

Short statement for AOS 2024, WG 1: Regional to global observing

Title: Indigenous arts-based approaches to promote just water futures and wellbeing in the Arctic

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Stories from Indigenous communities worldwide illustrate the centrality of water to Indigenous wellbeing and culture. "For Indigenous Peoples, water provides lifeways, subsistence, and has undeniable spiritual significance," described Special Rapporteur Victoria Tauli-Corpuz in an end-of-mission statement^[1]. "Water is the first medicine" and "Water is life" are common refrains in North American Indigenous communities, including those in Alaska and Canada^[2]. In these communities, as elsewhere, people are understood to be a part of the living world – affecting it and affected by it. Lived experiences and identities are frequently tied to place, and wellbeing and life are therefore inseparable from the health of land and waters. This knowledge of place and intimate connection with the land offers insights for Regional to Global Observing. Indigenous Peoples are and always have been artists and scientists. This short statement calls for incorporating the present and intergenerational knowledge and knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples into global environmental observing networks and associated policies.

For generations, Indigenous Peoples' knowledge has not been adequately considered in scientific policy, and communities continue to struggle for water and environmental justice across the globe, stemming from centuries-long, ongoing colonial legacies and having profound effects on Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination, socioeconomic development, cultural identity and health outcomes. Tides may be changing. