



A Vision for Co-development of the *BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda*

**WHAT WE LEARNED REPORT AND
CO-DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES**

Engagement Session was hosted virtually on
December 1, 2023 from 9 am – 12 pm



**British Columbia
Assembly of First Nations**



NAQSMIST

Executive Summary

On December 1st, 2023, the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) and Naqsmist, in partnership with the federal government (Environment and Climate Change Canada and Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada) hosted an engagement session to kick off the development of a BC specific First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda (FNCL Agenda). The session, which included participants from Nations around BC, was titled: “*A Vision For Co-development: The BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda*”, and focused on the question: What does 'co-development' with Canada mean to you?

Through this conversation, we learned that the terms 'co-development' and 'climate change' can be complicated. To worldviews that see all as interconnected, the terms themselves are confining – creating discrete categories that to many seem arbitrary. To implement First Nations' worldviews in policy and program development, the following approaches were recommended: Listen to Elders to understand the Mandate; Uphold Traditional Knowledge; Strengthen Relationships; and Promote Community Driven, Nation-Based Processes.

A **Mandate** is a strategic direction. Participants shared that Elders and Knowledge Keepers should be leaders in supporting development of strategic direction in governance. They shared the importance of not losing sight of teachings, like identity work to understand self; engaging with grassroots community members and ways of thinking; ensuring that processes are connected to Land and languages; and using Indigenous governance processes that promote deep, meaningful listening.

All of these Teachings are aspects of **Traditional Knowledge**, which is fundamentally based in the idea that everything is connected and the role of humans on this earth is one of responsibility to the rest of Creation. To make space for Traditional Knowledge, silos must be broken down, Stories must be shared, relationships with the Land must be fostered, and people (First Nations and settlers) need to learn to be grounded in their emotions and ways of being. This takes time and discipline.

On this path to strengthen **relationships**, Crown governments must approach 'co-development' initiatives from a reconciliation standpoint, they must recognize and work to level out power imbalances, they must be transparent, and they must work internally on their own systems in order to promote longer lasting relationships with First Nations partners.

Finally, community members *are* Rights and Title holders. The nested systems model wherein the individual, family, community and Land are bound up in relationship and reciprocity is a core tenet of making sense of the world and thus of making decisions about it; to bring it to fruition, all rings of the circle must be represented in governance. The processes wherein **communities and Nations** build and rebuild will take place in a spiral, where efforts are made and flow through time, necessarily being revisited over and over again along the flowing path towards wellbeing for all of us and the Land.

Co-development Framework: Principles and Recommendations

In discussing the practicalities of First Nations-Crown relationships, it still seems as though there is a gap between what is possible in a given 'co-development' process and what is desired by communities – both in the capacity of communities and governments. The following principles and recommendations have been created with that gap in mind, and as such, are broad principles rather than specific, narrow recommendations. They apply specifically to the BC FNCL Agenda and could apply generally to other 'co-development' processes. We must also acknowledge that they are not complete nor comprehensive; nor can they be, since such principles will differ across and between communities in different moments and situations. By defining 'co-development' at a provincial level, there is a risk that 'co-development' becomes a standardized process which may not suit the needs of diverse communities, which would be an undesirable consequence. As such, please consider the principles and recommendations in this section as a living guide with which to assess whether the term 'co-development' is appropriate for a given relationship while recognizing that Nations are diverse and self-determining.

What is 'co-development'?

Co-development: In the engagement session and through our research, we have learned that the meaning of co-development can be variable and situational but that it should include the following essential elements:

1. Co-development initiatives respect First Nations' inherent Rights and Title, self-determination, jurisdiction and governance;
2. True partnerships mean transparent, timely, and accessible decision-making and equitable solutions; and
3. Government approaches must be rooted in the spirit of reconciliation and decolonization.

Principle: Respect inherent Rights and Title

1. **Rights and Title:** 'Co-development' and/or shared jurisdiction do not abrogate or derogate from any existing inherent Rights and Title, rights in section 35 of the *Constitution Act*, the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), relevant case law precedents specific to a First Nation, or the *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis child, youth and families*.

2.1 Article 46 in UNDRIP will not be utilized to dilute the assertion and protection of Indigenous rights; UNDRIP will be interpreted and implemented with the spirit and intent of advancing Indigenous rights. [[Strengthen Relationships](#)]

2. **Shared Jurisdiction:** While 'co-development' is an important concept, the underlying principle of 'co-development' is the sharing of jurisdiction moving forward. 'Co-development' cannot be seen as a separate process in isolation from the desired long-term outcome of shared jurisdiction, which includes true partnerships to manage lands and shared decision-making processes that are led by First Nations in their territories and supported by the federal government. [[Framing the Discussion](#)]

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3. **Community-centered:** Approaches must have a community-centered design, and include all Rights and Title holders such as community members, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, youth, hereditary leaders and those living in urban areas. Elected chiefs and councillors under the *Indian Act* cannot be the only voices of First Nations. [[Promote Community-driven, Nation-Based Processes](#)]
 - 1.1 First Nations will determine how and if 'co-development' approaches are being achieved and will set their own priority areas for 'co-development' initiatives.
 - 1.2 Consider if existing Comprehensive Community Plans can act as a guide for 'co-development' as it relates to community expectations and initiatives. [[Promote Community-driven, Nation-Based Processes](#)]
 4. **Language and Culture:** Approaches to collaboration that are tailored to specific Nations must respect and include their language, teachings, cultural identity, and protocols. [[Listen to the Knowledge Keepers to Understand the Mandate \(Worldview\)](#)]

Principle: True partnerships mean transparent, timely, and accessible decision-making and equitable solutions

