

Advocating for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in the Context of Climate Change

While the climate crisis harms us all, not all groups are equally impacted by climate change [1]. Indigenous Peoples and local communities are frequently overlooked in climate change policies and discussions [2]. In addition to existing inequities, Indigenous Peoples and local communities and land are often in ecologically sensitive areas, like coastlines, forests, and mountains, making them especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change [3].

THE PROBLEM

Serious issues that impact Indigenous Peoples and local communities due to climate change include exposure to diseases [4], [5], [6], discrimination and poverty due to migration [7], land degradation and loss [8], [9], political and economic marginalization [10], [11], unemployment [12], and violence [13].

Indigenous populations living in Africa's Kalahari Desert have experienced interruptions in traditional farming due to dune expansion and rising temperatures [14]. Other communities in East Africa like Hadzabe and Maasai have been impacted by climate change, resulting in several African Indigenous Peoples and local communities becoming dependent on government resources [15].

Meanwhile, melting glaciers in the Himalayas impact the regional water supply [16], [17], while deforestation in the Amazon region intensifies global warming and threatens the livelihoods of local Indigenous Peoples and local communities [18], [19]. In the Ecuadorian Andes, water pollution from large-scale, illegal mining (caused by extraction methods and increased rainfall from climate change) has led to an increase in respiratory illnesses, neurological diseases, and psychological problems [20].

In addition to this, displacement and land ownership disputes further destabilize Indigenous Peoples and local communities leading to economic and social hardship. This is occurring across the globe – the Kalash in Pakistan face glacial floods [21], the Munda in Bangladesh face coastal flooding [22], and the Mbororo in Cameroon were displaced from their homeland and now face discrimination [23]. The displacement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities due to the effects of climate change heightens existing vulnerabilities and leads to stress and trauma [24]. While each of these situations is alarming on its own, this is only a small glimpse into the issues Indigenous Peoples and local communities face that are caused or exacerbated by climate change.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the scope of these issues, the Global Psychology Alliance - Climate Subgroup, drawing upon psychological research, has compiled advocacy methods that Indigenous peoples and their communities, allies, psychological organizations, and policymakers worldwide can use to support Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the face of climate change.

These recommendations are based on empirical evidence and applied work with the following themes serving as the foundation for the advocacy strategies:

1. EMPOWERMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO MITIGATE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

The resilience and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities can serve as essential components of global efforts to adapt and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Key aims include: understanding and recognizing the importance of Indigenous peoples and their communities' connection with their ancestral lands, helping communities obtain legal recognition of their ancestral lands, and encouraging sustainable development, cultural preservation, and inclusive environmental policymaking.

In the Dadelhura district of western Nepal, the "Climate Change Adaptation and Advocacy" project focuses on countering harm from climate change. This is achieved by creating livelihood options and integrating climate change adaptation practices into district and national-level plans and programs [25]. This program supports and engages Indigenous Peoples and local communities in adapting and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

To achieve similar aims, the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council was founded in Kimberley, Australia. The Fitzroy River is the largest flowing river in Western Australia. It is known by Aboriginal Australians as the Martuwarra: a living

ancestral being with the right to life, to live and flow. This river was threatened by proposed intensive agriculture, pastoral and mining developments, and oil and gas exploration in the Fitzroy catchment. To combat these threats, the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council was created [26].

The Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council is a group of Indigenous elders representing the independent nations of the Fitzroy River catchment, who came together to declare a united voice to protect the river [26]. The voices of these communities were put at the center of subsequent decision-making processes (e.g. conservation management plan), and media and websites helped amplify their message [26].

Through the work of the council and collaboration with other organizations, a conservation management plan was put forward [25] that: “First, it puts the Martuwarra, the ‘River of Life’ and a ‘sacred living ancestral being,’ and also its tributaries, front and centre in terms of how water should be understood, valued and managed. Second, it places First Law, the ‘system of governance and law that Indigenous Australians have developed over tens of thousands of years’ as the foundation for caring for the country and the Martuwarra. Importantly, ‘Traditional Aboriginal law focuses on maintaining the balance of the earth so that all things can prosper.’ Third, the Plan is guided and informed by Traditional Knowledge and insights from six independent Indigenous Nations which have, in partnership, developed a framework of guardianship with accompanying rights, responsibilities, and obligations” [26].

