

YIC4 - YUKON INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY CLIMATE CHANGE CHAMPIONS

MOBILIZING KNOWLEDGE FOR DEVELOPING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION IN YUKON

PROJECT NEWSLETTER, DECEMBER 2018

OBJECTIVE

This two-year project focuses on training Indigenous youth, aged 18-30 years on climate change and leadership skills for gathering and mobilizing new and existing knowledge for climate change adaptation in Yukon communities. The following newsletter shares updates from the community assessment phase of the project, which took place between June – November 2018.

During the first YIC4 youth training session (November 2017), youth developed plans for conducting a community-based assessment of climate change needs and priorities for action. Over the summer and fall, eight of the trained youth carried out their assessment plans in their communities across Yukon and Northern BC (Carcross, Mayo, Ross River, and Atlin).

The process of planning and implementing the community assessment activities was facilitated by the Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research (AICBR) as lead of the YIC4 project. Youth received hands-on training on the interview and community-based research process in their communities. The assessment sought to document a variety of community perspectives through interviews and focus groups with Elders, First Nation government representatives, farmers, and other community members with specific knowledge on climate change related themes.



[Pictured above]: YIC4 youth and Carcross/Tagish First Nation citizen, Roberta Wally interviews Farm Manager, Lloyd Lintott of the Carcross Farm.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

A community assessment is a process used to identify strengths, needs and challenges of a specified community.



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The youth led the interviews, developing questions according to five key themes:

1. **Food & Water Security**
2. **Health, Social & Culture**
3. **Infrastructure & Transportation**
4. **Species & Habitat Areas**
5. **Economy**

These five themes emerged from Training 1 where youth analyzed their communities according to the elements of Mother Nature (**Earth, Air, Fire, and Water**). Youth were asked what types of changes they are seeing in their communities and what sorts of adaptation activities are going on already. These responses were then analyzed by AICBR staff to help define the themes and guiding questions for the community assessment.

The following is a summary of some of the changes and adaptation themes which emerged from the community assessments.

CHANGES



EARTH

All communities have noticed a **change in animal migration, distribution and population**, particularly that many animals are taking different migration routes or migrating at different times of the year than they usually do. Many also noticed a decline in key



[Pictured above]: YIC4 youth and First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun citizen, Geri-Lee Buyck signs the Research Agreement with Chief Simon Mervyn during the Mayo Community Assessment.

COMMUNITY-BASED ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

A community-based assessment toolkit was developed in a participatory-style with the youth during Training 1. This toolkit outlines the process and example questions to guide the community assessment and contains a planning workbook for champions to use.

Download the toolkit for your community:

www.aicbr.ca/yic4

species like moose and caribou. This has made it difficult for hunters to find and track the animals that they hunt for subsistence.

Plant health, abundance and distribution are also changing – for example, traditional plant species are drying up; poplar and willow trees are being replaced by spruce; and berry patches are not as plentiful as in they used to be. All these changes have made it difficult for community members to access traditional food and medicines as well as practice their cultural pursuits.

All of the communities experienced **changes to their land brought on by mining/hydro/energy projects and construction of roads**, which have impacted citizens access to traditional sacred lands and hunting grounds and led to prioritizing Indigenous-led environmental stewardship approaches. All communities felt that they were vulnerable if there were to be highway closures, as they rely heavily on these highways for access to goods/services. This has an impact on food security in particular. While traditional hunting and sharing culture is still strong in many communities, our food system in the Yukon is largely market-based. All of these foods need to be shipped up along one major entry point to the territory (i.e. the Alaska Highway). In 2012, the Alaska highway washed out and the grocery store shelves quickly became empty in a matter of days. Communities outside of Whitehorse were most acutely hit by this lack of food. Last year, due to the forest fires around Carcross, the South Klondike highway also closed. Events such as these have prompted a number of communities to work towards self-sufficiency and prioritizing food security and food sovereignty.