1. **Transparency:** Opportunities and challenges should be clear and openly discussed as part of a 'co-development' process to ensure all parties know the extent of possibilities and limitations. This approach respects the limited capacity that many Nations face and allows parties to focus on practical and solutions-oriented discussions. [[Strengthen Relationships](#)]
2. **Crown Champions:** Principles, agreements, and processes can be robust and well-intentioned, but without champions in Crown governments who can turn words into actions, the potential for change remains stifled.
 - 2.1 Crown governments must directly involve senior leadership and politicians in 'co-development' processes in addition to project and Indigenous relations staff.
 - 2.2 Crown governments should consider inviting independent scientists to participate in these processes, especially those who specialize in nature and/or environmental policies. This will ensure impartial voices are advocating for the well-being of the land, fostering a more balanced and informed perspective. [[Strengthen Relationships](#)]
 - 2.3 Crown governments should consider that internal employee retention and efforts to establish longer-term posts to work with First Nations would promote institutional memory and more impactful relationships. [[Strengthen Relationships](#)]
3. **Capacity Support:** Given the limited capacity faced by many First Nations, the federal government must listen to what First Nations need and provide capacity support on an ongoing basis to allow equitable participation of First Nations in governance processes.
 - 3.1 Consider the creation of a Canada-wide Elders' Council to guide 'co-development' approaches in specific policy areas. [[Framing the Discussion](#)]

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- 3.2 Consider the creation of scholarly research projects that are led by First Nations and funded in post-secondary institutions to support the creation of primary research in Indigenous communities. [[Framing the Discussion](#)]
 - 3.3 Consider the creation of climate action plans and policies that focus on land stewardship and education. [[Framing the Discussion](#)]
 4. **Strong Foundation to Work From:** Ensure that relationships are fostered before a crisis happens so that there is a solid foundation of trust and understanding of roles and responsibilities to respond to significant events.
 - 4.1 Climate change approaches must be linked to Emergency Management (EM). The approaches at the provincial and federal level for EM must be clearly communicated to First Nations so they are able to navigate tripartite and bilateral agreements in place between the BC Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR), Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), and First Nations. [[Uphold Traditional Knowledge](#)]
 - 4.2 First Nations must be informed of available funding, programs and support that are available through ISC and EMCR, and when to engage directly with federal EM partners if ISC and EMCR are not meeting the needs of First Nations. [[Strengthen Relationships](#)]

Principle: Government approaches must be rooted in the spirit of reconciliation and decolonization

1. **Nation-Building:** Approaches must consider and support Nation-building and re-building to promote reconciliation and healing, including making space to acknowledge climate grief. [[Promote Community-driven, Nation-Based Processes](#)]
2. **Healing:** Reconciliation and healing must happen within communities so they can practice their culture and traditions. Traditional approaches to land stewardship reflect best practices in climate leadership.
 - 2.1 Approaches must foster safety, and both First Nations and government participants should be conscious of their emotional state in order to practice deep listening. [[Uphold Traditional Knowledge](#)]
3. **Ceremonial and Land-Based:** Partners in initiatives should participate in Ceremonies and go on the Land with Knowledge Keepers in order to develop an understanding of First Nations' connection to the Land. This should include high-level bureaucrats and politicians. [[Uphold Traditional Knowledge](#)]
4. **Economic Opportunity:** Reconciliation initiatives must include economic opportunities to support Nations to divest from fossil fuel industry incentives. These incentives often pay for social programming that promotes wellbeing in the community but are funded by industry that is linked to climate change, a lack of food sovereignty, poverty, and natural disasters. [[Uphold Traditional Knowledge](#)]

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Background

Federal Commitments

Canada has committed to co-developing an [Indigenous Climate Leadership Agenda](#) (ICLA) (Shared Priorities action item 46: UN Declaration Act Action Plan; [2023 Emissions Reduction Plan](#); the [National Adaptation Strategy](#)) that would build regional and national capacity and progressively place authority and resources for climate action in the hands of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and representative organizations. This will include distinctions-based strategies, meaning there will be separate processes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. The First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda (FNCL Agenda) is further separated into provincial regions. Through these distinct regional processes, the goal is to be responsive to both national and regional priorities.

The [Joint Committee on Climate Action](#) (AFN-Canada Technical Table) laid the foundation for the FNCL Agenda. The BC Assembly of First Nations [Resolution 03/2023](#) mandates the BCAFN to work with First Nations in BC to develop the FNCL Agenda specific to British Columbia (the BC FNCL Agenda) and ensure their recommendations and policy directions are fully considered in the Canada-wide FNCL Agenda.

The [BC FNCL Agenda](#) will complement the work undertaken by the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) to implement the [BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan's](#) pathways and actions, and will serve as a guide throughout the process. [Naqsmist](#) and the BCAFN are working to collaborate with First Nations Rights and Title holders in co-developing the BC FNCL Agenda. Together we will conduct a series of engagement activities across BC to foster discussions and identify key priority actions and recommendations.

The BC FNCL Agenda will inform the Canada-wide FNCL Agenda, ultimately shaping the ICLA. The ICLA will be presented to the Cabinet and Treasury Board for implementation in the fall/winter of 2024/2025. The following are some existing challenges of which Canada is aware and which this process is seeking to address:

1. First Nations must navigate a complex web of federal programs to access funding to act on self-determined climate priorities. Examples include:
 - a. Underfunding of programs targeted towards First Nations;
 - b. Inflexible/niche program mandates;
 - c. Investment categories that do not reflect First Nations priorities;
 - d. Administrative and reporting burdens; and
 - e. Rigid funding arrangements and programs.

2. Poor/shallow First Nations' engagement in climate-related decision-making and policy development. Examples include:
 - a. Limited opportunities for First Nations participation throughout the policy cycle;
 - b. Lack of capacity, resources, and time to participate; and
 - c. Fatigue.

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3. The funding and other supports needed to holistically implement climate priorities over the long term are difficult to access. Examples include:
 - a. Lack of long-term funding approaches to implement strategies;
 - b. Insufficient capacity and related supports at the community, regional, and national level; and
 - c. Poor consideration of First Nations Climate lens, lived realities, Indigenous Knowledge, laws and governance.

However, government has yet to take a transformational approach to address these considerations. The federal government needs to reposition itself to recognize that First Nations' view of climate is more holistic – it isn't just clean energy, but health, adaptation, stewardship, and more. The intentions moving forward include:

1. Transforming access to funding;
2. Moving towards collaborative decision-making; and
3. Removing systemic barriers.

Work is happening at a national level, but the government is coming by invitation and supporting tailored regional approaches. Towards the end of the process, recommendations that emerge will be amalgamated (keeping regional distinctions intact) into a memorandum to cabinet, which will go to the ministers in the federal cabinet for review, discussion, and approval.

Canada does not require First Nations to come to one consensus or vision for First Nations Climate Leadership; approaches can vary regionally or otherwise as appropriate. However, there is an opportunity to identify common goals nationally as appropriate. Similarly, there is no requirement that the 'co-development' process be uniform for all First Nations. However, the 'co-development' process is tied to the same timelines and general process for all.

BCAFN's Role

After receiving BCAFN Resolution 03/2023, the BCAFN began leading the BC FNCL Agenda ensuring that policy recommendations coming from the BC FNCL Agenda are fully considered in the Canada-wide FNCL Agenda development. The BC FNCL Agenda needs to respond to BC First Nations priorities and needs and ensure federal policy respects self-determination, title, rights and treaty rights. BCAFN's goals throughout this process include:

- Support the implementation of the BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan;
- Ensure collaborative decision-making on Climate;
- Provide recommendations to change the way Canada provides funding to First Nations;
- Support capacity, expertise and governance;
- Address systemic inequities and barriers that limit climate action;
- Hold up First Nations knowledge systems, languages and laws.

Prior to the 'co-development' session, a Knowledge Keepers Gathering was held in Tsleil-Waututh territory, where 23 Knowledge Keepers came together to discuss the climate crisis and provided recommendations for moving forward. Recommendations from both the 'co-development' session and

the Knowledge Keepers' Gathering will inform eight regional engagement sessions taking place in the spring of 2024, plus focus groups, interviews, peer review of reports, and recommendations-review sessions. Information collected along the way will be used to adjust the process as needed throughout the engagements and will also inform the final BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda document which will be put forward to the federal government to influence the memorandum to cabinet in late 2024.

Naqsmist's Engagement Process

Naqsmist uses transformative storytelling and whole-systems healing approaches to support confidence within individuals, organizations, and communities to promote good decision-making and strategizing. At Naqsmist, we help guide people through conflict, disconnect, grief and trauma by sharing our Syilx Knowledge, Enowkinwixw decision-making process, and Cultivating Safe Spaces Framework. We provide participants with the tools and processes needed to improve how we show up in our personal and professional lives to solve problems and contribute to change effectively and sustainably.

Enowkinwixw is a decision-making process based on the Syilx creation story "How Food Was Given" or the "Four Food Chiefs" story. This story explains how important it is for us to include all voices in decision-making and tells us how to listen to each other so we can make good decisions. All of our Laws are held in our stories and language. Our stories tell us how we must govern ourselves and make good decisions for the good of all living things. During Enowkinwixw, participants are divided into four perspective groups: Tradition, Relationship, Action, and Innovation. Participants self-select into perspective groups, and each group is provided with a set of guiding questions and a facilitator/notetaker to capture their discussions (in the 'co-development' session, each group received the same questions, listed below). Enowkinwixw is not a process in which we come together to figure out something new. It is a process of clarification of what we already know.

Cultivating Safe Spaces (CSS) is a trauma-informed framework based on Enowkinwixw that ensures the protocols and perspectives cultivate a productive space for ideas to come into contact with one another by fostering a sense of safety and trust amongst participants. It asks participants to promote one another's wellness, inclusion, validation, and freedom. Through CSS and Enowkinwixw, we acknowledge that we all have different perspectives, experiences, and ways of doing things but that each voice is important.

What follows is a summary of the second session of this process, *"A Vision For Co-development: The BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda"*, which includes draft principles for what the word 'co-development' might mean to First Nations peoples in BC and how it might be conducted throughout the development of the BC FNCL Agenda.

Breakout Group Questions

1. What does 'co-development' with Canada mean to you?
2. What questions do you have about 'co-development'?

Thought Starters

These were supplemental questions offered to promote accessibility into the conversation for a range of knowledge and interest levels. The conversations flowed naturally based on participants' responses to the two main questions and their voluntary use of the thought starters.

1. Is 'co-development' the proper term for BCAFN and the government to use at this stage?
 - a. If not, what is the proper term?
2. What does a successful 'co-development' process look like?
 - a. What are some examples of successful or unsuccessful 'co-development' processes you have experienced or witnessed?
3. What principles are important to you when entering 'co-development' spaces?
4. How can we ensure that self-determination is upheld throughout 'co-development' processes, and how do we measure its success?
 - a. What is the difference between 'co-development' and direct engagement with Rights & Title Holders?
 - i. How must these ideas be considered during 'co-development' and/or direct engagement with Rights & Title Holders?
 - b. How do we know when something is adequately co-developed?
5. How do we best work alongside each other and the provincial and federal governments when entering 'co-development' processes?
6. How can we hold the government accountable to use 'co-development' meaningfully?
7. How can we set a 'co-development' standard across federal and provincial governments?

What We Learned

Preface

Before delving into the contents of the discussion, it is valuable to first provide a brief description of the term 'co-development' to establish a starting point for what follows. We acknowledge that as of early 2024, “What 'co-development' means in practice and who must be involved in 'co-development' is a question that is currently being addressed through a distinctions-based approach”, i.e. it is an unsettled question¹. As one example, the National Assembly of First Nations (AFN) describes 'co-development' as “a collaborative process in which the AFN and the federal government each play an equal role in defining and elaborating necessary changes to law and policy consistent with the inherent rights of First Nations”². Furthermore, the Inuit Crown Partnership Committee³ defined 'co-development' as “the process by which Inuit and the Crown work together in good faith to advance shared objectives, including to amend or modify existing initiatives or develop new ones” (Inuit Crown Partnership Committee, 2022).

As we will discuss below, the parties to be involved in 'co-development' activities in BC may vary depending on circumstance, but for the purposes of this report, when we talk about ‘co-development’, we refer to some interactive process to advance shared objectives, such as amendments, modifications, or creation of initiatives (including development of policy and laws) between First Nations groups in BC (broadly defined) and Canadian Crown governments. The ideas in this report may also be taken (with care for nuance and context) to shed light on the idea of 'co-development' outside of this context. The audience for this report is intended to be: federal government staff and leaders working on the BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda; federal and provincial government staff and leaders working collaboratively with First Nations and First Nations organizations; and First Nations and individuals seeking to advocate for themselves in the BC FNCL process and other collaborative processes with Crown governments.

¹ Canada, 2023. Consultation and Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples. Retrieved January 11th, 2024 from https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/report-rapport/2023/docs/2023-unda-ar-final_en.pdf

² Assembly of First Nations, 2022, page 2.