In response to climate issues, the Council has several supported projects over the years. One example is the Boab Monitoring Project [27]. As described on their webpage: “The Building Indigenous Capacity in Culture, Tourism, and Conservation Economies project, funded by the Western Australian Government’s State Natural Resource Management Program, aimed to protect and sustain the culturally and ecologically significant boab trees (*Adansonia gregorii*) of the Kimberley region. The Boabs are sacred and integral to Indigenous heritage, and these trees are at risk due to climate change and land development pressures” [27].

This collaborative project combined Indigenous knowledge and Western scientific methods to monitor and preserve boab ecosystems, focusing on water table fluctuations and other environmental changes. The project fosters community engagement through monthly citizen science initiatives, and Pandanus Park volunteers have contributed essential data for ecological and economic monitoring [27]. Long-term goals include creating sustainable tourism and conservation opportunities along the Martuwarra (Fitzroy River), and supporting local economic development while sharing the river’s unique cultural significance with a global audience.

2. PROMOTING ALLYSHIP AND COLLABORATION TO MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE EFFECTS FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES.

This means listening, amplifying Indigenous voices, and engaging in joint efforts with communities while respecting Indigenous communities’ beliefs. The aim is to act as positive allies by fostering cross-cultural knowledge and establishing meaningful positive contact between groups. Understanding the role social identity plays in these intergroup interactions is essential, as identity conflicts can lead to negative outcomes.

In Yamhill, Oregon, the Eloheh Indigenous Center for Earth Justice is committed to advancing sustainable and regenerative earth practices through development, implementation, and education. The center aims to educate and nurture the mind, spirit, and body, fostering a lifestyle in harmony with the land, guided by North American Indigenous traditional knowledge (TIK), wisdom, and practices. Eloheh Farm & Seeds seeks to serve as a model for regenerative agriculture, animal husbandry, and wild-tending systems that support human needs while enhancing the earth and the interconnected web of life [28].

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, founded at Temple University in Philadelphia, USA, is an educational program that pairs campus-based students with incarcerated students for a full semester. Courses are held inside prisons, jails, and correctional facilities, and students learn together through dialogue and collaborative projects. Since the program was started in 1997, multiple chapters have been established at colleges and universities across the United States and worldwide [29].

Allyship programs often cause unintended harm to those they intend to help. Indigenous activists frequently bring up frustration with ‘well-intentioned’ allies who speak over and drain the already tapped individuals in the very communities they are trying to support. For example, workplace training programs risk alienating people, marginalizing certain individuals, or simply being ineffective. With these kinds of programs, there is often a sense among employees that the attempts are disingenuous at best or nefarious at worst. People can sense when others are sincere and when they are simply trying to fulfill a requirement or maintain outward appearances.

More successful programs implicitly promote allyship and positive contact between groups by providing a shared purpose or function. The Inside-Out Program has a practical purpose – providing education to students inside and outside prisons and correctional facilities. And it has a more implicit one – building positive relationships between incarcerated and non-incarcerated individuals. By providing a central goal or function, participants are more open and receptive to working with others who initially seem quite different. These circumstances allow for healthy intergroup communication and positive contact, which in turn offers a host of benefits. Everyone participating can experience transformative change, which plays out in ways that are hard to measure – like increased support for criminal justice reform,

lower recidivism rates, and humanizing those behind bars. That's what good allyship should be: kind, genuine and transformative for everyone involved.

3. PROVIDING FUNDING FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH ON MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

Targeted scholarships and funding opportunities are key for advancing interdisciplinary climate research and education involving Indigenous peoples. Establishing scholarships for Indigenous learners and providing funding for research focused on Indigenous-led projects is essential to realizing the empowerment of Indigenous communities.

What do successful education and research programs look like? The Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) hosts over 30 pre-conferences before its annual main conference. Each preconference has a specific research focus with a number of invited speakers and experts. There are opportunities for attendees to present posters, give talks, or brief "data blitz" talks on their research. Some examples of pre-conferences offered at the 2024 conference included: LGBTQ+ Research Across the Globe, Sustainability Psychology, Advancing Police-Community

Research in Personality & Social Psychology, and Intervention Science. There are also opportunities for early-career researchers to get involved in organizing the conferences. Psychological organizations could organize similar conferences and events focused on Indigenous-centered research [30].

SPSP organizes several training and educational programs for undergraduate, graduate, and predoctoral students with different focus areas. The programs offer hands-on experience in psychology research and networking opportunities and aim to support young researchers from underrepresented backgrounds [30].