The climatic changes are often happening at such rapid pace, that our communities are not able to adapt quickly enough. It's vital that we have emergency plans in place now to deal with these challenges.



[Pictured above top to bottom]: Geri-Lee Buyck speaks with a member of her community during the Mayo assessment; a willow adapts to new surroundings outside of Ross River; ~150 egg laying hens make the Carcross Farm their home.



AIR

Many elders noted that the **wind has changed** since they were young, becoming **stronger, bigger,**

louder, or blowing from a different direction than was normal in the past.

There has also been a **general trend of warming being felt** across all communities, which many observed was making the weather less predictable and causing lakes and rivers not to freeze completely in the winter; this has created a challenge for hunting, fishing and trapping pursuits.

"Even the weather was good for us then way back. Like, we can count on the weather growing up. Like, when it was cold, it stayed cold — like 50, 60 below — and it stayed, you know, weeks. We expected that kind of weather and that's what we got."

- Interview participant, Community Assessment



FIRE

Community members have noticed an **increase in the frequency and severity of fires**, which threatens plants, habitat areas, animals, and people.



[Pictured above top to bottom]: YIC4 youth and Ross River Dena Council citizens, Robby Dick, Derrick Redies and Joshua Ladue, interview a member of their community during the Ross River assessment; Jasmine Gatensby, from Carcross/Tagish First Nation interviews an elder in her community.

All communities stressed that no one is fully prepared for a fire and that there is a need for both **emergency preparedness at a community level as well as long-term fire and forest management from an Indigenous perspective.**

Changes in forest composition, such as the replacement of poplar with spruce trees and the overall drying of plants, made many interviewees concerned that their forests would be at increased risk for more frequent and larger fires.



WATER

The warming and shifts in climate are making **melting and freezing patterns less predictable**. This most notably affects how both people and animals travel over the land,

oftentimes making it less safe. Many communities noticed that **key plant species, like berries were drying up due to the lack of groundwater and slower melting of snow in the springtime (causing increased evaporation and less absorption of water into the earth).**

Lake temperatures across the Yukon are also warming, which means that the lakes are not freezing until later in the winter (or sometimes not at all), making ice fishing difficult. **Many people also worry that the warmer water is**



[pictured above, top to bottom]: Shauna Yeomans-Lindstrom, Taku River Tlingit YIC4 youth participant interviews an Elder alongside Norma during the Atlin community assessment; Norma, Shauna and Matthew Wesley, a new YIC4 youth recruit who helped conduct the Atlin assessment with Shauna, host a discussion with other youth at the Atlin school.

"The water is alive. It can hear you. It can hear you and see you and feel your fear. The water is alive. He can hear you."

- Interview Participant, Community Assessment

affecting the quality and behaviour patterns of the fish; fish meat is noticeably less firm and fish are moving around more in search of deeper, cooler waters, making finding them difficult for fishers.

ADAPTATION

Elders across the Yukon have been predicting “*hard times coming*” for many years now and have been urging their communities towards preparedness. Thus, communities across the Yukon are working towards mitigation and adaptation in multiple ways already. **Most of these initiatives relate to increasing community self-sufficiency and developing some kind of renewable energy project.** For example, biomass, solar systems, wind, and geothermal were common ways that communities are looking to decrease their energy dependence on diesel.

Bringing youth back to the land and reconnecting with cultural and traditional ways (especially with language) were identified as top priorities for all communities. **Education** is also a key priority and all communities have taken steps to train youth in areas such as community gardening and farming, environmental monitoring and/or land stewardship/guardianship. Because of the concern over rising risk of forest fire in the Yukon, **fire preparedness and management** are also top of the list for some; there is also desire to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the development of fire management policies and practices.

CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

There are three main types of climate change actions.

Mitigation – Refers to actions taken to reduce the severity of climate change and deals with the root causes (i.e. reduce greenhouse gas emissions). An example could be a solar or wind project.