³ “Inuit” is defined as “the Indigenous People enrolled as members in four Inuit Treaty Organizations (ITOs): Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Makivik Corporation, and Nunatsiavut Government. ITOs are the legal representatives of Inuit in their relationship with the Crown”; The Crown is defined as “represented by the applicable federal department or departments and their respective Ministers” (Inuit Crown Partnership Committee, 2022)

Participant Feedback

Framing the Discussion

While we have explored the term 'co-development' above, we did not provide any definition of 'co-development' to participants prior to the breakout groups at the session. This was so that we could avoid leading questions. As we asked participants *“What does 'co-development' mean to you?”*, we discovered that there are conceptual differences between western and Indigenous ways of thinking and being when it comes to 'co-development'.

First, we learned that there was reluctance to use the term 'co-development' because participants felt that it was confining. This sense of confinement was underscored by participants' view that the playing field on which 'co-development' occurs is fundamentally unequal and that there are deeper issues than the label given to these types of relationships:

“Co-development isn't about the choice of terms. We're wondering if they want to acknowledge the inherent rights and jurisdiction. We're talking about co-jurisdiction. How is the Canadian law incorporating us? Where it doesn't, there needs to be a revision to the law. Canada always falls short in its desire to be inclusive because of this cabinet [internal government decision-making] process⁴. When Canada opens that door, it will be able to look at us as individuals and respect our rights.”⁵

Another participant added:

“Co-development means working together to create climate action plans and policies at a level playing field – not for Canada but with Canada. [It involves] Land stewardship and [educating] the rest of the society of Indigenous Knowledge base and values.”⁶

Beyond the recognition of power dynamics in 'co-development', there seemed to be a fundamental misalignment between the participants' view of 'co-development' and their perception of government 'co-development' initiatives, based on inherent understandings of humans' role on this earth. Participants expressed the view that all things/beings are interconnected and said that they struggle with the silos inherent in government processes, where ministries and departments are responsible for narrow subject areas/operations. This is a mechanized system structure wherein many distinct *parts* have a hard time relating to one another – for example, policies within various government departments often contradict one another because of the diverse mandates/priorities within the siloed system of bureaucracy. If everything is interconnected, however, the logic of the system induces different behavior; people think in systems of interrelated cause and effect, of ripple effects. As one participant explained:

⁴ Cabinet is the political forum where ministers reach a consensus and decide on priorities and issues. It is the setting in which they bring political and strategic considerations to bear on proposed ministerial and governmental actions (Canada, 2023. Cabinet. Retrieved on January 11th, 2023 from <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/corporate/about-canada-revenue-agency-cra/ministerial-transition-2021/roles-responsibilities/cabinet.html>).

⁵ Innovation Participant

⁶ Relationship Participant

“Policies are based on self-interest. We don’t value these spaces. We use holistic systems, and we talk about things. Spider web – what happens on one strand affects the entire web. co-development does not have the human element; it is based on a power and control model.”⁷

Participants expressed difficulties in their experiences working with governments and industry, namely that it can be challenging to convey this worldview and to have the other party acknowledge it or truly understand it. This often stems from situations where individuals engaging with First Nations are not even aware that the lens by which they view the world is simply that: a filter that colours their reality. As one participant said,

“To me, co-development is a mutually beneficial approach that involves us from the early stages in planning and decision-making. It stems from self-determination; it has to be meaningful participation. From the discussion today I’m hearing that we’re trying to reject this colonized point of view – it’s about getting the government to understand what those characteristics of the colonized point of view actually are.”⁸

Another participant shared:

“We talk about Rights and Title a lot in our community. Title and rights are not an entitlement; it’s a responsibility. We have a responsibility to hunt, fish, and take care of the Land. tmix^w in my language means “all living things,” and everything on earth has a spirit and a soul. I understand this, but it is hard to explain this to people who don’t know the language; it is hard to translate into English. Elders have been fighting to find a way to get this message across to provincial and federal governments.”⁹

It would appear that a fundamental challenge in any 'co-development' process is to navigate the intersection of western and First Nations' worldviews in a way that promotes diverse worldviews equally. It is with this in mind that we consider the themes that emerged from the 'co-development' session:

1. Listen to the Elders to Understand the Mandate (Worldview)
2. Uphold Traditional Knowledge
3. Strengthen Relationships
4. Community-Driven, Nation Based

Listen to the Knowledge Keepers to Understand the Mandate (Worldview)

A mandate is a strategic direction for the way forward. It is a key component of advancing objectives or creating initiatives. However, getting towards a mandate is not cut and dry. Whose mandate is it? When is a mandate finished? Who implements it, and how? Among participants at the session, there was a shared sense that 'co-development' processes move too quickly to resolve many of these questions, as they are compressed by government timelines. Further, there was a feeling that the context (First Nations communities) within which 'co-development' initiatives often take place is itself a barrier to adequate 'co-development'. For example, many communities are struggling with intergenerational trauma and mental

⁷ Action Participant

⁸ Innovation Participant

⁹ Tradition Participant

health and substance use crises and are losing Elders, which makes engaging with government and industry challenging. The landscape of First Nations governance is complex – it is not always clear who speaks on behalf of whom and whom the appropriate representatives are for First Nations.

However, underneath these layers of colonization are essential teachings held in language, culture, and worldview. Many participants felt that the answers to many of the questions we are looking for (a mandate) can be found in Indigenous communities and more specifically in Indigenous Knowledge. Participants expressed that “moving back to traditional ways is so important.”¹⁰ There is a thirst for this Knowledge, and many participants shared that they would prefer to have guidance from Elders on the matter of ‘co-development’. As one participant said:

“Someone asked me recently, “What would you do to make some positive change?” I think about having an Elders council spanning across all Nations, sea to sea, women and men coming together to bring their voice, knowledge, and language not only in BC but across Canada. I understand that not all of us agree with one another, but I would put my faith in a council of Elders. Men and Women who have the very best in mind for the next generations.”¹¹

Another participant added

“They want to co-develop a process, and they probably want a vision statement. I’m wondering if we are taking a step ahead of ourselves. I want to ensure our Elders are heard first, and I love the idea of an Elders’ council. Our Elders meet in my community on a monthly basis, and that is where I get a lot of my guidance from.”¹²

