, Nika Silverfox-Young, Jewel Davies, Kadrienne Hummel, Mats'äsäna Mą, and Kadrienne Hummel.

In February 2022, we hosted a **webinar** titled *Indigenous-Led Climate Action: Next Generation of Policy Changemakers*. This event featured youth representatives from **Kahnawà:ke Collective Impact**, including Ohontsakéhte Montour, Karahkwinetha Sage Goodleaf-Labelle, Julie Teiokeráthe Delisle, and Carlee Kawinehta Loft. This chapter draws on the insights and contributions from these powerful youth leaders, as well as additional workshops and interviews we conducted. It is designed to lay the groundwork for the chapters that follow.

What we heard across all of these powerful conversations is that Indigenous relations and responsibilities to our lands and waters is climate policy. The youth we spoke to emphasized the urgency needed to restore and support these connections. These responsibilities are rooted in Indigenous Peoples' original instructions and our ancestral connection to the land, which is fostered through ceremony, language, and relationships.

These youth offered an honest, fierce critique of the education system and colonial government, highlighting how colonial legislation and policies have attempted to sever our relationships and disrupt our bonds with each other and the land.

The youth we spoke to are calling for the transformation of settler education and governance systems — or replacing them with our own. Through this approach, we can create the space for youth to shape the future.

In a thinktank session with the ICA staff, Executive Director Eriel Deranger (Dënesųłiné, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) explained why she firmly believes youth voices need to be at the centre of climate conversations:

> Someone once told me, 'Never trust an older person that does not have younger people in their lives that they consider mentors.' And the reason . . . is that if you are an Elder or an older person that is moving with only the available knowledge that you have accumulated in your lifetime, then you are not utilizing the teachings that we have around seven generations. And seven generations is not about just thinking about the seven generations before us, it is supposed to be about the three generations before us, the generation you are in, and the three generations into the future. And this requires us as older people to constantly be checking in with the new generations that are emerging to ensure that what we are striving for is not just in line with what our ancestors have built but it's going to serve the future generations. And if they are not there to voice their concerns for themselves, then we're going to get it wrong.

Ashley Nadjiwon (Anishinaabe kwe, Wikwemikong Unceded Territory, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome), reflected on the gifts young people have and why they have such an important role to play in challenging current systems:

> There's the song that we have in our lodge . . . and it talks about these new spirited ones that are coming to the earth at this time. [...] When they come here, they see everything on this earth as backwards. [...] They're talked about, having all of these amazing gifts. Their role is to question and challenge. And I think that we see that in society now. And even really young children I've had conversations with, the way that they're able to comprehend and engage in conversations about very difficult topics is incredible. I never had conversations like that when I was a kid, but they're able to call things out for being wrong. They're able to challenge the systems that we're currently in and they have no fear of challenging that.

Reconnection Vision is a climate action plan led by Indigenous youth. Under the direction of 14 Yukon First Nation Chiefs, the Assembly of First Nations Yukon Region and the Council of Yukon First Nations called for a youth-led climate action plan[1] in response to climate change's impacts on the environment. A fellowship of 13 representatives, all of whom are First Nations youth, developed a plan that focused on protecting the land for "the children of tomorrow". The plan addresses climate change's root causes and focuses on reconnection between people and nature. The plan also implements traditional Indigenous knowledges and natural alternatives to predominant practices. The climate action plan was ratified by Yukon First Nation leaders on March 17, 2023.

---

1. See The Narwhal's coverage of the Yukon Youth Climate Plan (https://thenarwhal.ca/yukon-youth-climate-plan/)

What the Youth Are Saying

Our Relations and Responsibility to Our Lands and Waters are the Heart of Climate Policy

> "Reconnecting to land is at the heart of Indigenous-led climate policies and solutions. Reconnecting to the land is the path for community well-being and for climate well-being."

The youth we spoke to emphasized that our relationships with and responsibility to our lands and waters should be central to climate action and policy. Many of our stories hold teachings about our connection to plants, waters, and animals, highlighting our role in respecting the sovereignty of all life and maintaining balance. These stories hold original instructions on how to enact our responsibilities.

For example, as one person (Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement, Boreal Forest Biome) shares, "My teaching from creation stories is that sacrifices were made to give us life . . . and we have to respect, honour, and maintain those relationships and kinships."

These instructions and responsibilities are not merely worldviews and cultural customs: they are our laws, our sources of authority, and they have never been extinguished. They ought to form the foundation of Indigenous-led "climate policy." The work we must do is to reconnect with these laws and instructions. Carole Monture from Six Nations of the Grand River in the Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome reminds us:

> Connecting back with nature and cultural knowledge is a one-two punch that acknowledges the earth is not well right now, and neither are we. The path to healing will be done together.

Colonial education systems separate us from the land by keeping children within the confines of buildings, learning from books. Similarly, political systems separate us from the land too by facilitating ongoing land dispossession, giving settlers and extractive industries access to our territories, and pushing us onto smaller and smaller plots of land. Reconnecting to land is at the heart of Indigenous-led climate policies and solutions. Reconnecting to the land is the path for total community well-being and for climate well-being.

An anonymous respondent from the Tundra Biome maintains that "Indigenous livelihood and well-being is connected to the land's well-being. And it's when we have strong people, and resilience, and are adapting, and are belonging, that we can best work for, and advocate for our land."

The following sections will explore the ways in which Indigenous youth are exercising their rights and asserting their places as leaders in climate action. Central to these efforts is an emphasis on creating space to restore traditional knowledge and the reclamation of stewardship practices in our territories.

What the Youth Are Saying

We Need Spaces to Rebuild Knowledge and Transform Education Systems

Across Turtle Island, Indigenous youth are connecting with their traditional teachings and languages, as well as their traditional governance and economic systems. Throughout this research project, we heard again and again that these teachings need to be at the heart of our formal education systems and that a transformation of educational systems needs to be well supported and funded.

It was also shared that (re)establishing connection with land is central to Indigenous-led climate action. Connection with the land connects us to natural law. We are reclaiming our own educational systems and grounding these systems on the land.

These educational approaches can cultivate climate leaders in our communities.

For our land based education systems to thrive, we need:

- To be grounded in our own languages and ceremony.
- Resources to pay Elders and knowledge holders. This funding is necessary to cover logistical, financial, and legal support, including travel to schools and other community settings; support to prepare, and gather material; and money to ensure they are making a good living and ensure that their knowledge is being adequately protected and honoured.
- To be grounded in our own ways of learning and teaching, our own diverse knowledge systems. It's not only what we learn and what we teach. It matters how teaching and learning happens.
- To centre children and youth as active in their own learning. Children and youth exist in the world with their own gifts and wisdom that education can help cultivate and make shine.

One of the young Kanien'keha:ka delegates who attended the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (Conference Of the Parties [COP] 26) and in Sharm El-Sheikh (COP27) told us, "I think that's what language does for us overall. It grounds us in who we are. And I think it's important for this climate work, because it's so heavy."

To one anonymous respondent (Aamjiwnaang First Nation, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome), "Language is super healing . . . I want that for future generations. I want them to be able to have Elders, to have those stories, to have all that. Because even being able to relearn it feels so special."

Ceremony and art needs to be at the centre of our transformed education systems too. Another youth who attended COP (Kanien'keha:ka, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) told us about the importance of her tattoos:

> As soon as you get that ancestral mark of our tattoos, you are carrying yourself with those teachings into those [colonial] environments. It's grounding yourself. So when you speak in these colonial environments, it feels like your ancestors are right behind you holding you up.

Education for Non-Indigenous People

Some people we spoke with shared the importance of integrating traditional teachings into mainstream education as well.

An anonymous participant from the Boreal Forest told us there needs to be “more education on how to engage with lands and waters respectfully — and from Indigenous perspectives ."

Hopefully, educating settlers about the land would at the same time foster in them a better understanding of Indigenous rights and perspectives on stewardship. As one person (CAFN, Tundra Biome) puts it, we need to be:

> helping other people who are non-Indigenous understand things from an Indigenous worldview, and understand why we do things the way we do, and why connection to people, land, and waters is so important to us, and why it was all in one big web.

Other participants shared similar thoughts with us. We understand the underlying goal of educating settlers is to combat racist behaviors and policies getting in the way of Indigenous people exercising our rights and leading climate policies on these lands. Mainstream education is still very much tainted with a “conquering narrative” that centre non-Indigenous worldviews and systems, and very rarely touches on Indigenous rights, realities, and perspectives on historic and contemporary issues.

To that effect, the 2021 *Indigenous Youth Global Declaration on Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems (IYGD)* stipulates:

> We recommend that member states work with Indigenous Peoples to establish intercultural education programmes; recognising Indigenous Youth need to learn about our traditional food systems, cultural heritage and key knowledge to sustain our food systems. We also encourage member states to build interculturality into mainstream education, which will enable entire societies to better understand and respect Indigenous Peoples. (IYGD, 2021, p.3)

One respondent (Gitxsan Nation, Mountain Biome) explained how they think strategically:

> I think if we can start integration of Indigenous pedagogy[2] into everything, that's a method of us gaining traction in the future for our kids, because I don't think adults right now will ever integrate Indigenous Peoples the way that we need to. I think it's going to be our children's generation.

Integrating Indigenous teachings and ways of teaching into mainstream non-Indigenous education systems would then be a way of getting more people to understand how to live in balance with the world according to Indigenous perspectives, as well as fighting racism and preparing future generations to better collaborate to uphold Indigenous leadership.

---

2. Pedagogy is the way in which teaching is organized so children develop their knowledge. It could be organized around books, stories, memorization, experiments, discussion, art, observation, etc. In western mainstream education, pedagogy relies on the idea that knowledge is gained through understanding external phenomena as abstract concepts other people (“experts”) make up.

Education on Climate and Political Action

Another need identified by participants is for training on the causes and effects of the climate crisis on climate and political action. Some of the young people we interviewed simply confessed they didn't understand it at all, but wished they were better informed to be able to have more power and impact.

One youth from Kahnawake (Kanien'keha:ka, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) said,

> [The youth] need to be educated on what's going to happen, what the reality of their future is going to look like. And that's climate action — sharing with them, educating them, getting them involved in this type of work, creating the spaces for them.

The IYGD points in the same direction, aiming to develop Indigenous capacities that would intertwine western and Indigenous sciences and technologies:

We appeal to governments to develop training plans for new technologies in Indigenous languages that allow, within the framework of interculturality, to develop the capacities of Indigenous youth to create local plans for the conservation of traditional knowledge through actions of innovation that combine ancestral knowledge with new technologies. (IYGD, 2021, p.4)

Tokenism and Navigating Colonial Spaces

As settlers work to centre more Indigenous people and perspectives to climate policy and education space and to learn from us, the problem of tokenism arises. In this context, *tokenism* refers to placing an Indigenous person in a position that would showcase an organization as inclusive, where in reality their voice does not have a meaningful impact on the organization. This act of inclusion can be a performative, shallow gesture, rather than a genuine, structural redistribution of power.

It's critically important for youth to have opportunities to learn and understand, to influence and shape policy. But as one anonymous youth respondent, (Teslin Tlingit, Tundra Biome) explained,

> To be able to move forward, we need to be able to have our voice at that table and have our voice being heard. And I think a big part of that is being able to understand policy. Once you are able to understand policy, it makes a world of difference. Create opportunities for people to understand policy, because that's hand in hand — when you're not able to understand it, you're almost there as a seat warmer, and they're almost using you there as a token.

Reporting on a youth-led participatory action research project led by Indigenous and northern youth, settler scholar Vanessa Sloan Morgan writes, "As youth themselves expressed, letting youth have a seat at the table does not fundamentally influence how decisions are made. In fact, engaging youth without doing so meaningfully or transparently perpetuates extractive relations and risks further estranging young people." (Sloan Morgan, 2020, p. 457).

Indigenous youth can decide for themselves when to accept or reject these tokenistic roles. As one person (Anishinaabe from Garden River First Nation, Mixed Boreal & Deciduous Forest Biome) explains,

> When I was in school, just not having enough financial stability, it was something that we had to do, that I had to do in order to make it through that system so that I can continue eating. Tokenism is a harmful, harmful practice done by. . .industry, government, and unfortunately, sometimes even our own Indigenous leaders. But it's also a place of power for these young people to learn their voice and learn how to speak up against things that they're not for.

Ashley Nadjiwon says she has "been in quite a bit of tokenized positions and places in academia, and then with government structures." She also refers to the courage it takes to fill these positions and some key teachings it can provide:

> I think by learning those systems and learning the way that they think, the way that they manipulate, the way that they play our people into thinking that we are part of the solution, I think there is incredible knowledge that I've been able to learn. [It] gave me some really valuable lessons in order to understand the language that is used in governance structures, the way that they think, the way that they structure their policies in order to make it sound like it's inclusive of Indigenous voices. I think sometimes we do have to go into those spaces and learn because, yeah . . . just break the system from within.

It is not that Indigenous youth should not take on these kinds of roles, nor should they feel any shame in doing so. There may be many very good reasons to do so: from building skills and networks to accessing paid work. However, organizations, educational institutions and governments all need to be going beyond inviting Indigenous speakers in tokenistic, one-off roles (for example, only being invited for the opening, blessing or a performance.) Instead, they should be working to create meaningful, long term and well supported roles for Indigenous youth—where their voices are included, heard and heeded in ways that lead to structural changes in the functioning of these institutions.

In the book *The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth*, Red Nations offers this vision for educational systems and a just energy transition, that meaningfully centre Indigenous people in very real ways:

> In addition to organizing campaigns and movements to address the other areas of struggle . . . we should demand that tribal leaders and Native educators be in charge of curriculum for Native students, including delivery in public schools that are not under the control of tribal jurisdictions. Until we can end our dependence on fossil fuels, and as a form of divestment and reinvestment, the revenue made from gas and oil on reservations and sacred sites should be given directly to Native communities to support their students on and off reservation. We should organize campaigns in our local school districts for mandatory Indigenous history in all K–12 social studies classes. Finally, we can develop a queer feminist labour platform by collaborating with LGBTQ2S+ student groups and organizing with teachers to increase resources and protections. (The Red Nation, 2021, p. 76-77.)

What the Youth Are Saying

We Need to Take Back Power Over the Land and Transform Governance and Political Systems

Similar to education systems, governance and legislative systems need to change drastically to uphold our rights and responsibilities to our lands and to support our climate leadership and solutions. First, settler policy-making approaches must be reversed, and policy must begin with local community observations, needs and efforts instead of imposing disconnected and general rules from above. Supporting local observations of the land and locally-developed solutions that prove their effectiveness should be starting points for climate policy making. For that approach to be effective, we need legislation that grants Indigenous Peoples access to their lands and control over their lands. Additionally, we need legislative tools to value and protect Indigenous knowledge systems.

The following section shares youth voices and visions on this subject.

A Bottom-Up Approach

We need to fight for and cultivate governance and political systems, at all levels, that:

- Centre the leadership of Indigenous folks, communities of colour, and youth.
- Centre the needs and decisions of the people and communities most impacted by the issues being addressed.
- Provide support and funding for impacted communities to make their own decisions and design and implement their own solutions.
- Structure our processes around consent, not consultation.
- Prioritize care and well-being for Indigenous communities.
- Ground themselves in local places, interests, and needs that determine what's happening at wider national and international scales.
- Engage whole communities in collective responsibilities, so that we're all shaping policies and feel invested in them rather than having them be imposed on us.
- Ground themselves in our rights, sovereignty, and self-determination over our own lands (i.e., Land Back).
- Ground themselves in ceremony and protecting sacred places and processes.

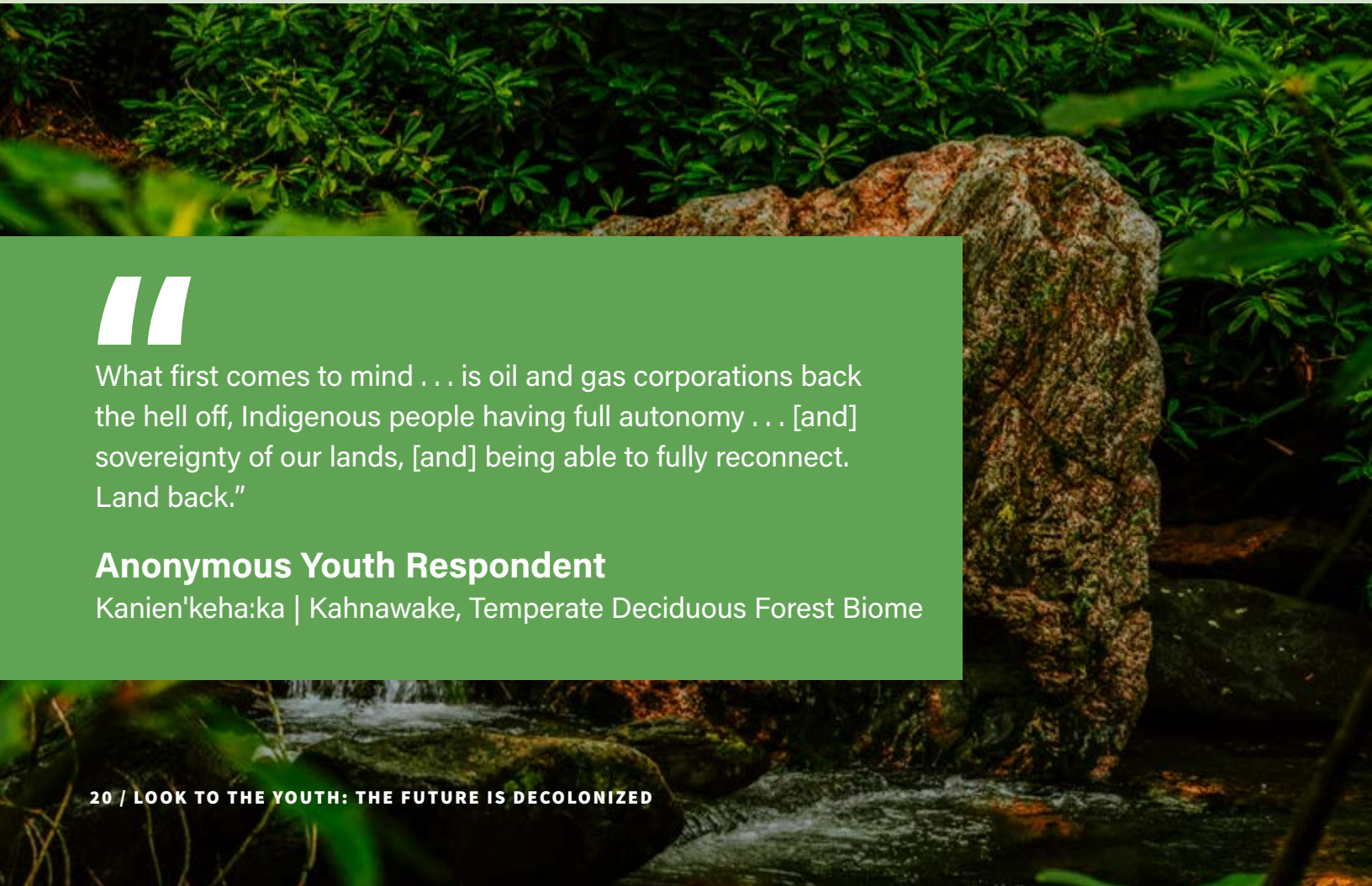
> "Building policy should be grounded and founded in ceremonial guidance, to really have that core of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of being."
>
> **Anonymous Youth Respondent**
> Teslin Tlingit | Tundra Biome

Indigenous Youth Roots[3] is a national, Indigenous youth-led organization that collaborates with communities to provide programs, grants, and opportunities that are grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and are designed to strengthen and amplify the voices of Indigenous youth. Indigenous Youth Roots (IYR) is a registered charity that provides Indigenous-based leadership, learning, and experiences to every youth that participates in their programs.

