



A Vision of Water Security Defined By Indigenous Women, in All Their Diversity

ACROSS FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, AND MÉTIS COMMUNITIES

Factsheet Purpose: Share a forward-looking, visual guide to what water security means for Indigenous communities, from a rights-based, land-based, and decolonial lens.

INTRO

What Water Security Means for NWAC

Based on years of national engagement through NWAC's Water Carriers' surveys, roundtables, and sharing circles with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women across coast to coast to coast one teaching is clear: **water security is far more than infrastructure.** It is the ability to rely on safe source water and drinking water, every day, in every season.¹

For Indigenous women, in all their diversity, this means having clean, safe water for our families and for the ceremonies that connect us to the spirit of the land. It means being able to trust what flows from the tap, while continuing to honour what flows from the rivers.

Water security is defined not by policy, but by relationship guided by Traditional Knowledge that teaches us water is a living relative, deserving of care and respect.

TO PROTECT THE WATER IS TO PROTECT THE FUTURE.

The Five Pillars of Indigenous-Defined Water Security

Derived from 6 years of engagements NWAC has had with Indigenous women across coast to coast to coast, NWAC proposes the following five pillars as a consolidated framework of the most frequently identified priorities of Indigenous women for achieving water security in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

#1



Access

Clean, Reliable
Water for All

Every Indigenous household, school, and community, First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, should have clean, reliable drinking water, without exception.

Access means turning on a tap without fear, knowing the water is safe, abundant, and dependable.

It means that barriers such as remoteness, poverty, or jurisdictional conflict are removed to ensure equal access for all, and to sustain Indigenous ways of life.



We can drink from the tap without fear.

The Five Pillars of Indigenous-Defined Water Security cont'd

#2



Safety

Freedom from Toxins,
Pathogens, and Fear

Safety is the assurance that no Indigenous women, families, and communities will be in harm or become sick from the water they drink, bathe, or gather in.

It means strong, sustainable infrastructure, but also trust: that systems are maintained, that communities are properly informed if emergencies arise, and that water is tested by those who care most for its wellbeing with adequate means to do so long term.

Safety is built on both technical measures and community connection, where Indigenous women are resourced and supported to lead.



Our water is tested by trained women from our own Nations and communities.

#3



Cultural Connection

Honouring Water as a
Living Relative

We all rely on water. But for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, water is not a commodity, it is a living relative with spirit, memory, and teachings.

For generations, Indigenous women have carried the responsibility to **care** for this relative.

Water security is incomplete without respect to this cultural, gender connection.

It is not only about quality and quantity, but about relationship: *knowing water, respecting it, and living in balanced with it as Indigenous women have guided for time immemorial.*

When Indigenous communities have safe, ceremonial access to lakes, rivers, and springs, the water's spirit is strengthened, and so is the spirit of the people.

Restoring this cultural connection preserves Indigenous Peoples ways of life for future generations, and simultaneously strengthens the collective wellbeing of all who share these waters.



By protecting the spirit of the water, we protect the spirit of the people.

#4



Co-Governance

Indigenous Women
Leading Water Decisions

Water security requires governance rooted in **respect, reciprocity, and representation.**

This means Indigenous women, in all their diversity, are not simply consulted, but are decision-makers.

It means leadership tables that reflect both Traditional Knowledge and technical expertise.

Co-governance bridges worlds: it brings together Elders, youth, technicians, and policy-makers to make choices that protect the water for generations to come.



Indigenous women lead our water plans.

The Five Pillars of Indigenous-Defined Water Security cont'd

#5



Intergenerational Learning

Carrying Knowledge Forward

Water security is sustained when knowledge flows like a river, from Indigenous Elders to youth, from the past to the future.

It lives in **land-based learning**, **community mentorship**, and **education that includes Traditional Knowledge** alongside modern science.

Through Indigenous storytelling, observation, and ceremony, young people learn to respect water not only as a resource, but as a teacher.

This passing of knowledge ensures that the relationship between people and water will never be forgotten.

 **Our water teachings are revitalized and passed from generation to generation.**

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Water Security in Practice, from the perspective of Indigenous women

Water security defined by Indigenous women is already being lived.

Across coast to coast to coast, many Indigenous communities are:

Creating partnerships rooted in respect, reciprocity, and Indigenous sovereignty.



Establishing women-led water governance councils that balance ceremony and policy.

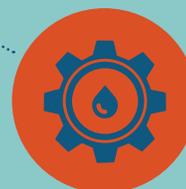


Revitalizing water teachings through water walks, songs, and community gatherings.



Water Security

Building local capacity to test, monitor, and manage water systems.



These examples show what it means when communities define their own solutions: when water management becomes **water care**.

They demonstrate that Indigenous-led, gender-responsive approaches are not just visionary, they are working.

Integrating Elders and youth in hands-on, land-based learning.



NWAC's Shared Vision

When Indigenous women lead, water is not only protected, it is nurtured.

As matriarchs, Knowledge Keepers, and Water Carriers, Indigenous women's vision extends beyond human need to the wellbeing of all life that depends on water.

Through NWAC's Water Carriers project, women have described a future where decisions about water honour its spirit, where ceremony walks alongside science, and where communities and ecosystems heal together. It is a future shaped by

matriarchs, Knowledge Keepers, and youth who carry teachings in unity.

Through such Indigenous-led systems of care, we can ensure that prosperity flows not just to our communities, but to the rivers, lakes, and lands that sustain us all.

This is what true water security looks like:
a water system equally led by Indigenous women, grounded in relational responsibility, and guided by the living wisdom of the water itself.

WATER CARRIERS PROJECT

Native Women's Association of Canada

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Water Security:** The capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability. – Working definition, UN-Water, 2013, Available at: <https://www.unwater.org/publications/what-water-security-infographic>
- 2** Access to clean drinking and sanitation water is recognized internationally as a human right (adopted at the UN General Assembly, 2010) and is affirmed through the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). United Nations General Assembly, (2010). The Human Right to Water and Sanitation (A/RES/64/292).
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