Other participants mentioned the importance of not losing sight of Traditional Teachings and ways of being, saying: “Sometimes the higher educated people are the ones that are more highly colonized. They need to go back to their grassroots of the true teaching of who they really are,”¹³ and

“Knowledge Keepers and people who get out on the Land and have the knowledge and the solutions. I have a cousin who spends all his time on the Land or water, and he does not understand the depth of the knowledge he holds. He has so much knowledge and the ability to look at the Land and see what is going on. Whatever approach we take, it is important to include these people.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Action Participant

¹¹ Tradition Participant

¹² Tradition Participant

¹³ Tradition Participant

¹⁴ Action Participant

Further,

“In terms of co-development, it's about listening and allowing an Indigenous voice, which includes our languages. We have words or phrases for environmental or ecological ways of how to take care of our watersheds, rivers, and mountains. There needs to be a radical shift in old siloed thinking; it's all interconnected, but the government still doesn't understand that.”¹⁵

Another participant shared that

“One of our former Chiefs used to tell me that he loved the ability to be heard and actually feel like he's being heard. It's time to take a step back and listen to our Elders. The way I was raised, if I don't listen to my Elders, they will sit me down and make me listen. I have done enowkinwixw processes before, and I wonder how we can implement a process like this with Canada ensuring the right people are there?”¹⁶

Another participant explained that “The communities have oral traditions where all differing viewpoints are upheld, respected and intertwined.”¹⁷ That said, depending on who a Mandate is for and how it will be used and implemented, it might appear in different ways, or there may be multiple Mandates. As one participant shared:

“There are 204 First Nations in BC, and we all have different goals and needs. While local communities are just seeing climate changes this year, others have done so earlier. There needs to be a framework of reconciliation and recognition of the rights of First Nation peoples within the 'co-development' model.”¹⁸

The following are some suggested approaches to take when working towards a mandate:

1. Seek guidance from Elders and Knowledge Keepers;
2. Work to understand who you are and where you come from;
3. Engage with grassroots community members and ways of thinking;
4. Ensure that processes are connected to Land and Languages; and
5. Use Indigenous governance processes that promote deep and meaningful listening.

It is challenging to outline a Mandate for all First Nations in BC, however, what follows may begin to provide a framework by which communities, Nations, organizations, and partners can seek strategic direction in the process of partnership itself, not just the end result.

Uphold Traditional Knowledge

Throughout the discussions, many participants alluded to the notion that both 'co-development' and 'climate change' are limiting in the sense that they are only parts of something larger and cut out the rest of the picture from the field of view. It is almost as if, for some First Nations people, the concepts themselves are a logical error that prevents a true reflection of lived reality. The siloed nature of western culture destabilizes First Nations realities. As one participant shared: “English language and culture are

¹⁵ Tradition Participant

¹⁶ Tradition Participant

¹⁷ Action Participant

¹⁸ Relationship Participant

siloes, translating into the colonial government being broken down into ministries and departments like DFO, Mining, etc.”¹⁹ In reference to ‘co-development’, another participant said:

“We have a word in our language, Shxwelí, which means “spirit that moves in everything.” We cannot keep using the term “co-development.” It needs to be a word that describes the Land and what we really want out of this relationship.”²⁰ In reference to climate change, one participant shared: “Maybe it’s not a word. In many ways in our languages we use phrases. It needs to say “This is our Land, and we must take care of everything that’s on it.”

We have so many different languages; how fortunate and rich is that? It needs to be something that encompasses that idea. Taking care of the animals, sustainability, our thousands of years of knowledge, and that knowledge is still at the table. We must bring that forward.”²¹ Another participant asked: “Climate is not just an Indigenous issue but a world issue of colonization; how does ‘co-development’ look if governments function with different world views from those of Indigenous Nations?”²²

What does this mean in practical terms? First Nations feel like they must bring the same concerns over and over again to different groups, departments, and ministries—each with its own specific mandate—constantly entering into silos where their worldview is denied and brushed off. One participant asked:

“How can this [‘co-development’ process] be tied into the Indigenous worldview and reduce the toll on Indigenous communities having to talk about these challenges with different ministries? How do we level the playing field and get to solutions quickly? The work done by Indigenous peoples to work with the colonial government does not feel respected or appreciated.”²³

A frustration shared among many participants is that emergency management is not being linked to climate change. After experiencing record breaking climate disasters, it feels ineffective to be discussing similar topics at different tables, especially when communities are already experiencing engagement fatigue. One participant shared,

“The wildfires have become a new normal...Impacting the landscape and salmon. Many different tables are having the same discussions and asking the same questions. Time is of the essence. We are behind on climate action. We have the solutions, but we are not seeing the action. In regards to First Nations, equity, and capacity are missing.”²⁴

Another participant added,

¹⁹ Relationship Participant

²⁰ Tradition Participant

²¹ Tradition Participant

²² Relationship Participant

²³ Relationship Participant

²⁴ Action Participant

“I am from Lytton First Nation. You can imagine how devastating things have been in my community. I have experience working in education and emergency management. Climate Change needs to be linked to Emergency Management. I have been involved in both federal and provincial 'co-development' processes. It's important that First Nations know what those processes are and how the system works because many people don't understand it, so it is hard to navigate.”²⁵

This relates to First Nations Stories, teachings, and prophecies. One participant mentioned a common thread among First Nations stories that the White People are the little brother to the Red People, and for the world to be well, they must humbly listen and learn from their older brother.²⁶ As an example, one participant shared that a group of firefighters were responding to a wildfire on their Territory, but did not heed advice from local Elders about the weather conditions. They were caught twice behind the burn line, putting themselves at risk. “Our Elders told them that our winds change twice in one day and to not be in certain areas at certain times, but they brushed them off.”²⁷

The Knowledge of the Land acquired by Knowledge Keepers comes from a deep relationship with the Land itself through living and relating to it in an experiential, observant way. As one participant shared,

“Anyone that wants to participate in 'co-development' should go and be on the Land, and be with our Knowledge Keepers. They need to make a connection and understand why we hold that connection so dearly. Otherwise, they will never understand.”²⁸