IYR also hosts a Centre for Indigenous Policy and Research[4], which provides tuition-free programs to train youth on policy. Throughout this program, Indigenous youth are given the tools to ensure their priorities are advanced and perspectives are reflected in policies that matter most to them.

---

3. Indigenous Youth Roots. (n.d.). *About Indigenous Youth Roots.* Retrieved from https://indigenousyouthroots.ca/about-indigenous-youth-roots#
4. Indigenous Youth Roots. (n.d.). *Policy school.* Retrieved from https://indigenousyouthroots.ca/programs/policy-school



> "What first comes to mind . . . is oil and gas corporations back the hell off, Indigenous people having full autonomy . . . [and] sovereignty of our lands, [and] being able to fully reconnect. Land back."

Anonymous Youth Respondent
Kanien'keha:ka | Kahnawake, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome

"

We call upon member states, to ensure that Indigenous youth are granted access to our lands and territories in order to protect and uphold our cultural rights and carry forward our food systems"

Anonymous Youth Respondent
Indigenous Youth Global Declaration on Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems, (2021, p. 4.)

Land Back

We understand Land Back to mean returning access to Indigenous Peoples to the lands stolen from us, holding decision-making power over what happens on our lands, and restoring the land's agency.

Land Back is necessary to bring us toward climate balance and human well-being.

In speaking with Elders in their communities, the Yukon youth we spoke to had learned that the low number of salmon in their rivers is due to their communities' disconnection from lands and teachings. Access to our lands is essential for practicing, teaching, and learning how to harvest. It is through this access that we can fulfill our responsibilities to protect the waters, salmon, and other relatives. For Mats'äsäna Mą (CAFN, Tundra Biome),

> That's obviously a huge thing. Being on the land is the first and foremost thing. I think it is super important because our people aren't doing that enough. . . it's knowing when to harvest, when not to harvest. Our people had traditional knowledge of when it was okay to harvest, to take this amount or not. One of the most powerful things protecting our lands and waters would be Indigenous ownerships and dictations and decisions, especially Indigenous-led, on-the-land healing, especially just doing what we used to do on the land, walking on the lands where our ancestors walked before us.

Climate leadership and solutions are naturally fostered when connection to land is supported, practiced, and grounded in Ancestral Knowledge. As one youth participant (Kahnawake, Temperate Deciduous Biome) put it, "These different communities. . ., they know the land, they know their environment — you have to give them the spaces and support them to make the decisions on their lands."

Our knowledge and decision making as Indigenous Peoples is important, as is the knowledge of the decision-making power of the land itself. "Wouldn't it be amazing if one day the Yukon River had legal personhood, so we can protect our salmon even further and protect the tributaries?" asks Nika Silverfox-Young (Little Salmon/ Carmacks First Nation, Tundra Biome.)

One youth (Carcross/Tagish, Tundra Biome) made it clear that the animals also share jurisdiction over the land: "The animals own a part of the land . . . During certain seasons . . . that's their part of the land and nobody's allowed to use it, because the animals own it."

By being on the land, and by listening to and learning from the land, waters and our animal relatives, we can know the best ways forward through a changing climate.

But we can not be out there doing that while colonial governments and industries and settlers are occupying and making decisions on our territories.

It is only through Land Back – full access to our territories and the restoration of our full jurisdiction over our lands and waters – that we will be able to fully flourish as climate leaders, enact our own climate solutions, and nurture healthy ecosystems able to maintain resilience as the climate changes.

"

...we are not protecting nature. We are nature protecting itself."

Climate Action Summit,
Parliament of the World's Religions, 2023

What the Youth Are Saying

Relationships Are At the Heart of Climate Action — and Everything Else

The youth from Kahnawà:ke Collective Impact explained that during their time at COP26 and COP27, being together and building relationships with each other and other Indigenous people from across the world served as a powerful antidote to the toxic environment at UN conferences. They highlighted the healing, grounding, and strengthening effects they found in being together and taking time to connect. They recommend that any other young Indigenous youth attending these kinds of spaces make an effort to do the same.

One youth participant shared that they "centered laughing with each other as a way to stay grounded. . . we centered relationship building and listening to other people's stories."

As another noted, "We'd come together and put our minds together and go over what we're going to take from the day, and really centre us on having a good mind."

Another participant added: "What we did a lot throughout every day is checking in on each other and making sure that we're okay".

The youths' main motivation in attending COP in the first place was to establish and develop relationships and build knowledge and capacity with other Indigenous communities worldwide. Carlee explained:

> We really wanted to attend COP, bringing everything that we know about our community, our Nation, our understanding of climate action, and share that. And in return, we hoped to meet other Indigenous youth and hear their approaches, their Nation's ways of looking at climate action, and the solutions that they have, and hopefully bring that back.

"Strengthen our own communities so that we're strong internally, and then we can support our brothers and sisters across Turtle Island."

Anonymous Youth Respondent

Kanien'keha:ka | Kahnawake, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome

ICA has several youth-focused climate Initiatives you can check out:

- Our **Youth Leaders Trello** board provides access to youth opportunities, trainings, jobs, resources, events, organizations, and community.
- We've launched a **Youth Leader Zine**. In Issue 1, "*The Stories We Carry,*" Indigenous youth across Mother Earth were asked to share their perspectives on what The Stories We Carry means to them in relation to climate change, social justice, and cultural practices through a variety of artistic mediums, including visual art, poetry, and more!
- We have relaunched our **Indigenous Youth Wellness Honorarium**! These honorariums are intended for Indigenous youth engaged in frontline activism or climate justice organizing. At ICA, we know that financial and mental health barriers often impact Indigenous Peoples when engaging in climate justice work. By creating this fund, we hope to remove some of the barriers that come up when upholding our sacred responsibilities. You can find all of the above on our Youth Leadership Page.

- We offer the **Youth Solidarity Support Fund** to Indigenous youth engaged in community organizing and supporting strategic campaigns around climate justice activism, reinforcing their place as leaders driving climate change solutions. The fund is intended to support cultural knowledge, healing justice, networking and collaborative projects, online events and opportunities, and skill building or training opportunities. The Youth Solidarity Support Fund is a critical component of our approach to amplifying Indigenous youth needs, experiences, and aspirations. If you or someone you know would benefit from the support of ICA, please consider applying!

- To learn more about all of ICA's youth-related initiatives, click **here**.

Are you an Indigenous youth? If so, are there ideas, critiques or perspectives that are missing from this chapter? Are there things in this chapter you felt were particularly important or interesting? How do you hope to see climate policy developed in the future?

Please share your thoughts with us! You can jot them down here and offer your feedback to ICA by emailing: **info@indigenousclimateaction.com**. Make sure that you include "DCP" in the subject line!

If you are not an Indigenous youth, what are some concrete ways you can centre Indigenous youth leadership in your own work and perspectives? Jot them down here!

Reclaiming Climate Policy, On Our Own Terms.

"We always knew how to take care of ourselves. We knew where the medicines lay. We knew how to take care of the land. The land always took care of us. You know, just let us do this. Let us go back to what we were doing best."

Ginnifer Menominee

Wasauksing First Nation | Boreal Forest Biome

As outlined in Chapter Two, to many Indigenous people, the word “policy” represents colonial control, coercion, oppression. Indeed, policy is derived from the same common root as “police." To explore whether and how climate policy can be removed from these colonial processes and instead embedded in our own, we asked the people who we spoke to: How do you think Indigenous knowledge can become policy? *How do you think we can bring together Indigenous knowledge and policy making? What differences would doing so make in your community?*

These questions sparked inspiring and powerful conversations about what climate policy making could look like and what it could do if it were led by Indigenous people, and was grounded in our own worldviews, laws, governance systems and our relations with the land.

We sat down with the eight Yukon youth who are leading the Yukon First Nations Climate Action Fellowship to seek their vision. As one of the youth (Carcross and Tagish Nations, Tundra Biome) told us,

> I can look at policy in both ways. You can see it from the negative point of view — like as the very thing that pretty much brought us down. But also you could look at it another way and change it where we take back that power and make it into policy? Yes, I look at policy and I don't like that word. But I'm also like, we are totally going to be able to take it as our own and make it our own thing. We're gonna change policy to make it something that Indigenous people and people in general aren't scared of.

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, (Dënesųłine, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation [ACFN], Boreal Forest Biome) shares that, to her,

> reclaiming policy would be about [a] decolonial process, which is to deconstruct the systems as they exist, and rebuilding them with different metrics . . . that value what we feel brings betterment or joy or happiness to our communities. . . .How do we build policies and structures that are not wholly built on colonial systems? . . . We're gonna build it. Our way. With our systems, our structures. We're going to take it back. We're going to take the tool that you use to oppress us. And we're going to claim it as our own.

Eriel went on to explain that our Indigenous approaches to policy would be grounded in the self-determination and sovereignty of each Nation in order to develop their own governance systems and policies. As such, she told us, there would not be “Indigenous policy” per se. Instead there will be “Mi'kmaq Law and Dene Law and then even subcategories of that — like Chippewa Dene Law and Swampy Cree Law, Woodland Cree Law.” Eriel explained that

> ‘Indigenous’ is a blanket term to recognize the diversity of Indigenous Peoples that exist across Turtle Island. And that each community has a rich history — of thousands and thousands of years of governance systems that existed pre-contact. We are inspiring our communities to draw from their ancestral knowledge to develop laws that helped to govern their lands and traditional territories to support their cultural survival as well as contributing those knowledge systems to developing ecological frameworks for the protection of planetary health for all.

As Potawatomi scholar Kyle Whyte wrote in their chapter "*Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene*" from *English Language Notes* 55.1–2,

"Holistic policies that reach across disciplines and disrupt the broken systems that have been imposed on us. Removing the silos that exist in colonial views of land to create fluid, dynamic, responsive and culturally inherent approaches to land protection"

Anonymous
Cree | Mountain Biome

> Renewing Indigenous knowledges can bring together Indigenous communities to strengthen their self-determined planning for climate change. . .renewing knowledges [involves] renewing relationships with humans and nonhumans and restoring reciprocity among the relatives (Whyte, 2017, p. 158.)

Many of the other folks we spoke to also discussed this potential and talked about what Indigenous-led climate policy looks like. A common theme that arose is that unlike settler policy, which typically looks at issues and solutions in silos, Indigenous policy making is community-driven and holistic, bringing into one lens all the factors and forces at play.

Foundations for Indigenous-Led Policy Making

A holistic policy lens doesn't just focus on humans. As Indigenous Peoples, we understand ourselves in relationship to the natural world. Such policy informs how we can live in a good way, not just in relation with other human beings but with our animal and plant kin as well. Good policy must be inclusive of all our relatives. A holistic perspective recognizes the interconnectedness of all things. It considers the land and water, culture, and healing. Policies are not just thinking about these things in theory but require passing along values systems and truly reconnecting with land. In this way, we can begin to break down the silos imposed by settler governments. A good example is Wahkohtowin (Plains Cree) which is embedded in kinship - our relationship with our surrounding environments, communities, and natural laws.

Folks made clear that for climate policy to effect positive change for the climate, it must be rooted in an understanding of truth and reconciliation and be inclusive, representative, and equitable. Thanks to the work of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, and many other reports on the state of Indigenous Peoples in so-called Canada, there has been a new wave of policy making practices that centre reconciliation. This sets a precedent for what is required of climate policy as well.

As Robert Maytwayashing (Anishinaabe, Boreal Forest Biome) reminds us, settler governments must respect existing treaty relationships:

> They weren't agreements where we sold or ceded, gave up, relinquished or were conquered for our lands. They were agreements, to share our lands and resources 50/50. You know, we're now in the era of what they call truth and reconciliation. And I always remember the words of this one Elder at one of these. I, as an Indigenous person, have nothing to reconcile. I have done no wrong. We're still waiting for our partners to own up to their end of the sacred agreements. And until that happens, what hope is there for actually moving forward together?

Indigenous Peoples have been either excluded from climate policy making tables, or we have been invited to the table in tokenistic ways. This is not okay. It violates our rights to self-determination and it leads to failing policy. To ensure a future for the next seven generations, as one member of the Métis Nation of Alberta made clear, our communities have to be able to actually influence policy in a real, meaningful way. A policy that makes it

"I am busting into conversations I was not necessarily invited to and creating pathways for my voice to be heard. But, at times it is challenging to spend my energy in the most strategic way. There is much going on and much to do"

Anonymous
Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg | Boreal Forest Biome

mandatory to have more Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour represented in decision making, as one person we spoke with (Metis Nation of Alberta, Grasslands Biome) explained, "would make a big difference, changing the way society thinks and feels."

As one person (Inuk, Tundra Biome) told us in an interview,

> Policy is so intimate for us. We've had a very abusive relationship with policy. Since we've had this lived experience of the abuses we face through the Indian Act and different ways of colonization, that means we're actual hardcore policy experts that deserve to be in those spaces to actually make them better and less colonial. There are already experts everywhere within the territories [who] know what needs to be done.

An important pathway forward is focusing policies around protecting Indigenous rights. Policy in so-called Canada has been used as a means of inflicting genocide. We need policies, including climate policy, that will protect against that. All policy needs to take into full account that, as one respondent (Eelünaapéewi Lahkéewiit Delaware Nation, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) puts it, "I have a right to the land as an Indigenous person, which includes having a say in economical, political and cultural developments that are happening that directly affect our livelihood."

So far, we've heard that Indigenous-led policy is grounded in a holistic approach, truth and reconciliation, inclusive, representative, and equitable processes, and the full respect of our rights. Others brought to the conversation is the fact that good policy making includes collective discussions that bring our collective ideas, goals and decisions to a place of action. As one anonymous respondent (K'atlo'deeche First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) puts it, "Policies don't become useful until they become actions. Words are cheap unless they connect to action. I think that where policy meets action, is where governance happens."

"To First Nations, a 'policy' was/is simply a way of living or knowing."

Anonymous Respondent
Dawson City | Boreal Forest Biome

Others brought up that integrity and accountability are at the heart of good policy making. For one respondent (Plains Cree, Boreal Forest Biome),

> Policy means integrity. When you write a policy and sign it, you are committing to do what you said you were going to do. You walk your talk. I have seen many policies being created, and in reality, they are a piece of paper that is an 'ideal' to strive to live up to, not a reference for people to know how to act and how not to act. They are usually not enforced and not lived by governments, companies, or people.

It's not enough to just improve settler processes of policy making to include all the elements mentioned above. Indigenous-led policy making must centre our own worldviews, perspectives and practices, and diverse approaches to governance.

Ginnifer Menominee makes clear that, in her view, we have always had our own policy making:

> We had policy within our ceremonies. We had policies in our day to day life. They were brought out from watching our natural world and looking at creation. We had original instructions given to us. How do we follow those now? How do we maintain that in a colonial state? I think it's really going back to listening to land, listening to our youth. Listening to our Elders. Where are they trying to take us? The land is telling us a whole bunch of things. Kids are telling us a whole bunch of things. Our Elders are telling us a whole bunch of things that are happening right now. . . . We have these protocols for everything that we do in our lives, through day-to-day work, through ceremony, through birth to death. We have these policies of how we are going to walk through life.

Indigenous Policy: Rooted in Relationship and Natural Law

While settler and Indigenous policy share some common elements, many people pointed out important ways they fundamentally differ from each other. One huge difference is that Indigenous policy is based on relationship to the land, ancestral knowledge, and concern for future generations.

Carole Monture (Six Nations, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) shared that:

> from a Haudenosaunee perspective, our policy would be informed from our creation story and traditional knowledge. Our course of action is informed by the actions of our ancestors and for the generations to come. It is not static or created by just one entity but [is] a bottom-up approach that takes into consideration all of creation.

Many people we spoke to made clear that while our own diverse forms of policy making and governance are strong, flourishing, and in service to us and our relatives, colonial governments have actively and internationally sought to destroy and dismantle these over the last several hundreds of years. Through the Indian Act, Métis scrip and road allowances,[5] Inuit land acquisition, and the violation of treaties, our own policy making processes and systems have been eroded. But they are still here. As Robert Maytwayashing (Anishinaabe, Boreal Forest Biome) told us, "Even when they created laws to suppress our ceremonies, you know what ended up happening? Our ceremonies simply went underground."

Indigenous ways of knowing and being are still here and continue to be reinvigorated and strengthened. But even as colonial governments maintain their intention to include us and our knowledge at climate policy tables, they continue to actively and violently repress the resurgence of Indigenous policy making. A clear example of this unfolds in Wet'suwet'en territory, where the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) continues to violently intervene in the rights of the traditional Chiefs to protect their lands and waterways by opposing the Coastal Gas

---

5. Road allowances are areas of unused land where Métis families settled in the late 1800s to the late 1900s after facing dispossession, migration, and forced relocations. These communities were sustained until they were forcibly removed between 1930 and 1960. See Logan, Tricia. 2021. "MétisRoad Allowance Communities." The Canadian Encyclopedia. July 19, 2021. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/metis-road-allowance-communities.

Language Nests are designed for First Nation communities in British Columbia and are programs to immerse First Nations children in their language. Language Nests comprise online tools and resources to support communities in using the program. *The Language Nest Handbook* and online toolkit are designed to guide facilitators with essential information on how to teach language as well as provide information on overcoming challenges of teaching and learning. Language Nests are designed to revitalize First Nations languages in a holistic way by extending language to families and preserving them for future generations. (First Peoples' Cultural Council, 2020.)

> "[A] just path to a sustainable future must consider all relations, an approach best expressed through Indigenous knowledge systems, legal orders, governance and conceptions of justice."
>
> **Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor, writing with colleagues Whitaker and Sritharan (2020, p. 37)**

Link pipeline. The colonial project of actively trying to destroy our own governance systems is not over. This needs to be acknowledged.

