



Photo Credit: Government of Northwest Territories

Inclusive Resilience Project

Experiences of Disaster and Climate Change Among Indigenous Women, Two-Spirit, and Gender-Diverse Community Members



Canadian
Red Cross

Croix-Rouge
canadienne



Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

About

The Inclusive Resilience Project is a four-year initiative funded by Public Safety Canada and implemented by the Canadian Red Cross, along with subject-matter experts: FireSmart Canada, Partners for Action (University of Waterloo), BC Earthquake Alliance, and the Native Women's Association of Canada. The Inclusive Resilience Project involves identifying the most effective ways to increase critical awareness, and practical preparedness actions in responding to wildfires, floods, and earthquakes among under-served and under-resourced populations.

The Inclusive Resilience Project began in 2020 and concluded in March of 2024.



Public Safety
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Canada

What We Heard

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) joined the Inclusive Resilience Project in September 2022. The goal of the project was to provide the Canadian Red Cross with research on identifying barriers to disaster preparedness among Indigenous Women, Two-Spirit, and Gender-Diverse community members, focusing on three key hazards: earthquakes, wildfires, and floods. NWAC developed and delivered a national survey, and conducted six qualitative interviews. The survey was directed to those living in Lake Babine Nation, BC, Moose Factory, ON, and St. George's Bay, NL. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, visiting Indigenous communities was not feasible. As such, the survey was shared on NWAC's social media channels. As a result, NWAC heard from urban and on-reserve Indigenous community members across multiple provinces and territories. A total of 100 participants participated and their results are shared in this report.

Respondents believe that forests are most at risk from a disaster in their community, followed by rivers and lakes, which is, in part, a function of community proximity to these ecosystems.

“

**The land and the lake
are our home. If anything
were to happen to that,
I would be devastated.**

– PARTICIPANT FROM TEMAGAMI,
FIRST NATION, ON

”

Photo Credit: Government of Northwest Territories

Inclusive Resilience Project

Notably, in a disaster situation, participants are most likely to expect help from friends and family, followed by the federal government.



“

We like to help where it is needed. I do not like to see anybody struggle, that is not who our nation is. We do not just turn a blind eye when someone needs help. There is always something that needs to be done.

– PARTICIPANT FROM LAKE BABINE FIRST NATION, BC

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Respondents believe that forests are most at risk from a disaster in their community, followed by rivers and lakes, which is, in part, a function of community proximity to these ecosystems.

Barriers to disaster preparedness:
The most widely reported barriers to disaster preparedness are lack of money and lack of awareness about why and how one should prepare.

“

A lot of people are on social assistance so if there is no money coming in, they cannot prepare or plan for the disaster let alone have emergency kits. In the north, social determinants of health really play a big role in what type of preparedness you can have. For some people, people do not think about emergency preparedness. They might think more about everyday food coming in, everyday safety for women; with situations like that, we do put the unlikely that will happen, such as emergency disasters, at the back of our thoughts...I think policymakers should really take that into consideration. Social determinants of health should be a priority.

– PARTICIPANT FROM IQALUIT, NU

”

51





There is modest awareness of emergency preparations at the community level, as well as limited preparedness at the household level.

I would like to see each band in the nation have a day where you make a kit, take a tote home, learn what to pack, and what to put in there, so, you cannot say ‘I don’t know what to pack’ because everyone went. You get a tote, ‘you keep it in your car, you keep in your home and it’s ready to go.

– PARTICIPANT, NICOLA VALLEY, BC



The audience expressed widespread concern about disasters, due at least in part to past experiences with disasters in their communities and the related health impacts.

Respondents widely anticipate that most harvesting practices will be affected by disaster.

40%

of respondents have taken other disaster preparedness actions, such as learning about risks or building an emergency kit (33%)

71%

of respondents say they have stayed informed of weather and other advisories in the past year.



Interview Outcomes

Six participants from the following communities were invited to a virtual one-hour, one-on-one interview. The interviews aimed to dive deeper into the experiences and perceptions around disaster preparedness through qualitative questions. All six participants identified as Indigenous and female. One participant identified as Two-Spirit¹. Participants' education levels varied from high school and college to post-secondary degrees. Three participants lived on reserve, and three off reserve. The interviews are divided into four sections: preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. This portion highlights the main points made in the discussions.

Participant A – Iqaluit, NU

Participant B – Lake Babine Nation, BC

Participant C – Nicola Valley, BC

Participant D – St. George's Bay, NL

Participant E – Temagami First Nation, ON

Participant F – St. George's Bay, NL



¹ Two-Spirit is a term used by/for Indigenous Peoples. It can relate to orientation/ or someone who embodies masculine/feminine energies. It resists western gender binaries, and can also be understood as a cultural identity.

Spotlight: Preparedness

The most identified hazard or foreseeable risks to participants were floods, forest fires, climate change, food insecurity, and industrial disaster.

Most participants did not participate in disaster preparedness activities over the last year other than providing COVID-19 support, such as contact tracing and community support.



Four out of six participants said that their communities did not have an effective communication system regarding disaster warnings.

Most viewed word-of-mouth as the most effective form of disaster warning and communication, as well as social media.

All six participants indicated a want and a need for more training around disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. The need for more information on supporting others, packing necessities, and developing an evacuation plan was highlighted.



Spotlight: Mitigation

Four out of six participants said they feel comfortable in their knowledge to reduce risk factors related to disaster. Four out of six participants identified financial barriers as the primary concern in the event of a disaster, followed by a lack of transportation and language barriers.

Two out of six participants are moderately confident in their community's skills, knowledge, and resources to prepare for disaster. However, the lack of communication made participants not fully confident in their community's skills, knowledge, and resources to prepare for disaster.

Traditional Knowledge of the land was extremely important to all **six participants**. Many shared how the land sustains them, and how harvesting, hunting, and understanding the land are important in managing future disasters.

When asked what measures would reduce the risks experienced by women and children in disaster, participants suggested childcare, a safe, inclusive space for women and children, ensuring that they are tended to first in evacuation, and including financial and transportation assistance.

Spotlight: Response & Recovery

Four out of six participants shared that their communities responded well to disaster, such as searching for a lost hunter, timely disbursement of Personal Protective Equipment and providing COVID-19 support. Support for Elders who needed to evacuate a smoke-filled community, including care for animals and pets, was mentioned.

Participants identified community gatherings, cultural events, financial assistance (including food, shelter, and clothing), and Healing Centers (access to Elders, a place to recover from trauma) as the most encouraging in recovering from disaster.

The most identified personal concerns in disaster were financial, evacuation, and transportation needs; mental and physical effects; social determinants of health and lack of government support. Notably, one participant shared that the pandemic significantly affected their community because they lost, “matriarchs, Knowledge Holders, and Traditional language retention, including the ability to gather for ceremonies and cultural events.”

Spotlight: Identified Barriers & Solutions

1



Financial barriers are identified as the most common concern in this study.

2



Language barriers: not having preparedness materials and information provided in Indigenous language(s) and accessibility to disaster preparedness information.

3



Communities should strive to increase accessibility to disaster preparedness information, including the provision of preparedness materials and information in Indigenous languages.



4



Increase communication within the nation or community. Communities must strive to enhance communication between leadership and members on preparedness actions and early warnings.

5



Increase community awareness around disaster preparedness and response. Develop a “what to do” tool-kit and provide emergency contact information to every household in the community.

6



Increase action to training. Every participant indicated a need to access more training, such as how to help others, how to create an evacuation plan, and what to pack in the event of a disaster.



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