Once you make that connection, your decisions are made from a place of prioritizing the future and well-being of the Land, and the next seven generations. However, without adequate crown investments directed towards the economic development of First Nations, decisions may be made without the best interests of the Land at heart. Industry plays a large role in climate change but can also aide in the economic growth of communities. One participant said,

“We have industry who are big players in climate change, and they want to work with us, whatever that may be. Change is happening in transitioning to a green economy, and we need to transition. However, it is tough sometimes because we need the economic horse to pull the social cart. The social programming funded by industry is often linked to climate change – food sovereignty, poverty, and natural disasters.”²⁹

The Connection to the Land also needs to be strengthened within First Nations communities, as another participant said,

²⁵ Action Participant

²⁶ Tradition Participant

²⁷ Tradition Participant

²⁸ Tradition Participant

²⁹ Action Participant

“We need to be talking about the root causes of the climate crisis. We need to get youth back on the Land, and we need opportunities and reconciliation based on meaningful words and actions. What do those look like? There is a strong disconnect between climate professionals who don’t want children, and the Indigenous worldview of taking care of children and the importance of raising them for the next generation—reconciliation, connection to the Land, knowledge building, and sharing all tie into the climate strategy.”³⁰

Evidently, this is a two-way street: First Nations and settler communities can both benefit from strengthening their ties to the Land and to other beings. This is a key element missing from 'co-development' discussions where conversations take place in board rooms and the realm of ideas, rather than on the Land in the realm of lived experience and relationship to Creation.

This missing element – the connection to Land and other beings – is a key component of what participants talk about when they stress the importance of healing. As one participant explained:

“The added part of reconciliation and climate leadership goes back to healing First Nation peoples and their Lands. There must be a lot of reconciliation within the communities themselves so they can return to practicing cultural ways and traditions. Reclaiming this is vital for climate work, and Canada has a responsibility to facilitate this for First Nations peoples.”³¹

Further, another participant explained:

“We need to have it with our hearts, souls, and minds. Young ones do not have their identity; they need to know who they are and where they come from. The higher the education, the more prone people become to government processes and are more willing to get their direction that way. They do not know that there are other ways to do things.”³²

As was mentioned earlier, there is a desire to return to the old ways and truly uphold Traditional Knowledge, which includes a deep understanding of oneself and one's purpose. Teachings are a lived and embodied practice that relates to emotional maturity, or Coming of Age. Because of residential schools, many First Nations still feel afraid to speak their languages or practice their cultures. With this fear as a baseline in many 'co-development' processes, much work is needed to cultivate safety for conversations and for participants engaging in conversations to work on their own healing, both First Nations and government officials. As one participant said:

“[While hunting,] I was never allowed to pull the trigger until I was 20 years old. I had to learn how to do all the work first because pulling the trigger is the easiest part, but then you have to learn how to deal with your emotions after you pull it. There is no co- in 'co-development' because we still are not being listened to.”³³

³⁰ Relationship Participant

³¹ Relationship Participant

³² Tradition Participant

³³ Tradition Participant

Managing emotions is part of deep listening and listening with discipline. Like hunting, 'co-development' requires all involved to “do the work” in order to promote the best outcomes.

Strengthen Relationships

Participants felt strongly that 'co-development' initiatives are underscored by a strong power imbalance, with Canada ultimately having authority. One participant shared:

“Co-development has given us a seat at the table right now, but our ink is not visible. Our ink needs to be seen and implemented. Our voices are not heard. It feels like we are talking but not being heard. Co-development is about Canada stepping aside and letting us take the lead in our ancestral Lands. We were here before, and the Land in BC is unceded and unsurrendered. We know our Territory and how to manage it. Co-development is about letting the Nations take the lead in our territories.”³⁴

Another participant said, “Listening to the presentations, I feel like there are many hoops that we have to jump through – it is coming from a colonized point of view, and we need to change that narrative.”³⁵

While there is a positive sentiment that more conversations are being guided by First Nations, the inevitable power imbalance and secretive nature of Canadian government processes continue to prevent progress. One participant explained that collaboratively identifying government barriers would feel like a step in the right direction, making the process feel much less one-sided:

“It would be great to ask the government, “What are your barriers, engaging in this conversation?”... The closed-off attitude of the government needs to change. It’s secretive; they say they can’t share. What are ways to overcome this? We deal with politics in our own culture. We have unique strategies that maybe we can help you.”³⁶

Participants still felt as though the climate change conversation and other issues are not moving along fast enough – that Canada is not upholding its commitments to First Nations people – and it is hard to overlook this fact when trying to work collaboratively. Participants expressed that “organizations and Nations are feeling left out of the conversation, and the decision-making, but the biggest issue is that nothing comes out of it.”³⁷

Ultimately, participants felt that it’s not simply a 'co-development' process, but a holistic, inclusive “reconciliation process [that they are seeking].”³⁸ To that end, participants felt that it would be a significant shift in the right direction if governments would make it a priority to openly share

³⁴ Action Participant

³⁵ Innovation Participant

³⁶ Innovation Participant

³⁷ Action Participant

³⁸ Relationship Participant

“how the federal system works, how decisions go to Cabinet and requests to the Treasury Board, etc. Community members and people participating in this engagement process need to understand the mechanics of government.”³⁹

Moreover, when government communicates the (very real) barriers it faces in implementing change, while it may be disappointing, it might still promote trust between people involved in 'co-development' processes. As one participant shared,

“the provincial government kept saying no in a 'co-development' process, the committee kept asking why not, and the government kept deferring the question. Finally, the government was truthful, and they said it was too hard to implement, and then they all agreed. Instead of the government deciding, it is important to be honest and share the decision-making.”

In the case of the 'co-development' of the BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda, this conversation is happening. As one government official shared about the process, “The system we feed into with this information gathering results in a Memorandum to Cabinet and there is a confidentiality agreement inside of cabinet. We’re forced to work within these systems and we force First Nations to work in these systems, so that results in timelines, it results in imperfect co-development. The conversations are being led by First Nations organizations – the conversations are being self-determined”... They asked: “Are there other thoughts from the group – acknowledging the system we work within – recognizing that we probably can’t change cabinet processes – how could we move closer to 'co-development' in the internal process?”⁴⁰ To this question, participants responded that it might be wise to have independent scientists within government that advocate for Nature; that 'co-development' is bigger than the choice of terms – it is about co-jurisdiction; and that in other 'co-development' processes, the right to define a process as 'co-development' or not should rest in the hands of the Rights and Title holders, i.e. community members. 'co-development' cannot be a separate process from shared jurisdiction. With the aforementioned barriers, we simply aren’t there yet. But it is a process that must take place in increments.