As colonial governments continue to prioritize exploitation and extraction driven by profit, Indigenous Peoples continue to practice knowledge systems and protocols that prioritize life. The people we spoke to emphasized righting relations, reciprocity, and listening to the land as central to Indigenous policy making.

Citing Muscogee scholar Daniel Wildcat, Potawatomi scholar Kyle Whyte writes,

> Reality is more than just facts and figures collected so that humankind might wisely use resources. Rather, to know "it" — reality — requires respect for the relationships and relatives that constitute the complex web of life. I call this Indigenous realism, and it entails that we, members of humankind, accept our inalienable responsibilities as members of the planet's complex life system, as well as our inalienable rights. (Whyte, 2018, p. 224-225.)

One respondent (Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement, Boreal Forest Biome) pointed to the central role that language needs to play in our policy, emphasizing that "Indigenous languages come from our lands. And if our language is not represented in those policies to protect the land, how can we do that?" The policies that will be able to protect our communities and lands need to be based in our respective languages. The person further explained that the English language, which was used to colonize these lands and force us onto reservations, is not equipped to guide our policy making.

Ashley Nadjiwon (Anishinaabe kwe, Wikwemikong Unceded Territory, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome), echoed this, envisioning how:

> having the language embedded throughout [climate policy] will help keep connected with that living spirit embedded within that language. [Climate policy] can be grounded in reclamation of the language, as well as our relationship with future generations and this kinship that we need to rebuild with the earth and with all of our relations.

While settler policies interpret the land as a resource to be exploited, Robert Maytwayashing (Anishinaabe, Boreal Forest Biome) makes clear that Indigenous policy making starts from a different understanding:

> The earth is alive and needs to be respected. It is the source of life, not a resource to be exploited. We see the world and earth around us as our relatives. We recognise that we need our relatives to survive.

One person (Algonquin First Nation, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) expressed a similar sentiment speaking about mining:

> One of the hardest, most challenging things that our people will have to confront is the mining because sometimes corporations don't understand the things that they're doing wrong to the land — they don't really have that sense of understanding in a spiritual way, how it affects the land, the waters, and everything. They just want to take, take, take — that kind of mentality can be the hardest to try to stop.

Jeff Corntassel (Citizen of Cherokee Nation, Mountain Biome) spoke of "policies with community protocols which are grounded in respectful relations and responsibilities to those relationships that promote our health and well-being." Other people we spoke to also proposed that 'protocol' is a better alternative to describing our collective agreements than the word 'policy'.

As Veronica Rose Waechter (Gitxsan and Gitanmaax, Mountain Biome) explains,

> The word policy brings up for me what my Auntie said — 'racist colonial policies.' I think 'protocol' is a much better term that would be less threatening for Indigenous people, because we already practice those, although Canadian policy has tried to stop us from practicing protocol. Protocol to me is not like a policy/law that essentially restricts, but instead protocol keeps you mindful of your agency as a person and the power each of us need to direct in a good way, for all. If we all practiced protocol, maybe the world would be a better place.

Additionally, "protocols" may be a better framing for other reasons. Policies tend to change as a result of turnover in governments. They are volatile. The ways Indigenous knowledge guides climate-related paths forward need to go deeper than policies that change with the political winds of so-called Canada. The word "protocol" holds steady due to its basis in Natural Law — meaning it flows from our observations of the natural world and Indigenous legal systems. Like the laws of gravity, Natural Law does not change over time. Our Knowledge and

"Policy is Natural Law. We are not separate from it and we don't dictate it. We are not above nature, we are part of nature. These teachings would have been passed down to us from our ancestors — but so much has been stolen and we need to work to regain it."

Shawna Gray
Ceg A Kin Nakoda Nation | Grasslands Biome

traditions change over time. Natural Law stands firm.

Whether we refer to Indigenous policies or protocols, the conversations we have had tell us there is a very strong emphasis on the centrality of relationships. Shawna Gray explained that, in her worldview, "The meaning of policy is the acting upon of right relations, following our valued teachings to engage in relationships with each other, the land, the water, our animal kin and plant ancestors."

These relations are fostered and maintained through traditional teachings, and are the basis of taking good care of the land. If this connection is missing, people will not be able to take care of the land in the necessary way. As one person (Mohawk, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) explained, "It becomes easy to mistreat the earth when we do not see ourselves connected to her."

But through traditional teachings across our diverse cultures, there is a shared understanding and relationship with Mother Earth as a living entity. From that fundamental philosophy, Carole Monture explained, our policies and protocols are developed: "Our teachings encourage reciprocity with the land, only taking what you need, and wasting nothing. Our teachings demonstrate how to live a life that is in balance with the natural world." Instead of trying to control nature, "We see we are a part of it, we take care" (Pierre-Luc Gauthier, Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk, Boreal Forest Biome).

Many folks we talked to spoke of Indigenous policies and protocols as grounded in ceremony. As Melanie Dene (Mikisew Cree First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome), shared,

> It all begins with ceremony and that relationship we hold. If we do not start there, how can you speak on anything else? Ceremony is a good place to start to guide this work. We cannot speak on one thing and forget that there are protocols we must carry out before any work that we do, especially when it comes to land, water, animals, medicines, and Treaty.

> "Truly transformative climate action can only be attained when based on a reciprocal, interdependent, and learning relationship with Mother Earth."
>
> **Anishinaabe scholar Graeme Reed, writing with Indigenous and settler collaborators (Reed et al. 2022, p. 529)**

Darrell Fors (Treaty 8 Territory, Boreal Forest Biome) maintains that traditional teachings and ceremony

> help connect us to the spirit of the land. Ceremonies help to clear the path to recognize that we are all sacred and dependent on each other. When our hearts are ready to work together we can experience a love for the land which isn't based on greed or economic gains.

Through traditional teachings, through ceremony, through relationship with the land, we have access to Natural Law and other sources of Indigenous law. This too, came up many times in the conversations we had. To Sarah Jackknife (Cree Métis, Elizabeth Métis Settlement, Grasslands Biome) "Indigenous policy interprets how the Indigenous law will be implemented in the everyday."

As Sarah explained,

> Indigenous knowledge is a form of policy and operates within oral frameworks that guide how Indigenous Peoples interact with their environment. Western laws guide policies and regulation development and Indigenous laws do the same thing.

One anonymous respondent (Heiltsuk Nation, Mountain Biome) expressed hope about a future where "our traditional territories [go] back to being governed by the ancient laws that our ancestors put in place."

Many of the people we spoke to made clear that Indigenous-led climate policy is, or should be, grounded in Natural Law. As one person from the Métis Nation of Alberta said, "I truly believe that all aspects of our ways of being are applicable, because everything was about reciprocity and sustainability." This means that every teaching can inform climate policy.

"Traditional teachings speak of humility to the greatness of everything other than ourselves. How do we put that into climate policy? Traditional teachings speak of listening to the environment, learning from the environment. How do we put that into policy for people that know it all and act like they don't have ears? How do we make humility a policy?"

Dana Strong
Anishinaabe | Wauzhushk Onigum Nation | Boreal Forest Biome

Indigenous Ways of Knowing Are Crucial to Climate Solutions

The climate solutions needed are quite literally rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing. Chapter Six will centre the diversity of Indigenous ways of knowing, each stemming from specific places and cultures, as the first of six Pathways Restoring Balance and Indigenous-led Climate Solutions.

Hanna Paul (Métis Nation of Alberta member, Buttertown [Fort Vermilion District], Boreal Forest Biome) spoke of how they

> believe in every single sense of traditional teachings. Indigenous Peoples are the land. We are extensions of our specific territories, and so climate policies would actually hold weight if they were specific to the land's needs, based on the people's knowledge of the territories.

One person (Keeseekoose, Grasslands Biome) described how:

> Traditional teachings encapsulate all of life experience and show us how to live in a balanced way. Traditional teachings share with us the ways to preserve the land as human beings with the gifts we have been given from Creator. We have a responsibility on this planet as a species with the intelligence to uncover the mysteries of the universe, and we are using this ability with a great amount of recklessness in the name of profit.

Daniel Green (Kispiox, Mountain Biome) underscored this shared understanding that Indigenous knowledges are key to good climate policy making: "Having a well balanced spirit, sense of healing, and stewardship will give us a more connected and practical experience while working with climate change policies."

Through rich, inspiring, and clarifying conversations, we've heard that Indigenous knowledges, ceremonies, relations with land, and Natural Law are each sources of intelligence and guidance for building climate policies. However, there is a caution against seeing all Indigenous Peoples and cultures as the same, or seeing Indigenous knowledges as uniform or unchanging. There is need for care, nuance, and specificity in the ways we draw on Indigenous ways of knowing in guiding the way forward.

To meaningfully engage with Indigenous knowledge we must prioritize building relationships with the land. Sometimes, doing so requires us to grapple with complex choice—choices that put our cultural values against economic gain. Ellen Gabriel (Kanien'kehá:ka, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) offered this example:

> My community of Kanehsatà:ke is rich in uranium and niobium and there are still efforts to obtain permits to open up the old uranium mine. These elements help feed the status quo of capitalistic war machine as niobium is used to strengthen steel used in tanks and in the space station.

When we speak of traditional knowledges, or traditional teachings, there's the potential for conceptions of our knowledge to be fixed in time, rendered unchangeable. But as one person (Gitxsan Nation, Mountain Biome) explains,

> Indigenous knowledges have always evolved. It wasn't until colonization that we started talking about 'traditional' or 'traditions.' But these knowledges always evolved. And those relate to policy in the same way that we have protocol to different ceremonies and lands.

Reclaiming Indigenous Governance

Reclaiming and rebuilding Indigenous governance is vital to Indigenous-led policy, including climate policy. However, colonial governance still stands in the way. As one person explained,

> I kind of wish that we would be able to take down the Indian Act, because this separates a lot of our people. And I find the Indian Act is like the gate to the land—the corporations go through these people to get access to the territory. I find this is how a lot of these agreements are being signed.

Indigenous Nations still wrestle with the impact of colonially imposed governance systems, such as Chief and Council systems (imposed by the Indian Act). As one anonymous respondent (Mountain Biome) said,

> I feel like a lot of things are missed, or nobody is bringing these things together in a collective manner. For example, I know there are some people in my community that are pushing water issues, but it's still really divided. Because there's the Chief and Council and all the colonial problems that come with that.

The above contributions underscore the urgency of reviving governance structures that promote a more inclusive approach to policy making. As an anonymous respondent reminds us, "We used to have traditional governance systems, or we had, like youth councils, Elders councils, not just what had been given to us through like the Indian Act of like, just a Chief and Council." Indigenous governance structures transcend the limitations imposed by colonial governance.

Indigenous governance expands beyond the borders of reserves. As Ellen Gabriel described, "It's your community, and your nations' homelands which extend beyond the colonial borders of a reserve."

> "Alternate laws, knowledges, legal, and governance structures at every level and scale are required if we, as humanity, are to live well with the earth and support the continuance of life. Existing Indigenous systems of understanding offer living examples and insights into the development of such sustainable alternatives."
>
> **Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor, writing with colleagues Whitaker and Sritharan (2020, p. 38)**

Rebuilding First Nations Governance is "a six-year research project to identify the most effective ways for First Nations to transition from Indian Act administrations to self-determining governments. Project researchers work with First Nations who participate in the Centre's Transitional Governance Program. Community-led research emerges from the priorities identified by the Rights holders — the people — to develop a roadmap and tools to help other First Nations reclaim Indigenous forms of decision-making and revitalize Indigenous governance practices. (First Nations Governance Centre.)"

In recentering Indigenous governance, one respondent described the importance of treaties that are based in specific Indigenous traditions:

> I used to think it would take a treaty with the government, but not like one of those written, modern treaties. It has to be something that comes from way in the past, the way the east side has done treaties here, through wampum belts. I think those would mean so much.

As they further explained,

> For me as a spiritual person, I would see that as a way like, Creator would sanction these laws, and then if they try to go against, and then there's some things that happen, in a spiritual way where it would be prevented in some ways, that's why I think those are very powerful . . . It would have to take a movement of people, a lot of people to come together for the government to understand what we mean. I think our people still have a lot of power . . . because our people still carry the sovereignty to the land. There's nothing out there that says that the government owns or can do whatever he wants, you know, it's not there yet. So while there's still time, it's . . . that would need to be given a chance to see if that would work.

In this chapter, we have heard from those who are reimagining what policy can be—not as a colonial tool, but toward something holistic that begins from our responsibilities and teachings Indigenous knowledges and protocols are deeply rooted in a relationship with the land and Natural Law and are a source of hope in the face of the climate crisis. The conversations we've presented throughout this chapter emphasize the importance of recognizing and respecting the diverse protocols, knowledges, and governance structures of Indigenous Nations across Turtle Island. We need Indigenous-led climate policies that prioritize our rights, uphold Natural Law, and foster right relations with the land for a sustainable future. While we know that Indigenous knowledge is necessary to address the climate crisis, we need settlers to approach this work with humility and a willingness to enter into a reciprocal relationship with our Earth by acknowledging and fighting against the ongoing colonial efforts in so-called Canada to suppress and oppose Indigenous governance systems.

Indigenous governance systems extend beyond the confines of colonial borders and offer a pathway toward more just climate policies. It is necessary that we centre Indigenous knowledges and governance as climate solutions and as a powerful force for change. In the next and final chapter of this report, we turn to Pathways and Solutions to help this call to action become a reality.

In your Nation or community, how is policy being developed?

What would you like to see happen differently? How could local policy making be more aligned with Natural Law and your community's own traditional governance systems and laws?

An idea for a community-wide activity you could help instigate and support:

- Get familiar with the Rebuilding First Nations Governance project: **https://fngovernance.org/rebuilding-first-nations-governance/**
- Learn about the SIX STEPS TO SELF-DETERMINATION (How to Get Beyond the Indian Act). **https://fngovernance.org/get-beyond-the-indian-act/**
- Convene a meeting with your community to learn about, discuss and make plans for working through these SEVEN STEPS TO TRANSFORM YOUR NATION together. **https://fngovernance.org/transform-your-nation/**

Pathways for Restoring Balance

“Indigenous Peoples and our diverse knowledges are truly the only way that climate change can be combated. That means a change in economic, political, and social systems.”

Hanna Paul

Métis Nation of Alberta member | Buttertown [Fort Vermilion District], Boreal Forest Biome

> "Significant shifts around all resource extraction industries should be aligned with traditional teachings and ways of knowing. These longstanding systems of relating to the planet have much to teach 'Canadians'."
>
> **Shawna Gray**
> Ceg A Kin [Carry the Kettle] Nakoda Nation | Grasslands Biome

This chapter shares ten categories of climate solutions that Indigenous peoples in so-called Canada are already enacting:

- Relocalizing Governance and Cconomies
- Reconnection to Land, Culture and Language
- Indigenous Food Sovereignty
- Energy Sovereignty; Taking Care of the Water
- Taking Care of the Forests; Taking Care of our Animal Relatives and Their Habitats
- Taking Care of Our Cities
- Taking Care of Our Waste
- Transforming Legal Systems to Protect What We Value and Require.

Additionally, this chapter highlights Six Pathways to support the fundamental shift to Indigenous-led solutions. They are:

- **Pathway 1:** Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being (Decentering Settler Ways.)
- **Pathway 2:** Asserting, Defending, and Respecting Indigenous Self-Determination, Sovereignty, and Consent.
- **Pathway 3:** Redistributing Power, Wealth, and Land (Relinquishing Settler Control of Lands and Lives).
- **Pathway 4:** Decentralizing Climate Governance and Building Community Power.
- **Pathway 5:** Building Powerful, Intersectional, Inter-National Movements.
- **Pathway 6:** Ensuring Accountability and Reparations.

Six pathways and ten categories of climate solutions have emerged from our conversations. These pathways and solutions present ways to restore balance with our lands and waters as well as human and non-human inhabitants. The urgency of this task cannot be understated. It is

"I think that Indigenous voices and stories need to be told more about how Nations and communities are building their own resilient infrastructure to serve themselves and the people. There are many amazing projects across 'Canada' where Indigenous Peoples are doing great work, reducing emissions, and creating resilient infrastructure, and people just don't hear about it. If we could showcase this work, mainstream society could see that it is possible to get off of fossil fuel energy systems, and do it within this generation—starting now."

Anonymous Respondent
Boreal Forest Biome

important to think of these pathways and solutions not as a list from which to pick and choose but as a whole; these pathways reinforce one another. We must do all this work simultaneously.

The time for talking about the need for deep transformation is over. It's time to do the work—all of it.

Indigenous-Led Climate Solutions

The six pathways outlined in the second half of this chapter offer concrete ways to shift political and economic systems in order to weaken the grasp of colonial control and make space for Indigenous land-based solutions to emerge, take hold and flourish, and to build new economic and political systems.

We spoke to many Indigenous people who are envisioning and working on climate solutions. In this section, we will be highlighting some of their efforts.

Three important caveats:

1. The term "Indigenous-led solutions" doesn't excuse settlers and allies from the responsibility of implementing these recommendations. Settler cooperation and support in Indigenous-led climate work is critical. As The Red Nation tells us, "Indigenous political structures and economic systems do not apply only to Indigenous people. Our liberation is bound to the liberation of all humans and the planet. What we seek is a world premised on Indigenous values of interspecies responsibility and balance" (The Red Nation, 2021, p.35.)
2. While many of the proposed solutions are grounded in Traditional knowledges, they are innovative. As ICA Executive Director, Eriel Deranger, has made clear, in looking to Indigenous solutions, it's important to avoid tropes and stereotypes. "The reality," Eriel shares "is that Indigenous people are innovative people [who] are looking at how our Ancestral knowledge systems can help to bolster and increase the effectiveness of western and technological approaches."
3. While this chapter is framed around decolonizing climate policy, it is not only climate policy that requires these transformative, Indigenous-led approaches. All policy and decision-making in so-called Canada, from housing and health policy to foreign affairs and fiscal policy must also follow these paths towards decentering settler control and centering Indigenous Rights and Knowledges.

"The ways of life that Indigenism practices are not inherent in Indigenous peoples' DNA but the result of myriad centuries of relations with places. Altered and sometimes compromised, these ways of life, 'cultures,' continue to serve up values that need to be understood as alternative imaginaries that once existed all over the world."

Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million, (2018, p. 26-27)

Solution 1

Relocalizing Governance and Economies

Though climate change is a global issue, solutions must be grounded in specific places, landscapes, and communities in order for them to truly serve those places and peoples. We need new ways of organizing ourselves to effectively address the diverse needs arising from ongoing changes in environmental realities. For example, empower Indigenous communities to respond to crises in their own ways rather than relying on state-led interventions. It makes little sense for the federal government to set climate policies for diverse communities all the way from Mi'kmaq to Salish territories. Instead, we need "hyper-local solutions that address community needs based on community leads." (Anonymous Respondent, Mountain Biome.)