If organizations care about including people from different backgrounds and perspectives, they need infrastructure in place to help these individuals through each stage of their careers. Having a more diverse collection of voices in research, education, and practice requires encouraging people to enter, remain in, and flourish in these fields. It is not enough to pay lip service to these ideals. Effective programs require funding, careful consideration and continued work. Funding these programs and enabling interested individuals to start their own initiatives allows for institutions of research and academia that support these goals.

4. SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES RESPONDING TO THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

The negative impacts of climate change pose serious mental health risks. Indigenous leaders should be engaged in planning and providing cultural competency training for mental health professionals. Providers must ensure services are accessible for and culturally sensitive toward Indigenous peoples and their communities. This requires effective and continual communication between government and non-government entities, mental health providers, and Indigenous peoples and their communities.

Established in Ontario, Canada, the Mental Wellness Program (MWP) is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The program aims to help Indigenous Peoples and local communities and organizations provide high-quality mental wellness services [31].

Building on the resilience and strengths of First Nations, the program prioritizes Indigenous-led projects. Research and capacity-building projects for mental health are identified by Indigenous Peoples and local communities to better serve their communities. Activities such as (1) spending time on ancestral lands, (2) life and health promotion, (3) suicide prevention, (4) substance abuse prevention and intervention, and (5) climate-related crisis response were specifically identified depending on the needs of the community [31].

Mental health and wellness programs often focus on systemic inequalities but rarely attempt to empower Indigenous peoples and their communities. The Mental Wellness Program (MWP) provides a holistic, strengths-based approach that promotes health and well-being for Indigenous peoples and their communities. Government funding is allocated to Indigenous Peoples and local communities and organizations, helping them carry out self-directed initiatives to help their community, such as prevention, healing, and crisis interventions. The program also supports vulnerable groups within Indigenous peoples and their communities, such as 2SLGBTQI+ people and survivors of Indian Residential Schools. By giving communities funding and the power to decide how to use it, this program helps address systemic issues and avoids top-down approaches that inadvertently cause harm or reduce effectiveness [31]. Mental health programs and interventions aiming to support Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the context of climate change can follow similar strategies but should be tailored for each community's specific context and the issues they face.

Advocating for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in the Context of Climate Change

(1) EMPOWERMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND CENTERING THEIR VOICES

Advocacy movements and strategies

Develop and support training programs on sustainable practices for Indigenous Peoples and local communities [[32], [33], [34], [35], [36], [37]

Key Stakeholder: Psychological organizations

System Level: Community

- Conduct surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions to understand the needs, priorities, and existing knowledge of Indigenous communities.
- Advocate for improved access to sanitation, clean water, health care and education to improve sustainable practices and engage in climate action.
- Co-create training programs with indigenous leaders and experts integrating traditional knowledge with modern adaptation and resilience practices. Giving focus to areas such as: eco-tourism, agriculture, handicrafts, and renewable energy.
- Offer leadership training to help community members lead and advocate for sustainable practices alongside existing community leaders.

(2) PROMOTING ALLYSHIP FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND COLLABORATION WITH OTHER GROUPS

Advocacy movements and strategies

Promote allyship and advocacy in support of Indigenous Peoples and local communities through positive contact between groups [38], [39], [40], [41], [42]

Key Stakeholders: Non-indigenous allies, Indigenous community, psychological organizations

System Level: Community

- It is important to avoid the pitfalls of ineffective or harmful allyship.
 - » Promote listening, elevating, and amplifying among Indigenous allies while acting on community-based needs.
 - » Avoid imposing or overshadowing Indigenous leadership.
- Embrace community-driven cross-cultural knowledge exchange and promote positive contact.
 - » Positive contact between groups can have lasting

beneficial results in how individuals from different groups perceive and relate to each other.

- » Organize immersion activities to understand Indigenous traditions and beliefs.

- Provide educational materials to non-Indigenous allies regarding cultural knowledge and skills of Indigenous communities.
- Build relationships between Indigenous and non-indigenous allies for mutual learning and collaboration.
- Promote cultural immersion activities that respect the traditional and cultural beliefs of the Indigenous community.