An early step is to ensure that knowledge is shared openly. In short, First Nations peoples are asking to be involved as equal partners, entrusted with the same knowledge as governments so that all can work towards solutions with accurate information together. This is foundational to good relationships in 'co-development' processes or otherwise. This is reconciliation.

Another practical recommendation to improve relationships was to improve the way that 'co-development' and other initiatives are advertised within First Nations communities. As one participant said, “The government needs to share that this climate crisis is an emergency with lots of time for people to plan to attend.”⁴¹ They shared an example of an engagement event on some critical legislation taking place where all Nations were invited, but only five participants attended, some of whom were members of the government ministry running the session. The participant shared that the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) doesn’t represent their band, and so their band and others like it often fail to have their perspectives heard. They shared that not all 204 First Nations were consulted, yet the legislation still went through the legislative process anyway. The participant attributed the lack of engagement to late

³⁹ Action Participant

⁴⁰ Innovation Participant, CIRNAC

⁴¹ Innovation Participant

invitations. When asked about some of the other logistical challenges in sending invitations to First Nations governments/organizations, including email addresses being out of service, the participant responded that Facebook is the most valuable resource for them to hear about events.

Another, more systemic challenge in building and maintaining relationships and providing adequate communication is government turnover. As one participant explained,

“The dilemma I’ve seen is a high turnover rate of government personnel. Passing work over to the next generations, there are internal strategies that must be considered. Relationship building is essential, and it’s hard with a high turnover rate.”⁴²

This indicates that one way to promote better 'co-development' processes might be for governments to focus on internal employee retention and efforts to establish longer-term posts that promote relationship building over many years. While these logistical and practical considerations are important, it is essential to acknowledge that the core challenge in strengthening relationships between governments and First Nations is deep distrust in government processes from First Nations. As one participant put it,

“Regarding the recognition of inherent Rights and Title - Canada is not there yet. Canada initially denied UNDRIP then agreed to accept it; even after acceptance, they are not actively trying to implement it. They say, “Yes, we understand there are Indigenous people here,” but they’re not doing anything to include us in actual decision-making. For example, with the Trans Mountain pipeline – Canada decided to step away from a lot of the Indigenous processes and hand the next step off to the regulatory bodies.”⁴³

Unless Canada takes a more meaningful approach to implementing UNDRIP, 'co-development' processes may continue to ring hollow. However, even UNDRIP itself may not adequately challenge the power dynamic. As one participant explained, “Article 46⁴⁴ of UNDRIP removes its teeth as a supporting tool for Indigenous Rights; it puts the balance of decision-making in the state’s hands.”⁴⁵ How can there be 'co-development' when this is the backdrop of decision-making?

⁴² Innovation Participant

⁴³ Innovation Participant

⁴⁴ Article 46 of UNDRIP states:

1. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, people, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act contrary to the Charter of the United Nations or construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States.
2. In the exercise of the rights enunciated in the present Declaration, human rights and fundamental freedoms of all shall be respected. The exercise of the rights set forth in this Declaration shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law and in accordance with international human rights obligations. Any such limitations shall be non-discriminatory and strictly necessary solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for meeting the just and most compelling requirements of a democratic society.
3. The provisions set forth in this Declaration shall be interpreted in accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and good faith.

⁴⁵ Innovation Participant

Promote Community-driven, Nation-Based Processes

In discussing the need to improve the process of understanding the Mandate, uphold Traditional Knowledge, and strengthen relationships, there remains a critical question: With whom? There is tension in the conversation around 'co-development' because of the complicated nature of First Nations governance in BC. To conduct a 'co-development' process, the target audience and 'co-development' partner must be properly identified. This is harder than it may seem. As an example, one participant said “I’m from Squamish Nation. I do not speak for Squamish Nation – I speak for families and future generations to follow and make changes in the destruction of Mother Earth.”⁴⁶ So who speaks for Nations in different contexts? What *are* Nations? Are they band governments under the Indian Act? Nations as historically delineated through language groups? First Nations institutions and quasi-governmental organizations? Canadian governments must wrestle with this question when working with First Nations communities.

Participants shared that “It’s time for the government to acknowledge distinct governance structures and how to engage with different nations independently.”⁴⁷ One suggested way for this to take place was through community-based governance. It is necessary

*“to address the people and community members from the Nations that should have their voices heard, not just the Chief and Council. Co-development means reaching out to the people from the Nations versus just the staff or Chief and Council from the Nations. The community members also need to be engaged and part of the entire process. People within the Nation need to feel connected and heard.”*⁴⁸

Further, knowledge must come from communities: “It’s a way of life that we need to get back to, and we need to lift people up in our communities who can share this knowledge.”⁴⁹ Moreover,

*“A community-centered design model is important for co-development. 204 bands – so many Nations and diverse views on how communities should approach climate action and what things should be done. We need to tap into the knowledge in the communities because the solutions are there. The communities have oral traditions where all differing viewpoints are upheld, respected and intertwined...We need to empower communities and support community-driven priorities.”*⁵⁰

As one participant explained, “We all have individual and collective rights. As a band councillor or not, I’m advocating for our people and our Lands. These things need to go to communities themselves.”⁵¹ One way to do this might be providing “funding for organizations or communities so we can define that [governance] for ourselves. Our community participated in a CCP that identified our priorities and goals - it was 2.5 years. We have that as a guide already.”⁵²

⁴⁶ Innovation Participant

⁴⁷ Innovation Participant

⁴⁸ Innovation Participant

⁴⁹ Innovation Participant

⁵⁰ Action Participant

⁵¹ Action Participant

⁵² Action participant

While this may not be an easy process, the message was clear:

“It’s different among all Nations; all Nations are figuring out different ways to return to their traditional governance models – in our Nations, we’re talking about Rights and Title throughout our Territory as a collective right. The Indian Act Chiefs and councils are not stand-ins for Rights and Title. We’re trying not to use colonial terms for this work, and it isn’t working. Some of us are here as individuals to learn and understand, but along the visual [enowkinwixw diagram] it is part of being in the nested system.”⁵³