Aleesha Jones from the Nlaka'pamux Nation and the Mountain Biome points out that for many Indigenous communities, enacting these solutions is a "difficult task in a world thoroughly reliant on global exchange and capitalism … [in which] colonizers have intentionally created the current socio-economic state in which many Indigenous communities are reliant on the western world for many things." Still, she notes, "a significant goal for many communities is to increase sustainability and self-reliance",

Many of the folks we spoke with envision localized economies and livelihoods. Initiatives include developing community-led food systems, educational systems, water systems, and non-timber forest economies. It's important that these localized systems are supported with adequate resources, generate local employment, and produce revenue that remains in the community. By generating land-based jobs, self-sufficiency and self-determination also improve (Anonymous, Mountain Biome.)

Ginnifer Menominee (Wasauksing First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) says she dreams of "being able to grow food on our own territory, be able to utilize the water in our territory, to have infrastructure where we don't have to rely on the outside . . . you know, taking communities and going off grid and going back to the land."

Solution 2

Reconnection to Land, Culture and Language

The Indigenous scholars we read and the people we spoke to all emphasized that reconnecting to our lands, cultures and languages are climate solutions in and of themselves. As an anonymous survey respondent from the Boreal Forest Biome wrote, we need to be “taking on our roles and responsibilities and occupying our lands… getting as much knowledge as possible from our Elders and knowledge keepers. There are many ways we need to fight climate change: direct action, farming, fishing, working in government, they are all important. But I think my most valuable learning is coming from being on the land and in ceremony.”

It’s about learning from our Elders and it’s also about holding this knowledge for the generations still to come. One anonymous respondent does this “kind of work so that future generations will be able to do the same thing I am doing — like sugar bushing, seed saving, hide tanning — all these things that I want the future generations to learn.” (Anishinaabe, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome)

Our relationships with each other and with our plant and animal relatives, can help us reclaim our own approaches to climate change. One person (Dënesųłiné from Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) explained: "the policy, quote, unquote, that helps to govern the lands came from the land. It came from the land, and it didn't need to be written down because it was based on symbiotic relationships. And when you broke that order, when you broke natural law, then there were consequences that you could not run away from." As Jolene Patrick (N'Quatqua, Mountain Biome) suggested: "The highest traditional laws can be implemented—take only what you need, respect for all beings, balance, honouring Mother Earth and all mothers."

Closely connected to our relationship with the land are our languages. Relearning our languages is a climate solution. Nika Silverfox-Young, a youth from Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation in the Tundra Biome, told us about how she is learning her language from an Elder in her community. “It's really incredible just how much knowledge is in the language. Like, you can't really learn your culture until you learn your language, because there's so much behind that.”

While some folks have Elders, teachers and knowledge keepers close by to learn from, others shared that they are learning their culture through books, or using the internet to connect to leaders in their community to share knowledge (Anonymous Respondent, Tundra Biome.)

One respondent (Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement, Boreal Forest Biome) shared an inspiring example of the **First Nations University of Canada**. The institution is First Nations-owned and is located on the site of a former residential school. They explain that they "took back the power of that building and made it this First Nation university that created their own Indigenous curriculum to offset the effects of colonization."

As the university's website explains, "The First Nations University of Canada seeks to have an ongoing transformative impact through education based on a foundation of Indigenous knowledge. The Regina campus is situated on the atim kâ-mihkosit (Red Dog) Urban Reserve, Star Blanket Cree Nation and Treaty 4 Territory. Star Blanket is the first First Nation in Canada to create an urban reserve specifically dedicated to the advancement of education."

Solution 3

Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Central to the colonization of Indigenous Peoples by the Canadian state is the regulation of food distribution and control over access to land for agricultural purposes and hunting. Today, food should be one of the key pillars of the fight against climate change, rather than an instrument of oppression and subjugation.

A number of respondents referred to the concept of Indigenous food sovereignty. This idea responds to the colonial impacts of our food systems. It is rooted in self determination and "our ability to respond to our own needs for healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods." (Anonymous Respondent, Temperate Deciduous Forest) Realizing Indigenous food sovereignty means drawing on longstanding traditional knowledges and the deep connections with our plant and animal relatives that were built over thousands of years.

Food sovereignty in Indigenous communities involves moving away from commercial agriculture and food distribution, which is monopolized by large corporations and driven by commercial interests. "Investments in small farms and local farming initiatives" (Anonymous Respondent, Boreal Forest Biome) and "financial support for community gardens" (Marjorie Dawn Paleshi, Metis from Saskatchewan, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) are needed to develop locally-controlled sources of food.

Local production would "increase ecological diversity" (Natasha Donahue, Métis Nation of Alberta, Boreal Forest Biome) by centering "traditional varieties (of the Three Sisters, for example) that can cope with seasonal fluctuations and early or late frost" (Anonymous Respondent, Temperate Deciduous Forest) which would make local food systems more resilient to weather events induced by climate change. In addition to traditional food, this would also allow communities access to traditional medicine (Carole Monture, Six Nations, Temperate Deciduous Forest).

The Sičangu Food Sovereignty Initiative (SFSI) is a community-led initiative south of the Medicine Line.[7] The initiative empowers the Sičanguu people to regain independence in agriculture. The SFSI provides food, income, and, importantly, a sacred connection to food for the community. It is a small-scale and local project that includes a community garden, farmers' market, food subscription programs, and community events. The initiative is youth-focused, with a next-generation summer internship program that introduces community members to sustainable food practices.

Ginnifer Menominee (Wasauksing First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) argued for the reintroduction of wild rice and traditional fruiting trees as well as plants traditionally used as medicine:

> I've stumbled upon a plant called Sweet Fern that is amazing for inflammation and gut health. And I just can't say enough about it. We could be tapping back into our own ecosystem for health care, it's just that we've lost some of that knowledge or it's not lost. I hate saying lost because nothing's lost. It's just sleeping right now.

Beyond food production, distribution can also be led by communities. An anonymous respondent from Seine First Nation (Adams Lake Band, Mountain Biome) told the story of a community that created its own grocery store:

> A neighbouring community to mine, they're currently building their own grocery store on their reserve. And I thought that was really cool because their idea behind it is that it generates revenue for their own people. And also, they're getting to negotiate with suppliers for their own food that they want, and they don't have to rely on elsewhere to grocery shop. So they're building their grocery store, I think next year it'll be open.

Localizing production and distribution not only provides tools to address climate change, it also empowers communities. As the KARI-OCA 2 declaration says, "Food sovereignty and the right to food must be observed and respected; food must not be a commodity to be used, traded and speculated on for profit. It nourishes our identities, our cultures and languages, and our ability to survive as Indigenous Peoples." (Carole Monture, Six Nations, Temperate Deciduous Forest)

Solution 4

Energy Sovereignty

Participants expressed a strong desire to work toward energy sovereignty. This vision encompasses two approaches: (1) creating affordable and clean energy to power Nations and communities and (2) breaking dependence on settler governments, monopolistic utilities, and large corporations for energy needs. It's important to note that energy sovereignty can look different for each community and it is up to each community to self-determine what energy sovereignty looks like for them.

Respondents were clear that we need to move away from the current entrenched fossil fuel and extractive system, especially in the midst of a climate crisis (Anonymous Respondent, Grasslands, Biome; Anonymous Respondent, Boreal Forest Biome). For example, when asked what change in their community they wanted to see, an anonymous participant from the Boreal Forest Biome replied that we must, that we must,

> stop subsidizing fossil fuels and buying up pipelines after we go to international climate meetings and commit to our national targets! It would mean truly addressing the causes of the raging wildfires and impacts we are seeing on the ground by reducing GHG, logging and other real actions.

We heard that we must work toward an energy transition that is Indigenous-led. This transition must seek equitable outcomes for workers and communities affected by the shift, ensuring that policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions also protect those facing job job losses (Sacred Earth Solar et al, 2023, p. 152). As articulated by one respondent, a just transition involves offering possibilities for reorientation and retraining (Pierre-Luc Gauthier, Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk, Boreal Forest Biome.) This imperative extends beyond economic considerations to fostering "just relationships with one another and with the natural world," as emphasized by the **Just Transition Guide** (created in partnership with Indigenous Climate Action.)

The **Just Transition Guide** shares many exciting examples and important lessons from Indigenous communities engaged in their own just transition journeys. The guide was developed by Melina Laboucan-Massimo, founder of Sacred Earth Solar and co-founder of ICA. The guide shares story after story that demonstrates how "our communities [are] leading the way on the transition to renewable energy."

Wah-ila-toos: Clean Energy Initiatives in Indigenous, rural and remote communities. This Government of Canada programs' funds renewable energy and capacity-building projects in rural and remote Indigenous communities across the country. An Indigenous council, which comprises seven representatives, guides the program and policy toward a long-term clean energy transition strategy. Program officers working directly with communities to enhance their control over energy futures while respecting self-determined priorities and including diverse Indigenous perspectives. Wah-ila-toos provides flexible funding to support various clean energy projects and removes barriers by connecting communities with suitable resources.

"Colonizers will talk over us on any given point."

Anonymous Respondent
Mountain Biome

Respondents expressed overwhelming support for renewable energy, particularly solar energy, but also wind and geothermal. For example, respondents in the Prairies identified an underutilized opportunity for solar energy initiatives (Anonymous Respondent, Boreal Forest Biome.)

Some respondents identified community-owned renewable energy projects as central to achieving energy sovereignty (Anonymous Respondent, Boreal Forest Biome.) We also heard about exciting initiatives: for instance, one person from the Tsuut'ina Nation (Mountain Biome) described how new homes are equipped with solar panels.

Climate solutions can address Indigenous communities' current needs, provide opportunities for that community to generate wealth, employ local people, and achieve community ownership. As one respondent (Elizabeth Métis Settlement, Grasslands Biome) says, projects that meet these standards — like the example she offered of the Old Crow community in the Yukon — are a "win-win":

> The Nation wanted to move away from using gas to heat their homes, and they turned towards solar energy. The initiative has been incredibly successful because it met all those factors. Those types of innovation should become the standard.

Achieving a just transition also requires the right policy incentives and investment. For example, builders and officials must be encouraged to adopt geothermal, solar, and wind technologies in their construction projects (Marjorie Dawn Paleshi; Metis, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome).

Affordability emerged as another key theme. As one example, limiting the size of new buildings and providing smaller homes for community members is a more cost-effective approach (Marjorie Dawn Paleshi; Metis, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome.)

Participants emphasized the importance of reducing energy consumption and promoting practices that use energy only when necessary (Anonymous Respondent, Metis - Region 9, Boreal Forest Biome). Addressing car dependency (Evan Accettola, Métis Nation of Ontario, Boreal Forest Biome) and incentivizing alternatives to driving were also identified as essential steps to reduce energy consumption (Anonymous Respondent.)

Respondents stressed the significance of energy efficiency, especially in home construction, heating, and change to: appliances (Chelsea Jones, Splatsin, Mountain Biome; Anonymous Respondent, Boreal Forest Biome; Carole Monture, Six Nations, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome; Jolene, N'Quatqua, Mountain Biome). Donald Proven (Manitoba Métis, Boreal Forest Biome) spoke about the coop he is a member of; Sun Certified Builders Cooperative, as an example of how buildings can help combat climate change. Proven noted how "buildings that are carbon-storing rather than carbon-emitting, can generate more power than they consume. Retrofitting . . . existing buildings can create useful employment for Indigenous people."

He also pointed out that achieving real climate change emissions reductions requires changes to local building codes and bylaws, along with training, funding, and policy changes. Donald highlighted the **Passive House** standard as an example of buildings that are designed to consume much less energy than conventional buildings thanks to better design, increased insulation, greater efficiency, superior air tightness, and modelled performance.

To summarize, respondents recognize the importance of decarbonizing our energy and economic systems (Anonymous Respondent, Grasslands Biome). The path to energy sovereignty involves not just transitioning energy sources but also reshaping relations for a sustainable and just future.

Indigenous Aquaculture is led by an association of Pacific-region Sea Grant offices of Northwest Tribes and First Nations, Native Hawaiian, and Indigenous communities. These groups partner with organizations and universities to advance research that keeps Indigenous traditional knowledges and values at the centre. This research evokes Indigenous community engagement and develops strategies for restoration of aquaculture in marine ecosystems, which in turn helps support Indigenous fishing practices and seafood sovereignty for the future.

Solution 5

Taking Care of the Water

As Daniel Green (Kispiuox, Mountain Biome) reminds us, “there's still so many communities out in Canada that have no clean drinking water running from their taps.” Put another way, “Clean water for everyone" (Anonymous Respondent, Boreal Forest Biome) should be the number one priority.

One person (Poundmaker Cree Nation, Grasslands Biome) underlines that clean water does not mean only potable water, clean water means water that has no long-term negative health effects:

> They finally built a $14 million water treatment plant. [But]I don't use it, I go to town and I buy my water, because I don't believe in chlorine, chlorine, chlorine. And Indian Affairs knows this, the government knows this: chlorine damages our liver. Chlorine eventually damages our organs. Chlorine causes cancer. Why do they keep pushing chlorine into our water treatment systems within all First Nations communities across Canada? Why?

Water protection initiatives could include “protecting our water from further mining and irrigation,” (Anonymous Respondent, Grasslands Biome) “rainwater collection,” (Carole Monture, Six Nations of the Grand River, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) or “recycling . . . gray water within homes.” (Anonymous Respondent, Boreal Forest Biome)Kelsey Leonard of the Shinnecock Nation, along with several Indigenous co-authors, reminds us that “Indigenous-led water institutions that can advocate on behalf of Indigenous Peoples and Nations and for water are also critical to achieving water justice…These institutions embrace Indigenous ways of knowing; they recognize that Indigenous water justice can only be advanced by understanding our inherent responsibilities to water as a living relation."[32]

Solution 6
Taking Care of the Forests

Large, uncontrolled forest fires have dominated front page news in so-called Canada in the past few years. These fires have disproportionately affected Indigenous communities. Indigenous knowledges and practices of environmental stewardship offer direct solutions to this challenge. As an anonymous respondent (Nisichawayasihk, Boreal Forest Biome) noted,

> Indigenous cultural burns and teachings of these practices could help mitigate the level of devastation felt by ecosystems and societies surrounding these out-of-control fires. The provincial and regional systems are not working.

In addition to controlled burns, reforestation efforts based on traditional native species rather than commercial methods also present a path forward. More trees must be planted, but not in the form of tree farms. “Instead,” explained one participant, “we need to support the restoration of healthy, Indigenous-managed forests" (Anonymous Respondent, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome). Bringing back Indigenous trees contributes to building “small little biospheres [that] will help in a larger way" (Ginnifer Menominee, Wasauksing First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome).

Marjorie Paleshi (Metis,Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) shared a positive experience with the creation of a “micro forest” of native trees:

> The one we're doing is about 25 per cent larger than a tennis court. We've already marked it with flags. And we've already put compost for the winter down, compost of good horse manure and good wood chips — not processed wood, but good wood chips. So, in the spring we will be planting native trees in a very concentrated area, about 800 trees. We'll be putting little guys and they will be growing. And then [we will plant] an undercover underneath them as they get settled in. And this will grow very rapidly in this respect, because that's how this system does it.The micro-forest idea and implementation came out of the work of Dr. Miyawaki of Japan. And it'll capture the carbon.

Solution 7
Taking Care of our Animal Relatives and Their Habitats

Protecting land and waterways is not only a goal in and of itself. Rather, this strategy also allows us to protect animal and plant habitats. Any project should take habitat impacts into consideration, and land and water use must align with the life cycles of animals and plants. As one respondent (Carcross/Tagish, Tundra Biome) argued,

> I would want to see . . .the animals own a part of the land when it's their season to [do so], like rotten stuff like that. And during these certain seasons . . . that's their part of the land and nobody's allowed to use it, because the animals own it. . . . I think that would be truly representing the way that Indigenous People[s] see the world and see things.

Managing land and waterways in a manner that accounts for resource sharing with other species aligns with Indigenous knowledges and ways of relating to the natural world. As one respondent recalled,

> We kind of had a solution that was put in place a few years ago. That was not signing any forestry cuts, and just leaving the land as it is to heal, and also to ensure the population of the small animals.

A key aspect of creating room for other species to flourish involves letting areas remain untouched by human activity and presence for prolonged periods. Indigenous communities can then rely on these species for hunting

and fishing. As Ginnifer Menominee (Wasauksing First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) notes,

There have been a lot of changes in our territory with regards to climate change and the hunting has become very sparse. [We've] seen a decline in water. We've seen animals disappearing. And so a lot of that is making sure that we're taking care of the land and trying to build up environments where we can start welcoming back our bird relatives, those creepy-crawly relatives . . . as well as [regaining] the ability to be able to hunt and fish in our territory.

Solution 8
Taking Care of Our Cities

Mobilizing Indigenous knowledges in urban communities is essential to building cities that are more resilient to climate change. As Bobby Manning Leduc (Inuit, Tundra Biome) underlined,

> The Indigenous people of Montreal [can] say how the land used to be and what has changed to try to identify what issues have emerged . . . because we know the history of the area where we're from. So if you can get the history from Indigenous people, I think it would give a lot of information.

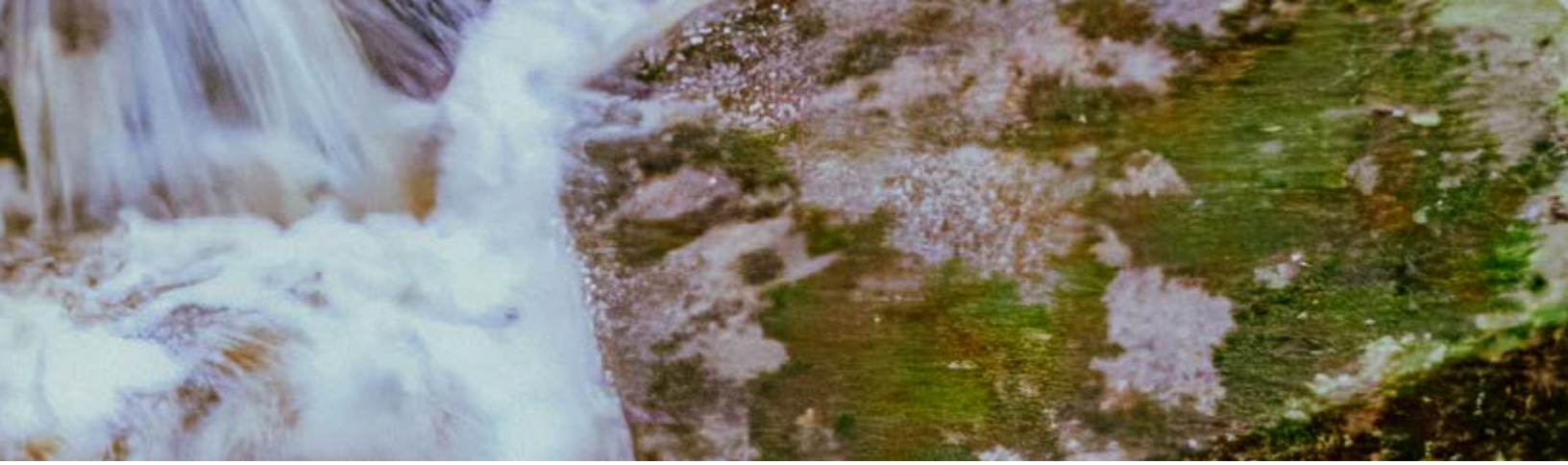
Centering Indigenous knowledges means creating urban policies that focus on ecological health, not just "human health." Infrastructure should be designed to "accommodate the land, not. . . capitalism and human wants" (Anonymous Respondent, Gitxsan Nation, Mountain Biome).