Integrate knowledge of social identity and intergroup relations into efforts and programs [43], [44]

Key Stakeholders: Psychological organizations, policymakers

System Level: Community

- People identify as members of certain social groups and these social identities influence how we interact with our world and others. An informed and thoughtful understanding of these topics can help programs that bring together diverse stakeholders to be successful.
- When people feel uncertain about their social identities or feel their identity is under threat, they strive to resolve uncertainty and threat. This can play out in negative or positive ways:
 - » *Negative* – stereotyping members of their own group and other groups, identifying too strongly with self-inclusive groups, embracing ethnocentrism and extremism, building “walls” between groups.
 - » *Positive* – identifying strongly with their own social groups, allows for the development of identity complexity (having multiple and intersectional identities), offers an opportunity to challenge their existing ideas and learn.

Mobilize resources and support collective action on issues impacting Indigenous Peoples and local communities [45], [46]

Key Stakeholders: Psychological organizations, policymakers

System Level: Societal

- Resource conflicts can drive and exacerbate identity conflicts. Acknowledging identity conflicts at play is the first step to sensitively handling and fairly resolving resource conflicts.
- With the right resources and support, people experiencing identity uncertainty or threat can perceive uncertainty as an *exciting challenge to grow and learn*. Without support and resources, people may *experience anxiety and see these threats as something to avoid and defend themselves against*.
- Effective leadership and messaging can promote positive, multicultural identities and collaboration.
- It is beneficial to create common goals across high-level shared identities (superordinate identities).
- It is important to acknowledge and value different identities while not drawing divisions between or marginalizing different groups.

Recognize that supporting and elevating Indigenous Peoples and local communities is something that benefits all people and efforts to combat climate change [47]

Key Stakeholders: Psychological organizations, policymakers

System Level: Societal

- Recognize the importance of the specific advocacy strategies addressing the impacts of climate change on Indigenous Peoples and local communities and that these benefits are not limited to Indigenous peoples.

(3) PROVIDING FUNDING AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Advocacy movements and strategies

Provide funding opportunities for research relating to Indigenous populations [48]

Key Stakeholders: Psychological organizations

System Level: Community

- Prioritize funding opportunities for research, specifically for:
 - » Research with sustainability aims
 - » Interdisciplinary collaboration
 - » Indigenous researchers
- Provide opportunities for researchers and practitioners working on this research to share their work and collaborate. Some suggested opportunities:
 - » Academic and professional conferences
 - » Research Society Subdivisions
 - » Groups and newsletters for researchers and practitioners

Establish networks and mentorship opportunities for Indigenous students and researchers [49], [50], [51]

Key Stakeholders: Psychological organizations

System Level: Community

- Mentorship is a key means of supporting individuals in education and academia.
- It is more important that someone feels a connection with their mentor and that their mentor shares their values than their mentor being of the same race, demographic or social identity.

(4) SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Advocacy movements and strategies

Create and participate in support groups and networks through training Indigenous Peoples and local communities to foster community resilience and mutual support [52], [53]

Key Stakeholders: Indigenous community, psychological organizations

System Level: Community

- Train peer facilitators to lead support groups within the communities
- Develop network support groups to provide emotional and mental health support to Indigenous communities.

Create and improve psychoeducational materials by ensuring cultural relevance and acceptance [54]

Key Stakeholders: Psychological organizations

System Level: Community

- Co-create psychoeducational programs with indigenous leaders and advisors
- Translate existing psychoeducational materials into Indigenous languages with appropriate cultural formats such as storytelling and/or visual representations.
- Organize community sessions that create, translate, or distribute psychoeducational materials for members of the community.

Develop and implement mental health programs that respect Indigenous cultural beliefs and practices [55]

Key Stakeholders: Psychological organizations

System Level: Community

- Involve Indigenous cultural advisors in the design and implementation of mental health programs to ensure they align with the community.
- Ensure programs are community-led and community-involved.

Organize mental health and psychosocial support programs to help Indigenous Peoples and local communities cope with the stress and trauma stemming from climate change [56], [57], [58]

Key Stakeholders: Psychological organizations

System Level: Community

- Develop programs that provide trauma-informed care to address the impact of climate change.
- Establish crisis intervention teams within the Indigenous communities.

Insist and collaborate in the construction of a curriculum where future psychologists are taught the need to make truly culturally sensitive approaches [59]

Key Stakeholders: Psychological organizations

System Level: Community

- In non-Western countries, it is important to move away from traditional Western approaches to psychology that neglect Indigenous and other worldviews and take a more culturally responsive and nuanced approach.
- Topics of the curriculum should include health, coexistence, conflict resolution, and cultural beliefs of Indigenous communities.

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