The mention of the nested system is important here because it describes the connection between worldview and community-driven governance – of relational responsibility to all of Creation. In the image described by the participant (Figure 1), the individual is at the centre of the circle, surrounded by family, community, Nation and Land. All elements of the system must communicate and care for one another. This is why governance isn’t holistic or authentic without community voices. It is also important to acknowledge the connection to Nationhood inherent in the nested systems worldview. As one participant shared,

“We need healing, but we need to heal ourselves and our relationships Nation-to-Nation. My hometown reserve is not a Nation; it is a St’át’imc Nation. The whole St’át’imc is one. The whole west coast is one. When they dealt with treaties, as long as the sun shines and the river flows they have to provide for us. West Coast, Interior, and Northern Nations. Not the Sto:lo, not the St’át’imc, as the Indian Act has been telling us. They knew what they were doing when they put us into reserves. It’s our time to be united as one.”⁵⁴

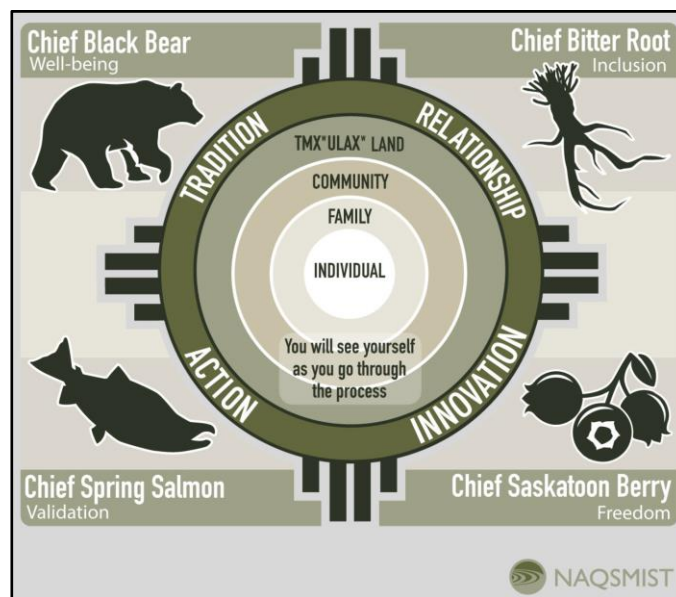


Figure 1: Nested Systems (As represented in the Four Food Chiefs Story)

⁵³ Innovation Participant

⁵⁴ Tradition Participant

As this participant alluded to, there are ambiguities between the terms Nation and Band. Some participants refer to First Nations governments as bands and think in the framework of Bands as the de-facto governance structure. Other participants may use the term Nation to reference their Indian Act Band or their historical Nation interchangeably – it is not always clear. ‘Co-development’ processes would be wise to consider these governance nuances in practice, yet should also take into account long-term movements towards community-driven, Nation-based governance based on nested systems – an evolving and variegated process that, to truly respect self-determination, must engage with the diversity of First Nations on their own terms, at their own pace.

Conclusion

There are many considerations when beginning ‘co-development’ between the government and First Nations, and it is still unclear how to enter into a ‘co-development’ process with all 204 Nations. While there are indeed several complex, long-term, systemic challenges to consider in order for ‘co-development’ to be meaningfully applied, it is important also to consider shorter-term, more practical approaches to undertaking initiatives in partnership between First Nations and colonial governments. As such, work should be allocated to short, medium and long term actions. In this, there is a recognition that moving towards ‘co-development’ is a process, not something that happens instantly.

Within the BC FNCL Agenda, we are in the beginning stages of this process and some of the big ideas remain murky. With that said, we know that as we start to define co-development, our definitions must be inclusive of all living things and set out an intention to put the Land first. This is why creating a Mandate is so important, it sets out the intention, and it comes from the Elders and Knowledge Keepers. We heard from participants that ‘co-development’ processes must:

1. Respect First Nations’ inherent Rights and Title, self determination, jurisdiction and governance;
2. Provide transparent, timely, and accessible decision-making and equitable solutions; and
3. Be rooted in the spirit of reconciliation and decolonization.

Too often, ‘co-development’ sessions are only inviting Indigenous leadership to the table to speak on behalf of their Nations, but we learned that these invitations must be extended past leadership to include all Rights and Title holders. Enowkinwixw is not the only Indigenous process that respects and includes all voices; it is a common theme in Indigenous decision-making processes and needs to be carried through into ‘co-development’ processes. The federal and provincial governments must start acknowledging the different governance structures that Nations have and realize that ‘co-development’ is bigger than the choice of terms – it is about co-jurisdiction; and that in other ‘co-development’ processes, the right to define a process as ‘co-development’ or not should rest in the hands of the Rights and Title holders, i.e. community members. ‘co-development’ cannot be a separate process from shared jurisdiction.

Along the way, as governments increasingly seek to implement UNDRIP and uphold their side of the relationship with First Nations, there are certain key priorities that can support processes. One of these is increased transparency and openness regarding the nature of Canada’s governance system and how

decisions are made – what barriers governments face in the practice of implementing changes to systems that seek to accommodate First Nations interests. As was previously mentioned, participants felt that honesty and transparency from the government about the real barriers they face would be a welcome shift in approach. To facilitate 'co-development' processes, governments can lay their cards on the table and work together with First Nations to solve the barriers that impact all parties.

Participants recognized that a shift in narratives is needed, from seeing First Nations as helpless victims of their own circumstance, to active partners in co-creating a better world. The responsibility for this shift lies largely within government. Participants are asking for action, and through these discussions with First Nations, federal government representatives, and the BCAFN, we are strengthening our relationships with one another and slowly moving away from engagements that start from scratch. We need to understand that everything is interconnected and find the balance between written and natural law. With regards to climate change, First Nations are just a small part of this global issue, and we must commit to one another in order to move forward together.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the participants of the “*A Vision For Co-development: The BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda*” session for sharing your voices. This report was written by Naqsmist Storytellers with support from BCAFN staff and oversight from the BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda Steering Committee.

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Please reach out to Patricia or Kristi with questions.

Thank you