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger emphasized the importance of recognizing Indigenous rights across settler jurisdictions:

> We come to urban populations. . . Over 50 per cent [of Indigenous peoples live] in urban centres. And yet, when it comes to policies and management of climate solutions within municipalities and urban centres, our rights are excluded from those processes. Indigenous rights are a federal jurisdiction and cities get to develop their own climate solutions at the municipal and regional level . . . And so there needs to be this understanding of how our rights are not just . . . federal jurisdiction. (Executive Director, Indigenous Climate Action, Dënesųłiné from Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome)

According to an anonymous respondent, taking care of our cities can involve concrete steps. Examples include:

> planting more trees in low-income areas that will help with cooling during heat waves and help the mental health of our relatives . . . [Other ideas are] more accessible (and cheaper) public transit, more promotion of urban gardening (and classes to support learning gardening and canning skills, more plots available, more subsidies available), more compost programs and recycling. (Anonymous respondent, Boreal Forest Biome).



Solution 9
Taking Care of Our Waste

Tackling climate change requires a combination of short-term, localized solutions and longer-term, systemic approaches. On the short-term and local level, several respondents highlighted how waste treatment in Indigenous communities is often deficient due to a lack of proper infrastructure. For example, an anonymous respondent (Tundra Biome) noted that "there is an issue with littering in my community due to lack of available public garbage[s]. I would like to find a way to have more [garbages] installed in the community."[6]

Taking care of waste in appropriate ways involves channelling more resources to Indigenous communities. Robert Maytwayashing (Bear Clan Anishinaabe, Boreal Forest Biome) recounted that recycling and treatment of toxic waste is limited in his community, because their only access points are a couple of "pits" near Lake Manitoba. As Robert noted,

> There has been some talk in the past of trying to even control the garbage that's going into the dump, like to have a separate area for appliances, to have a battery depot, to try and recycle some of the recyclables. But again, cost is a limiting factor, because who's going to look after all that? Who's going to manage all that? And who's going to transport these recyclables? . . . For us, the closest [city] would be Winnipeg, which . . . is two hours' drive one way. So, for us to do anything at this point, unless we get the resources to do it, it's cost-prohibitive.

Besides more resources, we also need systemic, long-term waste management solutions. These solutions involve a change of mindset, away from the culture of over-consumption toward Indigenous worldviews. These worldviews emphasize a holistic understanding that covers "the entire process of creating anything, from the history of the resources we seek to the fate of the creation when its use has been exhausted" (Natasha Donahue, Métis Nation of Alberta, Boreal Forest Biome). Embracing traditional practices like taking only what you need and making items could effectively tackle the root cause of waste. This approach could take the form of introducing a circular economy and locally sourced goods (Jolene Patrick, N'Quatqua, Mountain Biome).

However, waste management responsibilities cannot fall only on Indigenous communities. Respondents stressed the need to hold both government and corporate actors accountable. For instance, Evan Accettola (Métis Nation of Ontario, Boreal Forest Biome) argued that "corporations should also be responsible for recycling packaging that they create even if it ends up in a consumer's hands." As an anonymous respondent said, "Any pollution or waste that seeps onto those lands from the outside must be seen as the responsibility of the government and a breach of treaty." The government can also play a positive role in promoting regulation that decreases waste production, such as by "banning single-use, non-recyclable stuff" (Anonymous, Metis, Mountain Biome).

---

6. An anonymous respondent (Metis - Region 9, 19, Boreal Forest Biome) similarly pointed out that "where we live at the moment, we don't have green bins even as an option."

> Our non-reformist reforms will come in many forms. They will look like grassroots Indigenous seed bank networks where thousands of sustainable farmers share, trade, and feed their communities. They will look like successful runs for city council elections where [leftist] candidates implement a people's platform for climate and social justice at . . . municipal levels. They will look like Land Back camps or tribal council resolutions that reject colonial water settlements by banding with other Indigenous nations to blockade all government and corporate efforts to commodify water. Whatever form they take, we must simply get to work."
>
> **(The Red Nation, 2021.)**

Solution 10

Transforming Legal Systems to Protect What We Value and Require

We must ground all our climate solutions in Natural Law. Natural Law teachings "could inform and influence protocols [and] procedures [in] creating standards of conduct for all to follow — setting a precedent [of] upholding the past, present and future" (Anonymous Respondent, Kānaka Maoli). As explored more deeply in Chapter Five, Natural Law emphasizes our relationship with the land, reciprocity, and sustainability.

Respondents shared concrete examples of how Natural Law can be implemented in communities without waiting for colonial governments to act. For instance, as Jeff Baker (Métis, Grasslands Biome) recounted,

> We are currently working to include some of our traditional laws in establishing our own child and family services agency. There is [a] legal precedent for the acceptance of oral testimony in legal cases (and legal documents); in our case, this is mostly related to laws related to miyo ohpikinâwasowin (good child rearing), but other [laws] regarding the treatment of the land could also be included. Ceremonies can also be hosted to help guide the process of policy development.

Another example offered was the Shuumi (or, "gift") Land Tax in the United States (Anonymous Respondent, Boreal Forest Biome). The tax is defined as "a voluntary annual contribution that non-Indigenous people living on the Confederated Villages of Lisjan's territory can make to support the critical work of the Sogorea Te' Land Trust for rematriation or returning the land to Indigenous Peoples.[7]

We heard strong calls to respect the legal personhood of our non-human relatives — the land, forests, trees, and waters. Legal personhood would acknowledge that land and water are essential to nourishing and caring for other species, including ourselves. As Dana Strong (Anishinabe, Boreal Forest Biome) noted, "It all starts with language. Indigenous language speaks of the environment as family, as [a] person, [as] animate. In English [the environment is] a thing, a non-entity, a substance."

---

7. Sogorea Te' Land Trust, **https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/shuumi-land-tax/**

Legal Wins for the Rights of Nature

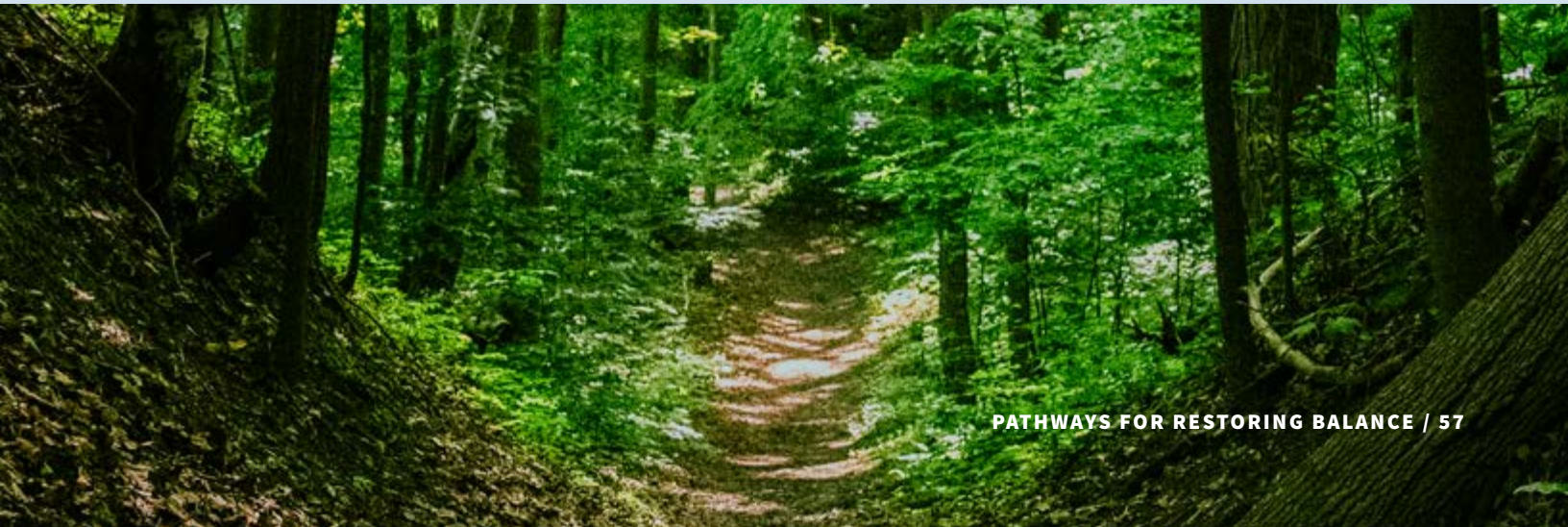
There have been major legal wins for the Rights of Nature internationally: in Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Spain, Bangladesh and India.

In February 2021, the Mutehekau Shipu/Magpie River in Innu territory in so-called Quebec became the first river in Canada to receive legal personhood. The Mutehekau-shipu Alliance drafted two parallel resolutions adopted by the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit and the Minganie Regional County Municipality (RCM).

The resolutions declare that, as a legal Person, the Mutehekau Shipu/Magpie River holds the following fundamental Rights:

- The right to live, to exist and to flow,
- The right to respect for its natural cycles,
- The right to evolve naturally, to be preserved and to be protected,
- The right to maintain its natural biodiversity,
- The right to perform essential functions within its ecosystem,
- The right to maintain its integrity,
- The right to be free from pollution,
- The right to regeneration and restoration, and
- The right to sue.

Learn more about this inspiring story **here**.



Ashley Nadjiwon, (Anishinaabe kwe from Wikwemikong Unceded Territory, Temperate Deciduous Forest biome), described the lessons offered by original teachings as follows: "Our original teachings talk about us being the caretakers of the land. And with that, I think, comes a huge responsibility of being that voice for the voiceless, like the water, the four-legged, the crawlers, the birds."

Despite some critiques, legal personhood could also grant enforceable rights to land and water. Such rights, according to Shawna Gray (Ceg A Kin [Carry the Kettle] Nakoda Nation, Grasslands Biome), would mean that Indigenous Peoples "can advocate for [land and water] as citizens," and ensure that they are taken into consideration and protected at all levels of development.

Many participants cited the precedent of other Nations granting legal rights to sacred bodies of water and forests as a potential direction. A notable example is Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Anonymous Respondent, Okanagan Indian Band, Mountain Biome). There has also been a recent legal win for the Rights of Nature here in so-called Canada as highlighted on page 57.

Pathways to Get There

Colonial systems' firm grasp on our lives and lands hinder the gorgeous, powerful solutions explored in this chapter. For Indigenous-led solutions to take hold, flourish, and transform systems, we need the means to weaken the control that colonial governments, economies, and cultures have over us. The Six Pathways below offer some possible strategies to counter this control.

These Pathways are:

- **Pathway 1:** Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being (Decentering Settler Ways)
- **Pathway 2:** Asserting, Defending, and Respecting Indigenous Self-Determination, Sovereignty, and Consent
- **Pathway 3:** Redistributing Power, Wealth, and Land (Relinquishing Settler Control of Lands and Lives)
- **Pathway 4:** Decentralizing Climate Governance and Building Community Power
- **Pathway 5:** Building Powerful, Intersectional, Inter-National Movements
- **Pathway 6:** Ensuring Accountability and Reparations

The Six Pathways are presented in more detail below. Each Pathway will require strong Indigenous leadership and widespread settler allyship and support.

"I'm hopeful for us. You know, we've survived everything that we've been put through, and I think this is what it's for. I think we survived everything so that we can help people get through this crazy change."

Anonymous Respondent
Gitxsan Nation | Mountain Biome

"We need a revolution of values that recenters relationships to one another and the earth over profits."

(The Red Nation, 2021, p. 22.)

"Indigenous knowledges [are] vital and integral to learning to adapt to a new world."

Anonymous Respondent
Gitxsan Nation | Mountain Biome

"Political responsibility can also be understood in relation to Indigenous women's knowledge. Given that many Indigenous women live close to the land, they may be acute observers of local manifestations of ecological changes, have knowledge of long-time scales of the environment where their communities have lived for generations, and have key insights for understanding the best strategies to adapt."

Potawatomi scholar Kyle Whyte (2014, p. 610).

Pathway 1

Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being (Decentering Settler Ways)

Indigenous knowledge systems are embedded within the land. These systems include everything from land management to language, spiritual practices, and beyond. In comparison, western knowledge systems are often disconnected from the land and tend to emphasize abstractions of perceived power (e.g., the British Crown.)

As a pathway to climate policy, the importance of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing cannot be overstated. As an anonymous respondent (K'atl'odeeche First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) told us, "I think that if we are going to survive the coming global climate crisis, it requires new ways of thinking."

Jeff Baker (Métis, Grasslands Biome) shared that in the community where he works, they are "beginning to weave our Traditional laws and customs into our policies, so there is hope!"

Reclaiming Indigenous knowledge systems, especially those systems that are premised upon the living realities of the land, will be critical for successful climate mitigation and adaptation. We must listen to Indigenous Peoples, including Elders, and integrate their knowledges (Anonymous Respondent, Mountain Biome). As one person (Elizabeth Métis Settlement, Grasslands Biome) emphasized, "Indigenous Elders have knowledge that is invaluable . . . They can remind us when we are repeating old mistakes."

Indigenous ways of knowing are an antidote to capitalism's destruction. As Natasha Donahue (Métis Nation of Alberta, Boreal Forest Biome) put it, "We have a responsibility on this planet as a species with the intelligence to uncover the mysteries of the universe.. . . We are using this ability with a great amount of recklessness in the name of profit."

Thomassie Mangiok, the Centre Director at Nuvviti School in Ivujivik, has been teaching students how to build Qajaq (also known as kayaks) as part of a reclamation effort. Thomassie is assisted by Alain Cloutier, a kayak-building expert, in teaching construction techniques. Through these classes, students also engage in Inuit history and culture.

Centering Reciprocity

Indigenous worldviews recognize the importance of interconnections. Rather than placing humans at the top of a hierarchical system, Indigenous ways of knowing "recognize we are not above any other (Natasha Donahue, Métis Nation of Alberta, Boreal Forest Biome). This means that humans must be respectful of the lands, waters, and our relations to its beings, as they are all our kin.

As Robert Maytwayashing (Bear Clan Anishinaabe, Boreal Forest Biome) put it,

> We see each other as equal. We see the world . . . around us as our relatives. We recognize that we need our relatives to survive. [. . .] Right from day one, our people have tried to warn the settlers of how they need to interact with the earth in a reciprocal, positive fashion. . . We have all seen that [that] is not what has taken place. Industry, within the last 150 years, has been the majority vector of what climate change is today. They seem to see the land or the earth itself as a resource to be exploited, versus the very source of life itself. And until the western mindset gets that wrapped around their heads, nothing will change.

Carole Monture (Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome, Six Nations) similarly emphasized how reciprocity can address the structural roots of the climate crisis:

> Our teachings encourage reciprocity with the land, only taking what you need, and wasting nothing. Our current economic system is the opposite and doesn't just kill life — it depends on killing life. Climate change is a symptom of a broken system. Our teachings demonstrate how to live a life that is in balance with the natural world.

"Indigenous systems and natural laws embody reciprocity and kinship. Restoring and centralizing these ideologies would be more kin-centric, as opposed to the current climate change policies, which are human-centric. Current environmental initiatives focus on what humans can do differently in their everyday lives instead of focusing on how to be good kin to all our relations, which is to stop unsustainable resource extraction."

Hanna Paul

Métis Nation of Alberta member | Buttertown (Fort Vermilion District), Boreal Forest Biome

Indigenous-led Environmental Assessments: Across so-called Canada there are inspiring examples of Indigenous communities leading their own Environmental Assessment processes. As described in the ***Impact Assessment in the Arctic report by Gwich'in Council International (GCI)***, "Indigenous governments are creating forms of impact assessment that combine conventional environmental impact assessment frameworks with Indigenous governance processes. These Indigenous-based processes rely on and protect Indigenous culture, language, and way of life in ways existing government legislated systems have either never contemplated or are still not accommodating." (Gwich'in Council International, 2020, p. 4.)

Some of these inspiring examples of Indigenous-led Environmental Assessment processes include:

- Squamish Nation's Assessment of Woodfibre LNG **(Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, 2016)**.
- Tŝilhqot'in National Government's Impact Assessment **(Tŝilhqot'in National Government, n.d)**.
- Stk'emlu'psemc te Secwepemc Nation's Review Process of the Ajax Mine Project **(Stk'emlu'psemc te Secwepemc Nation, n.d.)**.

As one person (Gitxsan Nation, Mountain Biome) describes it, reciprocity means recognizing that everything we do has an effect on the land:

Settler governments' environmental assessments . . . say, 'Oh, you can extract this X amount of whatever resource, and it's going to not impact land.' They always say it's not going to impact the land. Everything impacts the land. We just have to understand this. Instead of deciding how much we can extract without giving back, we have to look at, what can we extract? And when we extract it, what do we need to give back to help recuperate that land? So it's about reciprocal relationships. So I think policies need to kind of navigate towards that methodology, and to kind of change in a way that can impact everyone positively.

When asked what an Indigenous-led climate policy would look like, Hanna Paul (Métis Nation of Alberta member, Buttertown [Fort Vermilion District], Boreal Forest Biome) said:

> It would look like sustainable harvesting, knowing the cycles of plants and animals and honouring that. It would be showing reciprocity to animals that give themselves for food by giving back to the next generation of those specific animals. It's always about thinking ahead and the generations to come. Importantly, these can only exist through Indigenous land sovereignty.

One anonymous respondent (K'atl'odeeche First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) expanded on this idea of intergenerational care by referring to how Indigenous ways of knowing centre future generations: "There is an idea of the seven generations thinking where, when making a decision, we should be thinking of seven generations into our future. When we make decisions, we just think of how it affects us now, but how will it affect us into the future?"

