



WATER CARRIERS

EMERGING THEMES:

Water Carriers Phase Two- Building Capacity

CONTEXT TO THE PROJECT:

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Water insecurity can have disastrous impacts on the most vulnerable population in any community and women are often among this vulnerable group. Despite being one of the most vulnerable groups to water insecurity, women have been excluded from water governance for millennia. To combat this, The Native Women's Association of Canada together with Indigenous Services Canada, hopes to mend such inequality through the Water Carriers Project.

Phase 2 of the Water Carriers project focuses on gathering and disseminating knowledge, perspective and experiences of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals from 13 provinces and territories of Canada, on their role as water carriers; their knowledge and experience relating to access to clean and safe water; their knowledge of traditional water teachings; their experiences with impacts of climate change with particular focus on potable and drinking water and their recommendations for governance structures for conservation and protection of water and the environment.

Presenting the voices of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals in a national and regional scale will help push their agendas and issues to government entities. The distribution of information on women's roles as Water Carriers in their community will allow for sharing of traditional knowledge, encouraging more women to stand-up and advocate for their inclusion in decision making around water management which could help to reduce inequalities in socio-economic and political structures overtime.

PHASE 2





WHO ARE WATER CARRIERS

- Water Carriers in the Indigenous tradition are people, including women, girls, and two-spirit people, who are both protectors and sustainers of water.
- Indigenous traditions related to water include cleansing rituals and praying ceremonies that focus on sustaining and protecting water access for households.
- Indigenous women are disproportionately affected by challenges related to access to navigable and potable water
- Despite all the challenges Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people, their perspectives are largely omitted from federal and provincial decision-making processes around water governance.

METHOD OF ENGAGEMENT

- Thirteen 13 virtual sharing circles were conducted across the 13 provinces and territories of Canada.
- Sharing Circles are a traditional form of group communication used by indigenous communities to share and present information and thoughts in between members.
- The sharing circles were guided by a discussion guide divided into themes with accompanying guiding questions. The outcomes of the Sharing Circles are presented in the four thematic areas outlined below.

THEMES

1

PERSPECTIVES
on Roles of Water
Carrier and Traditional
Water Teachings



2

KNOWLEDGE
and Access to
Clean Water



3

IMPACTS
of Climate Change
and Concerns for
Future of Water



4

POSSIBLE
Solutions and
Recommendation



PART TWO:

EXPLORING THE THEMES

THEME 1:

Perspectives on Roles of Water Carrier and Traditional Water Teachings

- Traditional knowledge teaches us to respect water and care for it as it is essential and interconnected to all life.
- Water Carriers are individuals (most often women), who care for the water through ceremonies, prayers and through advocacy for its protection and care.
- Water is an important source of medicine, therapy, and spiritual calmness within the indigenous culture.
- Women are considered water carriers/protectors due to their connection to mother earth through life giving ability (womb).

Theme 1 Related Quotations:

- “We were always taught that water is sacred; it can feed you, nourish you, cleanse you, and offer transportation. We were taught to take care of the favorite, and it will take care of you.”
- “They are the knowledge keepers and protectors because water lines reach all across the land much like our veins and nervous system.”
- “Water carriers are protectors. They are the ones who speak up and protect like a clan, like safeguarding your baby. Babies are grown in our wombs, covered by water.”
- “In my teachings, as women we are protectors of the water. As water carriers we must provide youth and individuals with the teachings on why we are the water protectors.”

THEMATIC FOCUS WITH EVIDENCE

THEME 1





THEME 2:

Knowledge and Access to Clean Water

2



- Most participants and their communities have previously experienced or are currently experiencing water insecurity.
- Externalities from infrastructural buildings like dams, landfills etc., are a major reason Indigenous communities have faced water pollution to their rivers and wells.
- Environmental injustice through Water dumping, Agricultural runoff and commercial oil spills are some of the reasons for drop in water quality for Indigenous communities.
- Water insecurity has led to an increased usage of bottled water in Indigenous Communities.

Theme 2 Related Quotations:

- “In the Peter Ballantyne first nations, a dam was built, which wiped out all of our ancestral traplines. I don’t understand why our band doesn’t sue, considering we’re always under water advisory.”
- “I can’t believe that we now have to go buy bottles of water and not just to drink but to also wash our hands, brush your teeth, clean the dishes, it’s a lot”
- “One of the issues was losing access to our natural water sources; for example, earlier this summer, we were not allowed to use most of our water in the north due to contamination, and nothing is being done to mitigate those issues.”

KNOWLEDGE AND ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER





THEME 3:

Impacts of Climate Change and Concerns for Future of Water

- Climate Change and its subsequent externalities are regularly impacting Indigenous communities economically and culturally.
- Drop in fish populations due to droughts and changes in water temperature have caused insecurity in community food supplies.
- Concerns over the diminishing source of clean and drinkable water due to climate change and pollution are common among indigenous communities.

Theme 3 Related Quotations:

- “We have had years where there was not enough rainfall or water returning from the mountains that was able to provide traditional foods for gathering. This not only impacted our people, so there wasn’t the ability to go and gather silk berries and huckleberries and different type of teas and vegetation. It also impacted our wildlife. We had bears that were starving to death. We had cougars and large cats arriving in places they had never been seen before.”
- “Climate change has changed the water, and it is used for community food. I have seen the food fishery declining. Instead of healthier food being available, it became more of a grocery shopping industry. It saddens me to see the decline in fish and how I have to travel to get my salmon supply for the winter to feed my family”
- “The shoreline has got smaller and dirtier. There is more algae every year, and more fish die. Anything you put in the lake needs to be washed down after going in the water, which can contaminate other lakes if exposed.”

IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONCERNS FOR FUTURE OF WATER





THEME 4:

Possible Solutions and Recommendations

- An indigenous women's group is required in each community for decision-making on water.
- Education on the issues and possible practices for solutions are important in long-term care for the water and the environment.
- Increased decision-making power should be provided to Indigenous communities on any developments near their community and reserve.
- Increased Advocation for the protection of water and the environment is required by the Indigenous communities and their community members.
- Increased leadership roles need to be provided to women in their communities such that their voices can be heard.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Theme 4 Related Quotations:

- "It seems as Indigenous people, whenever we voice our concerns, we are treated like: "There's those people getting rowdy about something." It's not like people actually hear our voices, because we have so many things to talk about. It's like we are never going to be heard."
- "We need to work collectively, otherwise it becomes a cycle of assimilation and colonization and no respect for one another. A lot of older men are running the show, and they are ignorant."



Native Women's Association of Canada
L'Association des femmes autochtones du Canada