Monitoring – Refers to the actions taken to understand climate change and its impacts. Examples could be species or water quality monitoring programs.

Adaptation – Refers to the actions taken to limit our vulnerability or adjust to the impacts of climate change (but not necessarily dealing with the root causes of those impacts). An example could be a, community-based food security or emergency evacuation plan.

With declining and shifting traditional food species like moose, caribou and berries and a continued heavy reliance on market foods, which are shipped up the highway, food insecurity was a big concern. **Becoming more self-sufficient with regards to community food systems** was identified a key priority for all communities. Most communities we assessed were either looking into starting community farms/gardens and greenhouses or had already developed them. The existing farms, greenhouses and gardens are also acting as a place to train and/or employ youth and community members. Water security is also paramount for communities; many people have noticed changes in the water systems and due to the **sacredness of water, all believe that it is critical to protect, monitor and preserve it for future generations.**

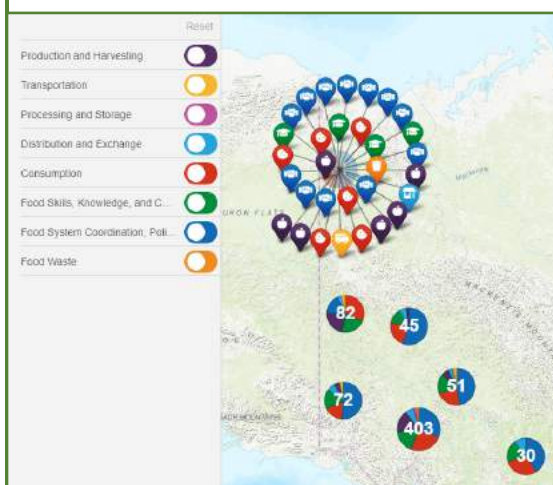
“If I can leave a message [to the youth], I would say: Learn your language, listen to stories, hang out with Elders, bring them tea. They appreciate that kind of stuff when you sit down with them. It’s good to hear them speak. Even if you can learn a little bit, it’s good enough. I encourage other people to pick up that torch, to really — the most important thing right now is preserving our culture and our language — who we are. We still got time. We still got time to do that.”

- Interview Participant,
Community Assessment

TAKING STOCK OF FOOD SYSTEMS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

AICBR has also been building **two inventory mapping tools** which will contain information about climate change and food systems initiatives in the Yukon.

This will help develop a more comprehensive picture of what is going on across the territory with regards to actions on climate change and food security. It will also act as a place to share information, connect communities, and promote collaboration and knowledge mobilization.



VIEW THE MAPS HERE:

<https://www.aicbr.ca/climate-change-and-food-systems-inventories/>

WE HAVE THE CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

The time for action is now. We must use our strengths as Indigenous peoples to teach the rest of the world how to protect our collective Mother Earth. Our strength is in our culture, our knowledge and our languages. We must look to the past to find a way forward. If we come together, we can do it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We'd like to acknowledge all the youth who took part in this phase of the training. You are inspiring champions and we are so proud of the work you have accomplished! To all the elders, Indigenous knowledge holders, First Nation government officials, and community members who shared their Traditional, local and scientific wisdom and guidance as part of these assessments, we thank you and hope that this process serves useful for guiding on-the-ground, community-led action in the future.

Thank you to Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (formerly Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada) and Polar Knowledge Canada, whose funding contributed to design, implementation and dissemination efforts of this project so far; we also would like to thank some others who have contributed to specific aspects of this project, namely, the Trudeau Foundation (through McGill University), Canadians for a New Partnership and Yukon Government's Environmental Awareness Fund.

Photo credits: Tookie Mercredi, Kelly Pickerill, Julia Veidt.

Authors: Julia Veidt, Molly Pratt, Norma Kassi, Kylie Campbell, and Coral Voss. Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research. 2018.



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