Indigenous ways of knowing also centre collective well-being. As Daniel Green (Kispiox, Mountain Biome) explained,

> You know, our ability to take care of things, to acknowledge the process of things and how it works, and to incorporate that into our overall practice is truly the Indigenous way. It's really broken free from the colonial way of thinking only of just oneself . . . We come from the viewpoint of working for everybody, working for the village so that everyone can prosper, not just one person.

Indigenous ways of knowing additionally incorporate the spiritual. As Robert Maytwayashing offered,

> Everything has spirit. The rock has spirit, the tree has spirit, the ant has spirit. Everything has spirit, because our great Creator created all of this. So the essence of [the] Great Creator is within all of this, which again, is why we show reverence for all of these things in the way that we do. Yet, western society has done everything within its power to discredit spirit. It's taken spirit totally out of the equation. It's only within the last 20 years, where [the] western health model, as an example, has reimplemented the spiritual aspect of the four quadrants of the human being — the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual, right? Because now, even their own scientists are starting to affirm, 'Hey, there is something to the spirit stuff,' right? But until the ones that are in power and control adopt and express that in their own lives, what's going to change? And that's where we as the Indigenous people come in. We have always tried to share that knowledge right from day one. We have not stopped."

Policy should be informed by the land itself as it changes. As an anonymous respondent (Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) said,

> That's one of the most important things if we're going to start decolonizing— let's have traditional land use studies or a policy even within our Nations, to help take care of what's left in our communities [and] on our lands."
>
> **Anonymous Respondent**
> Poundmaker Cree Nation | Grasslands Biome

> Meeting with Elders and community members would be my main priority: surveying the land with hunters and harvesters to see what's changed in the landscape, what we need to address and work on, making a community action plan and approaching the government for support on this plan.

Traditional knowledge must be grounded in place. As one respondent (Gitxsan Nation, Mountain Biome) shared,

> No amount of human policy, no amount of human anything is going to create new air or water. It's not going to clean the air or water. So, you know, I was telling the teachers that this is just something that they should have an understanding of: the land itself. And even if you're not from my territory, I hope that these kids can then look at their own lands where they're living, and say 'I wonder what's connected here,' and then start to explore that themselves.

Lastly, Indigenous-led policies should also be grounded in our languages. As one respondent (Inuit, Tundra Biome) described,

> The more language we incorporate into policies, the more it encompasses . . . There's so many more moving pieces in traditional [Indigenous] languages than in English — English doesn't capture the full emotion, or story, or concept, right? And so I think [that], by having more languages incorporated into pilot policy, then maybe we can get a better grip on what we're trying to accomplish.

Research and Monitoring

Research, measuring, and monitoring are essential to climate policy.[8] However, as one person (Elizabeth Métis Settlement, Grasslands Biome) said, "We need to stop measuring everything according to western standards."

We heard calls for more transformative change. For example, as an anonymous respondent (Boreal Forest Biome) commented,

> Our whole society needs to shift, structural changes need to occur at every level, and business needs to change. We cannot be driven by simple economics anymore; we need to look at the bigger picture and engrain important metrics to society in business reporting.

Jeff Corntassel (Citizen of Cherokee Nation, Mountain Biome) suggested meeting with Elders and community

---

8. Jeff Baker (Métis, Grasslands Biome) offered a starting point: carbon footprint assessments of the band's operations. He said that it could help to have "everyone be involved in cutting down our own carbon emissions." Other respondents mentioned a potential role for businesses, such as the development of "science based protocols to account for carbon and charge corporations for carbon use and emissions. Agriculture cannot be left out." (Donald Proven, Manitoba Métis, Boreal Forest Biome).

members about the impacts of climate change on “our lands, waters, and more-than-human relationships.” Further explaining,

> We could discuss the changes we have observed and strategize as a community how to address these changes. It would include culturally relevant indicators of changes to the fish, plants, animals, etc. These would complement 'scientific' indicators, not be overshadowed by them.

Another suggestion from an anonymous respondent (Mountain Biome) was to evaluate risk and plan for any negative eventualities:

> an impact measurement framework that determines how risky projects are on the lands and waters of that region. The stakeholders and investors would then have to make investments that are reflective of the potential risk of the projects and set aside funds for clean ups and restoration projects.

One respondent (Mohawk, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) suggested that Indigenous knowledge, law and teaching frameworks must be rooted in place and can differ from Nation to Nation or community to community. For instance, they said, “Using the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address [would mean] measuring everything we do against those relations. . . Everything that is created in policy [would be] measured against that ability for those elements in creation, including ourselves, [to] have the opportunity to survive and thrive.”

One respondent (Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, Tundra Biome) offered this positive example:

> I was hired as a land stewardship framework support worker last fall, and I did some surveying with [community] members. I had about 20 different maps and some questions asking what was important to [the respondents], where they hunted and fished, etc. Basically, [we said] ‘Give us all your details and we'll try to protect that.’ And I think it was a really good outcome . . . It also gets the entire community involved and their voice heard. And I think, basically, we just need more voices heard.

One respondent described monitoring practices in Gitxsan Nation:

> For us, I think the biggest component we have is monitoring our watersheds, including populations of salmon in particular. They're keystone species. And also ensuring that there is an account of the other species that exist within their own corridors, like the grizzly corridors and the northern parts of the territory, anywhere there are caribou. And just making sure . . . [of] the populations, what numbers there are and how they relate to the changing climate, and kind of monitoring where their migration patterns are going as well as monitoring when the salmon are leaving and returning, if that's changing at all. So those are the things that we currently are doing for monitoring and trying to sustain populations.

"Three simple laws could be put into place: No Indian Act, no underground extraction, and no deforestation — at least for a start. And I think those three changes would benefit people in the future generations [and] the climate, especially."

Anonymous Respondent
Algonquin First Nation | Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome

Pathway 2
Asserting, Defending, and Respecting Indigenous Self-Determination, Sovereignty, and Consent

Honouring consent is a pillar of a fair and equitable society. That consent is not actively sought after and respected by the governments of so-called Canada and industry actors, this is a reflection of the lack of respect for consent within "Canadian" laws and values.

While Indigenous sovereignties have been interrupted by colonialism, they have not been extinguished. Indigenous sovereignty is exercised every day by Indigenous peoples, whether through harvesting, language reclamation, or revitalizing birthing practices.

Indigenous governance is also about active participation throughout entire decision-making processes. It is about the right to have a say in economic activities that impact us directly.

The impacts of extractive development are often unknown until the damage has already been done and those impacts are felt in our bodies and on our lands. An anonymous respondent (Aamjiwnaang First Nation, Anishinaabe, Oneida, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) shared their Nation's experience with an oil refinery:

> The refinery is right near our houses. We know when it's spilling, we feel the impacts of the spill, but we don't see any kind of justice when [it happens]. [The company] gets fined if [it's] proven that they did spill, and that [money] goes toward the Canadian government. But . . . our kids are feeling really ill, or adults are feeling ill, even for days after. And that's just a regular week at Aamjiwnaang . . . Or, we face other longer-term impacts like mental health [issues] or respiratory problems or cancers . . . We should have a say about benzene [a chemical solvent emitted by the refinery] because it's being released in our community, and we have been feeling those impacts for years.

To learn more about the impacts of industry on both our lands and our bodies, see the report: *Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies: Building an Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence*.[9] The lack of respect for consent has manifested not only on our lands but in our bodies and the bodies of our relatives. Free, Prior and Informed Consent the door to these conversations.

One anonymous respondent (Temperate Deciduous Biome) expanded on the idea that Indigenous Peoples

---

9. Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Women's Earth Alliance, Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies: Building an Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence, accessed January 27, 2025, **https://www.niwrc.org/sites/default/files/files/reports/Violence%20on%20the%20Land%20Violence%20on%20Our%20Bodies.pdf**

"Our community must have the final say over what happens on our traditional lands. Period."

Sandi Boucher

Seine River First Nation and Thunder Bay Indigenous community | Boreal Forest Biome

should have a say about projects that impact their home territories. Indigenous Peoples experience the project impacts in a very different way because of our deep connections to this earth and because we are more likely to bear the brunt of extractive industries.

Respondents overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of consent. For example, another anonymous respondent (Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) suggested that,

> all proposed developments on, adjacent to, or potentially impacting our lands should be vetted by Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and experts, especially those [individuals] who come from the communities impacted by the proposed development.

We heard again and again about the importance of free, prior, and informed consent. As Daniel Green (Kispiox, Mountain Biome) noted, "UNDRIP [the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples] is a powerful declaration that needs to be enforced and brought to the table when creating these circles of change." Other respondents emphasized that this process should be led by Elders (Bridget Larocque, Inuvik Métis Council, Boreal Forest Biome.)

Critically, as an anonymous respondent from Seine First Nation (Adams Lake Band, Mountain Biome) observed that though UNDRIP offered a form of recognition, there is still a long way for settler governments to go: "They're not giving us our land back."

Even as settler governments adopt UNDRIP, they are continuing to violate Indigenous Rights. A stark example of this is that in November 2019, BC officially adopted UNDRIP into provincial law.[10] Less than three months later, Wet'suwet'en land defenders were violently removed from their lands by police officers armed with semi-automatic sniper rifles, dogs, bulldozers, and helicopters; a blatant violation of Indigenous inherent, treaty, constitutional and international rights, including UNDRIP.[11]

Consent and veto power is the only way to uphold Indigenous sovereignty. As Hanna Paul (Métis Nation of Alberta member, Buttertown [Fort Vermilion District], Boreal Forest Biome) made clear, this means eliminating:

> unsustainable development practices. And no development/extraction, etc., in general, unless the Indigenous community or communities of that area have given consent and they have veto power to stop it. [We need] complete and unwavering sovereignty.

Consultation plays an important role in consent processes.[12] Too often, consultations are inadequate and the options for decisions are narrow. An anonymous respondent (Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) expressed the necessity for consultation that does not have a fixed timetable: "Too often, we are rushed into making decisions based on too little information."

We also must move beyond consultation to real decision-making power. As an anonymous respondent (Boreal Forest Biome) pointed out, this means:

---

10. British Columbia Government, "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act," accessed April 9, 2025. **https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/new-relationship/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples**
11. Report Details Intimidation and Harassment of Wet'suwet'en People by RCMP Protecting Pipeline Company," MSN News, accessed January 27, 2025. **https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr20/7132/2023/en/**
12. As an anonymous respondent (Mountain Biome) told us, "We have to be consulted by any business looking to make changes to the land in our territory."

> not just consulting with native scientists but . . . including them as equal decision makers in the policymaking process. Go beyond consultation! Key Indigenous organizations could refuse consultation and instead say, 'We will not consult or help in policy making unless given a full, equitable seat at the table.'

Melanie Dene (Mikisew Cree First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) echoed this idea: "Do a cumulative impact study in the region. No more project approvals, no more testing: ensure that Indigenous communities are a part of every level of . . . climate development." Similarly, Aleesha Jones (Nlaka'pamux Nation, Mountain Biome) emphasized full participation in decision-making processes. She said,

> I think that regardless of the specific policies, Indigenous Peoples/communities must be present and empowered to be active in the decision-making process. Policies not developed with/by Indigenous Peoples are almost certain to police us.

This is important beyond so-called Canada as well. As one respondent (Kānaka Maoli, Independent Sovereign Nation State of Hawaii) echoed,

> Indigenous communities (adults and children) [must be] part of all plans and policies. . .allowing these communities to conduct and create protocols as well as standards of procedures . . . Natives being heard, natives back on the land, natives educating [the] community, natives in positions of power, natives leading projects and natives being asked first!"

Lastly, we heard calls to respect treaty rights, i.e., to "honour treaties, honour land Rights and honour our right to protect the water" (Anonymous Respondent, Nisichawayasihk, Boreal Forest Biome), and "return to the spirit and intent of the treaties" (Anonymous Respondent, Algonquin First Nation, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome. One anonymous respondent called for:

> old treaties [to] be re-examined and integrated into national policy to ensure that Indigenous People[s] have access to our lands. Any pollution or waste that seeps onto those lands from the outside must be seen as the responsibility of the government and a breach of treaty.

Pathway 3
Redistributing Power, Wealth, and Land (Relinquishing Settler Control of Lands and Lives)

Examining the efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission underscores the importance of understanding the truth about the relationship between Indigenous Peoples, their Nations, and the Government of Canada for all stakeholders. There must be a commitment to transparency and recognition that what has occurred and what continues to occur on these lands constitutes genocide.

The Indigenous people we spoke with stated that we must recognize that we are all hurting. The trauma of colonialism lives in the land, the water, the animals, and the plants. We have to acknowledge their hurt if we want to move forward in a way that brings respect to all our relations. Graeme Reed and coauthors (2021) remind us,

> To build just and reciprocal relations, the fundamental power imbalance related to land needs to be rebalanced. Indigenous Peoples have powerful alternatives and climate solutions, but to unleash this transformative power, land and sovereignty must be returned.

"

Instead of finding a seat at the table, we ask that this table get off our lands. We are more defined by our dreams of liberation and freedom and we refuse to be defined by trauma and violence narratives, as hapless subjects rather than active agents of history."

(The Red Nation, 2021, p.28.)

Settlers, It's Time to Step Back

We ask settlers to step back and relinquish their privilege, not tokenize us to legitimize settler decision making. As Veronica Rose Waechter (Gitxsan, Gitanmaax, Mountain Biome) told us,

> Give Indigenous People[s] a shot at this leadership, because white people have run the show for too many years with their intergenerational wealth and privileges. I think Canada's current agenda is, 'If we add one Indigenous position, maybe they will leave us alone.' No. This needs to be addressed [from the] top down, and that means that some people — especially those [people] who use their privileged positions to do absolutely no productive work — need to accept that there needs to be a wide institutional shift [that] will probably include them having less options.

This shift includes relinquishing power over the land and supporting movements for Land Back. We heard a strong and resounding call for land justice. The idea is clear — Indigenous Nations and communities must regain land rights (Anonymous Respondent, Mountain Biome; Anonymous Respondent, Inuit, Tundra Biome) and "full control of their territories through multi-layered governmental recognition of these nations as sovereign through Land Back. It could begin with Crown Land and National/Provincial Parks." (Hanna Paul, Métis Nation of Alberta member, Buttertown (Fort Vermilion District), Boreal Forest Biome).

As one person (Georgian Bay Metis, Temperate Deciduous Forest) highlighted, "All public land should be returned to Indigenous Peoples."[13] For another person (Okanagan Indian Band, Mountain Biome), this also includes "returning water Rights to Indigenous communities."

As Ginnifer Menominee (Wasauksing First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) puts it, the goal is "to have crown lands held in trust given back to Indigenous communities to hold and caretake, as was promised."

Indigenous Peoples, communities and Nations across so-called Canada must stand in solidarity on our own terms, rooted in our own sovereignties and relationships, in order to create a political context where Land Back is not only possible but is inevitable.

Indigenous sovereignties can and should look quite different from ongoing settler-colonial relations. For example, an anonymous respondent (Grasslands Biome) shared this vision:

Perhaps there needs to be a complete overhaul of the current country and government system. Perhaps reserves should be recognized as sovereign nations, which could lead to something looking more like the European Union . . . with defined borders to each of the countries/territories/peoples. . . that have recognized sovereignty, . . . individual laws, customs, languages and identity/culture, all [of which would be] developed and implemented by the individual nation of the country/territory, yet contribute to the collective. . . It would be amazing to see our Nations as micro-countries on maps and I think it could force the reconciliation process to be an immediate priority.

---

13. Similarly, an anonymous respondent (K'atlo'deeche First Nation, Boreal Forest) called on settler governments to "give the land back."

Stop Criminalizing Land Defenders

Western states perceive themselves as having a monopoly on violence, which is embodied in law enforcement. In so-called Canada, this includes the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and local and provincial police forces. Several of the interviewees discussed the violence imposed on them by Canadian law enforcement, particularly in the context of frontline land defense.

An anonymous respondent reflected on their experiences witnessing state violence:

> I've been [to] just so many rallies, so many things where we were heavily policed or brutalized, or even just seeing assault rifles within my own community for small things like a wellness check. All these hardships would be gone if Indigenous Peoples had more say in policy.

As Robert Maytwayashing summarized it,

> Whenever you see any potential threat to the Earth, who do you find at the forefront. . . trying to raise awareness of what's at stake? The Indigenous community. Then what happens to the Indigenous community? They're penalized. The authorities are called in to break it up. Why? Because [we are] threatening the economic machine.

Indigenous Land Stewardship

Indigenous land stewardship practices are an essential component of realizing our sovereignty. These practices carry many benefits for our relations and improve sustainability, including increasing biodiversity. (Corpuz-Bosshart, 2019) Biodiversity is a climate solution that helps to absorb and store carbon dioxide. This is incredibly important, since Indigenous lands around the world contain 80 per cent of the world's remaining biodiversity. (Recio & Hestad, 2022)

The rationale and call are clear. As one person (Gitxsan Nation, Mountain Biome) explained, "As we see now, [since] Indigenous People[s] were removed from being stewards of the land, the lands have all fallen into a downward spiral trying to adapt to industrialized change." This respondent called on settler governments to allow the stewardship of all waterways and ecosystems to be led and completely looked after by all the Indigenous nations. With the assistance of western knowledge keepers and scientists, the communities will be far more healthy and there will be more lands for all beings to exist on.

Jolene Patrick (N'Quatqua, Mountain Biome) echoed this sentiment, calling for "stewardship and control of all traditional lands by our people, guardians monitoring and managing all activities from recreation to industrial." Jolene also suggested Indigenous-owned park systems where traditional activities are protected and stewardship is maintained.

Guardian programs, such as Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Nagadjitòdjig Guardian Initiative, are Indigenous-led and serve to care for and manage protected areas in so-called Canada. The initiatives create Indigenous stewardship opportunities with the purpose of conserving land. Guardian initiatives encourage collaboration between Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian government on decision making regarding land use. This allows for Indigenous Peoples to use their knowledges and perspectives to create land-use plans. Furthermore, the programs create jobs for Indigenous people. Guardian programs have been successful in the Northwest Territories, where every $1 invested by Environment and Climate Change Canada has shown to create roughly $2.50 of social, economic, cultural and environmental results. **Apply here:** https://rng-ngn.ca/

Pathway 4
Decentralizing Climate Governance and Building Community Power

As Jeff Baker reminds us, Indigenous-led climate policies are "the opposite of the dry and dusty stuff usually associated with policy." Instead, these policies include ceremony, as well as

> community gatherings and feasts, where we can learn together and celebrate the work we are doing. [It's about] demonstrating care for the land and all of our relatives, connecting with our neighbouring communities to share our challenges and successes.

As environmental conditions shift, we'll need innovative methods to organize ourselves if we hope to effectively address the diverse needs that emerge. We need to empower communities to respond to crises in our own ways, rather than rely on interventions by the state. As an anonymous respondent (Mountain Biome) shared, this approach could look like

> building the capacity of our nations' membership to recognize the reciprocal relationship we have to the land by studying [its] history… ; learning the mechanisms [by] which we have fished and gather[ed] and implementing our own Nation-specific protocols for harvesting, climate responsiveness, and urbanization.

Colonially imposed governance systems like band councils can undermine climate justice. For example, one respondent (Carrier Dakelh from Nak'azdli Whut'en, Mountain Biome shared, "A woman out here in Sooke on [Vancouver] Island . . .did a tree sit because the Sooke Band [Council] went above her and her family [who were] protecting the wetlands that were being destroyed [by a project] that [the Council] approved."

Alexa Metallic, ICA's Research and Policy Coordinator (Mi'gmaq from Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome), shared that her community recently enacted a "lobster fishing law, and they used four different Mi'kmaq words, in terms of like, processing, everything that they do…there's not one such thing as like, Indigenous policy, there's Mi'kmaq policy, there's Wolastoqiyik policy, you know, nations have different nations do have different protocols

"We always knew how to take care of ourselves. We knew where the medicines lay, we knew how to take care of the land, the land always took care of us. . . Let us go back to what we were doing best. . .Let nations figure those things out for themselves in the best way that they know how, and things will start to slowly come back."

Ginnifer Menominee
Wasauksing First Nation | Boreal Forest Biome.

and different values, and different, they're all distinct in their own ways."

Indigenous communities must have the ability to decide for themselves. These ways of organizing are not universal and they should not be top-down. They cannot be defined or imposed by settlers, settler organizations, or the colonial government. Things will look different from community to community and will contrast colonial policy. This pathway is an invitation for communities to give their own answers.

We heard loud, strong calls for genuine self-governance (Anonymous Respondent, Boreal Forest Biome). Participants cited many reasons:

- "If the ideas come from the people, [then] they are more responsive and will act accordingly" (Anonymous Respondent, Grasslands Biome).
- "I think [ideas] would need to come from the community itself to be effective" (Jeff Baker, Métis, Grasslands Biome).
- "I think [self-governance] looks like community engagement and a focus on community well-being. It is a holistic approach that considers the land, water, culture, and healing" (Anonymous Respondent, Métis Nation of Alberta, Grasslands Biome).

Indigenous self-governance transcends colonial borders. As an anonymous respondent (Boreal Forest Biome) recalled,

> We . . . acknowledge[d] our own territorial reach and [saw] the world not through the colonial borders, but through our trade routes and trade items. For example, many of the communities in NYS [New York state] grew beautiful foods that wouldn't grow well up in the rocky terrain of Anishinabe Aki (north of present-day Ottawa). So we would trade with each other and share other forms of diplomatic relations. [Reclaiming] this [approach] would reinvigorate our ancestral foodways and also help us to understand ourselves as families, clans, nations, neighbours, and so on, helping us to know our lands and remember our instructions.

Climate solutions need to match the needs of each community. One respondent (Elizabeth Métis Settlement and Cree Métis, Grasslands Biome) shared their vision:

> As a policy analyst, I would want to see long-term plans for how these solutions will be implemented in the next 5–15 years; flexibility to ensure the policy can be adjusted to the changes in our environment or community needs; communities of Elders that review the policy or solution; long -term funding sustainability, and community ownership.

"HELL yeah we have been silenced. There NEEDS to be more women, youth and Aawowkkii at the table."

Anonymous Respondent
Piikani, Niitsitapi | Grasslands Biome

Inclusive, Indigenous Climate Governance

We heard from many participants about involving more women, matriarchs, water carriers, and youth and children in decision making.

As one person (Inuit, Tundra Biome) identified, Indigenous-led climate policy "would bring access to Elders, youth and every person in between. Our quality of life will be better and restore our pride in living in our Traditional lands."

Carole Monture (Six Nations of the Grand River, Temperate Deciduous Forest) similarly expressed that "Indigenous-led climate policies must include the entire community, especially our youth, parents, Elders, and those with disabilities. [These people] will work to meet our current needs, as well as our future ones."

Melanie Dene (Mikisew Cree First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome) suggested that representation consist of "various working groups . . . of youth, women, land users, knowledge keepers, trappers, hunters, Elders. These are the ones who are impacted . . . not leadership, who are making poor decisions."

Folks also called for more of a gender balance in leadership. One person said, "I think a lot more action will happen when there's equitable leadership [by] increasing the amount of women in leadership." Another respondent (Algonquin First Nation, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) suggested that colonization affected how women saw themselves, i.e., as followers who were excluded from decision making. As this person shared,

> The more women like us [who] stand up and go around and teach these kinds of things, then the more that kind of influences us as women to take [our] place. We're supposed to be at a time where we learn from the matriarchs.

More inclusive governance is already happening. As an anonymous respondent (Mountain Biome) said, "My community, specifically, has gotten very good at inclusion. There [are] constantly surveys with prizes, info sessions, open-door policies (with regards to emails, of course), and it's recorded and put to use."

As another anonymous respondent (Boreal Forest Biome) shared, the change

> might start as we have, with a small dedicated focus group [that] has invited any and all local people of all ages and occupations to contribute their knowledge, their experiences, [and their] observations to the central committee, [including] all suggestions and work that can alleviate the problem. I would like to see all levels of government . . .be obliged to meet with [us], speak with [us], and act upon our advice.

We heard examples of resurgence of traditional governance. For example, a respondent shared this intention from the Algonquin First Nation:

> So for us, what we are hoping to change this year is to go around our communities to educate about our Traditional way of making decisions called the spider web. . .Basically, the spider web talks about the way we sit around the fire and talk and make decisions. The Elders are there in every process to guide our decision making. But we're also guided by principles and different values we have. . . within our nation. . .Once we come to a decision. . . it gets written [down], then it's advocated. . .The decisions come directly from the people. And that's the kind of traditional governance we need to return to, rather than putting up leaders where they're going to be the ones to say. . .what it should look like. . .They're really taking the directions from the people.

Pathway 5
Building Powerful, Intersectional, Inter-National Movements

Climate change ignores borders. Corporate and industry actors are likewise unfettered by colonial boundaries, whether that's building pipelines across territories or seeking the cheapest labour costs available by exploiting people from the Global South.

Respondents emphasized the importance of grassroots movement building and climate action (Natasha Donahue, Métis Nation of Alberta, Boreal Forest Biome). For example, Daniel Green (Kispiox, Mountain Biome) described Indigenous-led climate action as "local events and gatherings that encourage everyone and anyone to join a movement of change and begin the next wave of generational healing!"

Movement building requires resources of all kinds, including financial resources. However, respondents emphasized avoiding reliance on colonial government funding (Anonymous Respondent, Fisher River, Boreal Forest Biome).

Indigenous-led climate solutions present an important opportunity for learning between Nations. For example, one person (Inuit, Tundra Biome) expressed a hope:

> to see more collaboration between nations and climate solutions. I know that's going on, but [it could be] less coveted. And, more opportunity for other communities to learn from each other . . .or find our own ways [toward] climate solutions, but are also wrapped up in Indigenous knowledge[s].

On the importance of traditional knowledge, this respondent offered the example of Nunavut Tunngavik, Inc. (NTI), which works to ensure the promises made in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement between the federal and territorial governments are kept.

> NTI really tries really hard to base everything off of Inuit traditional values. The base of most of the policy making . . . resulted out of the territory. And maybe we could be really good role models in that and support other folks in the south [who are] trying to centre their knowledge systems [in] their policy making.

Similarly, another respondent (Poundmaker Cree Nation, Grasslands Biome) emphasized the importance of Knowledge Keeper meetings.

Other respondents shared the importance of coming together and coordinating across Indigenous communities and nations. As Darrell 4s (Treaty 8, Boreal Forest Biome) suggests, this collaboration would mean having a "'collective voice at governing policy- [and] decision-making tables that speak for all our relations."

As an anonymous respondent (Temperate Deciduous Biome) reminds us, "Policy could look a lot different if Indigenous communities had a proper way to sit down and plan this out." Again, these conversations would look different depending how communities interact with the land. As the respondent reflected,

> Indigenous communities all have different ways of interacting with the land. . . Like my community . . . we're more foragers. . . Indigenous policy would look different with foragers versus people who do more planting. . . And I think that would be really cool, to see how it changes over the landscapes.

Movement building should not just be the work of Indigenous groups. Respondents emphasized the role of allies, including settlers, working in solidarity. One anonymous respondent (Boreal Forest Biome) called for:

> regeneration, restoration, reconciliation — active and meaningful engagement of all peoples in the restoration of our lands, getting all people to work side by side together in ways that are determined by the native peoples of the land.

Additionally, we must restore our sovereignties across the Medicine Line (the border between so-called Canada and the United States) and work toward the liberation of our relatives in the Global South.

The carceral state is inseparable from colonialism and capitalism. To achieve transformative change, Indigenous sovereignty movements must be in solidarity with Black

liberation movements, which have long called for the abolition of carceral systems. As the Black Indigenous Liberation Movement states on their website: "The time has come. We must unite our peoples in one black and indigenous movement. This is a time for mutual solidarity against racial capitalism, the prison state, extractivism, patriarchy and mass migration".[14]

Similarly, Marjorie Dawn Paleshi (Metis, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) also expressed a desire for wide-spread collaboration:

> I would like to see a mass call-out for all people in my community, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to come together and sit down with each other and work toward actual 'policies' for the climate and then begin to act on them. We are a little behind as it is.

We also heard respondents express hope for a new future for international climate policy. As Lori Johnston (Yamasi People) stated, "Indigenous Peoples' intergovernmental and multilateral transboundary agreements should be respected. Indigenous Peoples should be protected from reprisal from climate-changing States when they enforce such transboundary agreements."

---

14. Related reading also includes: the book Policing Black Lives by Robyn Maynard and Policing Indigenous Movements by Crosby & Monaghan (both grounding in the Canadian context). **https://www.blackindigenousliberation.com/en/nuestra-lucha**

"

We need action. We need laws. We need fines."

Anonymous, Temperate Deciduous Forest

"Make the polluters pay for real with large enough amounts that it will bring about a change."

Pierre-Luc Gauthier
Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk | Boreal Forest Biome

Pathway 6
Ensuring Accountability and Reparations

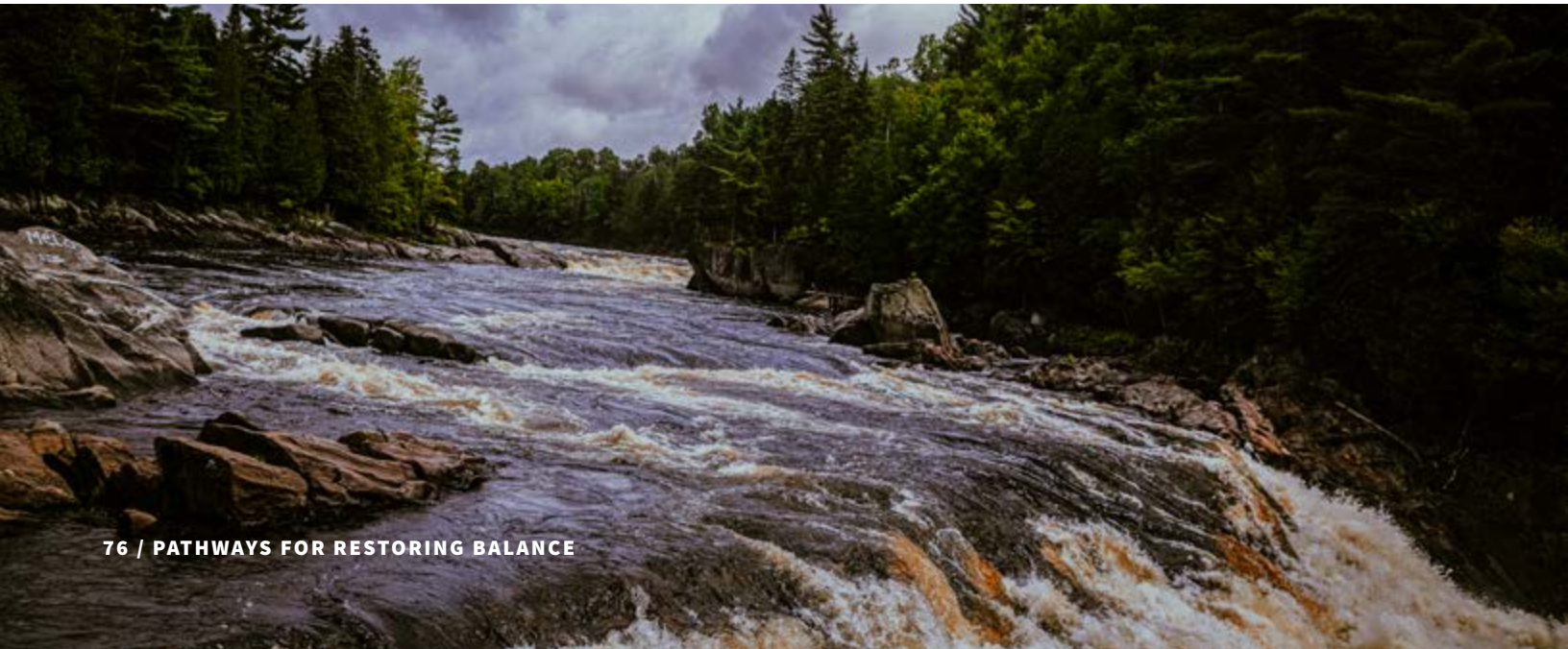
As we move along these transformative pathways, our own climate solutions will be able to flourish, expand, and thrive. But for these pathways to succeed, we will need systems of accountability. And these systems will need to involve compensation for past harms.

Darrell 4s (Treaty 8, Boreal Forest Biome) envisions climate policies that ensure development projects and new technologies sustain the elements of life:

> Climate policies can be used as a microscope of industrial evaluation. For example, the electric car and solar power industries will need to show how they are honouring the sun, earth, water, and air to benefit children, youth, adults and Elders in the spring, summer, fall, and winter.

Importantly, "Policies, protocols, and accountability mechanisms [must be] Indigenous-led and focus on the well-being of our communities and the land/water itself" (Anonymous Respondent, Métis Nation of Alberta, Grasslands Biome). Developing our own policies and ensuring they are respected will require significant resources. As such, we must also ensure that "communities are adequately provided with the resources to do the work, that adequate funding is in place, [and] adequate compensation is given to communities that are impacted" (Melanie Dene, Mikisew Cree First Nation, Boreal Forest).

The folks we spoke to offered the following guidelines, principles, and tools for designing and implementing climate policies with accountability and reparation mechanisms in mind.



Guidelines and Principles

- “Policies need teeth" (Anonymous Respondent, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome) to hold big corporations and industry accountable for the impacts on Indigenous lands and resources (Jolene, Mountain, N'Quatqua). We need “stricter laws [and] harsher punishment for larger corporations" (Anonymous Respondent, Barren Lands First Nation, Boreal Forest Biome).
- Companies and governments must be transparent and accountable for “oil leaks into lakes, rivers, and ocean water," (Anonymous Respondent, Grasslands Biome) and for orphan gas and oil wells that impact waterways and areas (Anonymous Respondent, Boreal Forest Biome).
- A significant portion of profits from extractive and polluting industries should be earmarked for the Nations on whose lands they operate, e.g., by supporting community stewardship programs. (Jolene, N'Quatqua, Mountain Biome).
- Real financial penalties must be implemented. Fines should incentivize companies to respect and uphold safety measures and avoid pollution and spills (Anonymous Respondent, Mountain Biome), especially for potential pollution of waterways that flow through communities (Marjorie Dawn Paleshi, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome). As one participant from the Łútsël K'é Dene First Nation, Mountain Biome put it, “Take away their money, that's what they care about.”
- Money raised through fines "should be going to communities - sustainable investments for the communities" (Anonymous Respondent, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome).
- We need more tools for overseeing corporate and industrial activity, increasing public oversight on these activities; “more regulations and restrictions on how these businesses are permitted to operate." (Anonymous Respondent, Tundra Biome). But we need tools that bolster community power and Indigenous sovereignty, rather than increase the power of colonial governments.
- In certain cases, development should be prohibited. We don’t just need less polluting industry — in some instances, full-on development bans should be in place. “We need to shut them down if they cannot operate within the allowed level of polluting" (Anonymous Respondent, Georgian Bay Metis, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome).
- All systems and policies must be Indigenous-led. These proposed strategies “need to be Indigenous-led for it to be true" (Anonymous Respondent, Anishinaabe from Garden River First Nation, Mixed Boreal & Deciduous Forest Biome).

Tools and Actions That Could Facilitate Accountability and Reparations

- “Indigenous institutions should be responsible (and funded!) for producing reports on each project's adherence to the previously defined policies and procedures to ensure the protection of lands and waters during the installation process" (Anonymous Respondent, Mountain Biome).
- “Create an [Indigenous-led] impact measurement framework that determines how risky projects are on the lands and waters of that region. The stakeholders and investors would then have to make investments that are reflective of the potential risk of the projects and set aside funds for clean-up and restoration projects" (Anonymous Respondent, Mountain Biome).
- Industries that pollute should have to “sit with the community and learn the impacts [of] their actions. . . “ One strategy includes “sentencing circles (if relevant or used in community) for folks who've done harm to the land" (Anonymous Respondent, Temperate Deciduous Forest Biome).
- Memory work is a process of including all voices in order to make memory effective and ensure that history is not forgotten. “It’s like an insurance policy to ensure that atrocities do not occur again. This has been used by the Nelson Mandela Foundation in South Africa" (Anonymous Respondent, Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement, Boreal Forest Biome).
- “Our stories shape our relationships to place, more-than-human relations and the ways we relate to each other. Through these stories, we come to practice and renew our ways of protecting sacred relationships, establishing community protocols and fostering land-based governance. Our stories, such as how medicine came to the people, give us accountability mechanisms, which indicate imbalance, illness, unhealthy relations when we fail to honour these relationships" (Jeff Corntassel, Citizen of Cherokee Nation, Mountain Biome).

Which of these solutions and pathways seem most important to you? Which ones seem most exciting and relevant to your Nation or community?

What are some small steps you can take to support these solutions and pathways in your Nations or community? What kind of help will you need to make these happen?

If you're interested in learning more about climate action and building your skills to become a climate leader in your community, consider signing up for Indigenous Climate Action's Climate Leadership Program.

https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/programs/climate-leadership-training

Conclusion and Calls to Action

What we heard across all of these powerful conversations is that Indigenous relations and responsibilities to our lands and waters is climate policy. Reconnecting to land is at the heart of Indigenous-led climate policies and solutions. Reconnecting to the land is the path for community well-being and for climate well-being. This vitally important work of reconnection requires Land Back.

What the Youth Told Us

As shared in Chapter 4, the youth we spoke to emphasized that our relationships with and responsibility to our lands and waters should be central to climate action. They emphasized the urgent need to restore and support our connections with our lands.

These youth offered a fierce critique of the education system and colonial governance, highlighting how colonial legislation and policies have attempted to sever our relationships and disrupt our bonds with each other and the land.

They are offering inspiring visions of educational and governance systems grounded in our original instructions and our ancestral connection to the land, which is fostered through ceremony, language, and relationships.

Transforming Education

For our own land based education systems to thrive, they need to: have ample funding to pay Elders and knowledge holders; be grounded in our own ways of learning and teaching, our own diverse knowledge systems; centre children and youth as active in their own learning; be grounded in our own languages, art and ceremony. These educational approaches can cultivate climate leaders in our communities.

Some youth spoke of the importance of integrating traditional teachings into mainstream education as well and about educating settlers about the land to foster in them a better understanding of Indigenous rights and perspectives on stewardship.

Other youth called for more educational opportunities about the climate crisis and education to inform impactful political action.

The issue of tokenism came up in these conversations as well. Tokenism refers to placing an Indigenous person in a position that would showcase an organization as inclusive, where in reality their voice does not have a meaningful impact on the organization. This act of inclusion can be a performative, shallow gesture, rather than a genuine, structural redistribution of power.

The youth made clear that organizations, educational institutions and governments all need to be going beyond inviting Indigenous speakers in tokenistic, one-off roles. Instead they should be working to create meaningful, long term and well-supported roles for Indigenous youth - where their voices are included, heard and heeded in ways that lead to structural changes in the functioning of these institutions.

Taking Back Our Lands and Transforming Governance

Governance and legislative systems need to change drastically to uphold our rights and responsibilities to our lands and to support our climate leadership and solutions. First, settler policy-making approaches must be reversed, and policy must begin with local community observations, needs and efforts instead of imposing disconnected and general rules from above.

A Bottom-up Approach

We need to fight for and cultivate governance and political systems that:

- Centre the leadership of Indigenous folks, communities of colour, and youth;
- Centre the needs and decisions of the people and communities most impacted by the issues being addressed;
- Provide support and funding for impacted communities to make their own decisions and design and implement their own solutions;
- Structure our processes around consent, not consultation;
- Prioritize care and well-being for Indigenous communities;
- Ground themselves in local places, interests, and needs that determine what's happening at wider national and international scales;
- Engage whole communities in collective responsibilities, so that we're all shaping policies and feel invested in them rather than having them be imposed on us.

Land Back is Climate Policy

The youth are being very clear: Climate leadership and solutions are naturally fostered when connection to land is supported, practiced, and grounded in ancestral knowledge. By being on the land, by listening to and learning from the land, waters and our animal relatives, we can know the best ways forward through a changing climate. But we can not be out there doing that while colonial governments and industries and settlers are occupying and making decisions on our territories. It is only through Land Back - full access to our territories and the restoration of our full jurisdiction over our lands and waters—that we will be able to fully flourish as climate leaders, enact our own climate solutions, and nurture healthy ecosystems able to maintain resilience as the climate changes.

The youth also shared that through their experiences in provincial, territorial and international climate organizing, relationships are built, friendships are made and learnings are exchanged and indeed that relationships are at the heart of climate action—and everything else.

Reclaiming Climate Policy, On Our Own Terms

In Chapter 5, we explored this question: what would climate policy-making look like (and what it could do?) if it were led by Indigenous people, and was grounded in our own worldviews, laws, governance systems and our relations with the land?

Many people spoke to make it clear that there are aspects of the policy and policy-making in this country that are inherently colonial, controlling and working against our well-being and rights. But others invite us all to think about it another way: engaging in policy creation ourselves, in our communities, as a way of reclaiming power and sovereignty. We can use policy, on our own terms, as a decolonial process; deconstructing existing systems and rebuilding them in ways that serve us, our communities and our lands.

We know that current settler-led climate policy is upholding colonial capitalism and excluding our people and knowledge from the policy making tables. But we can engage in our own processes that transform systems, through self-determined processes through which we enact our sovereignty, that center our own community needs and our own knowledge systems.

We can do this while reinvigorating our languages and traditional governance systems, grounding our policy making in our own protocols, original instructions and Natural Law and our commitments to future generations. Our policy making can begin with ceremony and can emerge from our time spent together on the land.

Unlike settler climate policy, our own climate policies can be holistic, not just focusing on climate as a single issue, or just focusing on humans as one species. It can be based on our understanding of the interconnected nature of all things. It can inform how we can live in a good way, not just in relation with other human beings but with our animal and plant kin as well. Our own climate policy can be about cultivating and acting upon right relations; restoring and celebrating our relations of reciprocity to the land and waters and relatives in our territories.

Climate policy making can be one path by which traditional territories return to being governed by the ancient laws of our ancestors. And they can be developed through genuinely inclusive, representative, and equitable processes that help us heal from the divisions in our communities driven by the governance systems imposed on us. These processes can go far beyond ideas and discussions. They can lead to real action, real change and real solutions for our communities, nurturing well-being for our communities and lands and waters.

These powerful visions of our own approach to climate policy are beautiful. But it needs to be named that all current efforts like this are still actively being hindered and thwarted by settler systems which underfund us, ignore our communities as rights holders, endlessly force extractive projects through our lands and lives and engage us in endless environmental assessments possess and court cases and negotiations table, as they seek to access our lands for their benefit.

So while we are doing this work in our own communities and territories, settler allies can do the work of transforming their own systems and fighting for climate policies that protect Indigenous rights, that support Indigenous climate governance on own terms, that reject false solutions and demand policies and solutions that transform colonial capitalism and hold polluters accountable.

As we bring our own knowledge and protocols to address the climate crises in all these ways, we need settlers to approach this work with humility and a willingness to enter into a reciprocal relationship with our Earth by acknowledging and fighting against the ongoing colonial efforts in so-called Canada to suppress and oppose Indigenous governance systems.

Pathways for Restoring Balance

In Chapter 6, we shared the inspiring conversations we had with Indigenous folks across Canada when we asked them what kinds of solutions they see or envision happening in this community. These conversations make clear that:

- Relocalizing governance and economies is a climate solution.
- Reconnection to land, culture and language is a climate solution.
- Indigenous Food Sovereignty is a climate solution.
- Energy Sovereignty is a climate solution.
- Taking Care of the Water is a climate solution.
- Taking Care of the Forest is a climate solution.
- Taking Care of our Animal Relatives and Their Habitats is a climate solution.
- Taking Care of Our Cities is a climate solution.
- Taking Care of Our Waste is a climate solution.
- Transforming Legal Systems to Protect What We Value and Require is a climate solution.

In Chapter 6 we describe and practicing these solutions, and what rang through these discussions is that our communities are already doing so many of these things and would be able to do so much more if we had full access to our lands; if our rights and title were upheld and if our own solutions were being well funded and supported.

Colonial systems' firm grasp on our lives and lands hinder the gorgeous, powerful solutions explored in this chapter. For Indigenous-led solutions to take hold, flourish, and transform systems, we need the means to weaken the control that colonial governments, economies, and cultures have over us.

The Six Pathways below offer some possible strategies to counter this control. The Six Pathways are presented in beautiful detail in Chapter 6 of this report. Each Pathway will require strong Indigenous leadership and participation as well as widespread settler allyship and support. These Pathways are:

- **Pathway 1:** Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being (Decentering Settler Ways).
- **Pathway 2:** Asserting, Defending, and Respecting Indigenous Self-Determination, Sovereignty, and Consent.
- **Pathway 3:** Redistributing Power, Wealth, and Land (Relinquishing Settler Control of Lands and Lives).
- **Pathway 4:** Decentralizing Climate Governance and Building Community Power.
- **Pathway 5:** Building Powerful, Intersectional, Inter-National Movements.
- **Pathway 6:** Ensuring Accountability and Reparations.

Again and again through these pages, the voices of First Nations, Metis and Inuit folks from across the five biomes of so-called Canada are sending a clear message to all those listening:

Indigenous people already have the alternatives and solutions to address the climate crisis. We need the time and space and funding to be out on our lands, together, listening to the lands, and speaking our own languages. For these solutions to flourish and for balance to be restored, we need settlers to do their own work.

Settlers and their Governments and Other Institutions Need to

1. Stop making this work harder for us through your colonial policies, industries and false solutions;
2. Demand that your governments uphold Indigenous rights and title;
3. Fight for land back. Land must be returned to the communities from who it was stolen from, so we have the spaces to enact these solutions and;
4. Find active ways to actively support Indigenous-led land stewardship and climate action, including supporting our full sovereignty .

Our diverse ways of knowing and being are powerful climate solutions.

For these solutions to flourish, we need our lands back.

Land Back is Climate Policy.

Resources

Black and Indigenous Liberation Movement. (n.d.). Our Struggle. Retrieved July 27, 2024, from **https://www.blackindigenousliberation.com/en/nuestra-lucha**

Borrows, J. (2010). Canada's indigenous constitution. University of Toronto Press. **https://www.deslibris.ca/ID/433699**

Bosshart. (2019, July 31). Biodiversity highest on Indigenous-managed lands. UBC News. **https://news.ubc.ca/2019/07/biodiversity-highest-on-indigenous-managed-lands/**

First Peoples' Cultural Council. (2020). Language nest handbook: A guide to creating and nurturing language nests in Indigenous communities. [PDF]. Retrieved from **https://fpcc.ca/resource/language-nest-handbook/**

Global Indigenous Youth Forum. (2021, June 18). Indigenous Youth Global Declaration on Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems. **https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/faoweb/2021/Indigenous/EN_Indigenous_Youth_Global_Declaration_on_Sustainable_and_Resilient_Food_Systems.pdf**

Gwich'in Council International. (2020). Impact assessment in the Arctic: Emerging practices of Indigenous-led review. Firelight Group. **https://gwichincouncil.com/sites/default/files/Firelight%20Gwich%27in%20Indigenous%20led%20review_FINAL_web_0.pdf**

Indigenous Food Systems Network. (n.d.). Indigenous Food Sovereignty. Retrieved July 27, 2024, from **https://www.indigenousfoodsystems.org/food-sovereignty**

International Indigenous Peoples. (2012). KARI-OCA 2 Declaration, Indigenous Peoples Global Conference on Rio 20 and Mother Earth. **https://villageearth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/DECLARATION-of-KARI-OCA-2-Eng.pdf**

Leonard, Kelsey, Dominique David-Chavez, Deondre Smiles, Lydia Jennings, Rosanna 'Anolani Alegado, Joshua Manitowabi, Rachel Arsenault, Rene L Begay, and Dawn D Davis. (2023). "Water Back: A Review Centering Rematriation and Indigenous Water Research Sovereignty." Water Alternatives 16 (2): 374–428.

Konsmo, E. M., & Kahealani Pacheco, A. M. (n.d.). Violence on the Land Violence on Our Bodies: Building an Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence. Retrieved July 27, 2024, from **https://www.niwrc.org/sites/default/files/files/reports/Violence%20on%20the%20Land%20Violence%20on%20Our%20Bodies.pdf**

Laboucan-Massimo, M., Rickerby-Nishi, F., Demeris, N., & Shafazand, S. (2023). Just Transition Guide: Indigenous-led Pathways Toward Equitable Climate Solutions and Resiliency in the Climate Crisis. **https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c9860bf77b9034bc5e70122/t/6555222edcea4d681ccf0454/1700078320040/Just+Transition+Guide.pdf**

Leonard, K., David-Chavez, D., Smiles, D., Jennings, L., Alegado, R. 'Anolani, Manitowabi, J., Arsenault, R., Begay, R. L., & Davis, D. D. (2023). Water Back: A Review Centering Rematriation and Indigenous Water Research Sovereignty. 16(2). **https://www.water-alternatives.org/index.php/alldoc/articles/vol16/v16issue2/707-a16-2-10/file**

Logan, T. (2021). Métis Road Allowance communities. The Canadian Encyclopedia.

McGregor, D., Whitaker, S., & Sritharan, M. (2020). Indigenous environmental justice and sustainability. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 43, 35–40. **https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2020.01.007**

McKenna, C. (2023, December 12). Report details "intimidation and harassment" of Wet'suwet'en people by RCMP protecting pipeline company. IndigiNews. **https://indiginews.com/features/report-details-intimidation-and-harassment-of-wetsuweten-people-by-rcmp-protecting-pipeline-company**

Million, D. (2018). 'We Are the Land and the Land Is Us': Indigenous Land, Lives, and Embodied Ecologies in the Twenty-First Century. In Nishime, L., & Hester Williams, K. D (Eds.), Racial ecologies, (p.19-33). University of Washington Press. **https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctvcwnm95**

Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. (2024). Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act—Province of British Columbia. Province of British Columbia. **https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/new-relationship/united-nations-declaration-on-the-Rights-of-indigenous-peoples**

The Red Nation. (2021). The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth. Common Notions.

Reed, G., & Gobby, J. (2021, July 30). Land Back and Climate Action. Indigenous Law Association at McGill. **https://indigenous-law-association-at-mcgill.com/land-back-and-climate-action/**

Reed, G., Gobby, J., Sinclair, R., Ivey, R., & Matthews, H. D. (2021). Indigenizing Climate Policy in Canada: A Critical Examination of the Pan-Canadian Framework and the ZéN RoadMap. Frontiers in Sustainable Cities, 3. **https://doi.org/10.3389/frsc.2021.644675**

Reed, G., Brunet, N. D., McGregor, D., Scurr, C., Sadik, T., Lavigne, J., & Longboat, S. (2022). Toward Indigenous visions of nature-based solutions: An exploration into Canadian federal climate policy. Climate Policy, 22(4), 514–533. **https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2022.2047585**

Recio, E., & Hestad, D. (2022). Indigenous Peoples: Defending an Environment for All. International Institute for Sustainable Development. **https://www.iisd.org/articles/deep-dive/indigenous-peoples-defending-environment-all**

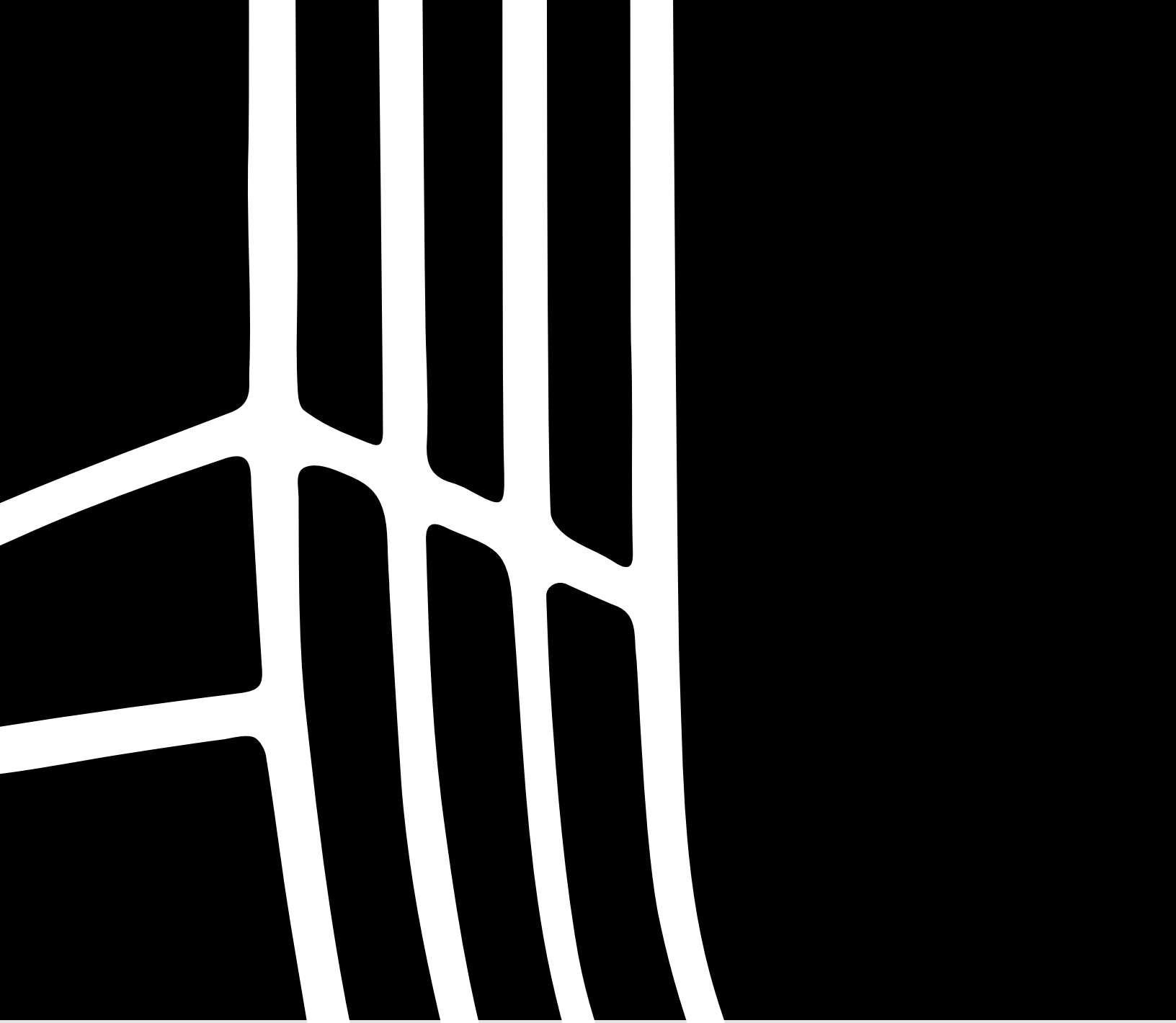
Sloan Morgan, V. (2020). "Why would they care?": Youth, resource extraction, and climate change in northern British Columbia, Canada. Canadian Geographies / Géographies Canadiennes, 64(3), 445–460. **https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12605**

Sogorea Te'Land Trust. (n.d.). Shuumi Land Tax. The Sogorea Te Land Trust. Retrieved July 27, 2024, from **https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/shuumi-land-tax/**

Whyte, K. P. (2014). Indigenous Women, Climate Change Impacts, and Collective Action. Hypatia, 29(3), 599–616. doi:10.1111/hypa.12089

Whyte, K. (2017). Indigenous Climate Change Studies : Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene. English Language Notes 55(1), 153-162. **https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/711473**.

Whyte, K. P. (2018). Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises. Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space, 1(1–2), 224–242. **https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618777621**



INDIGENOUS
CLIMATE ACTION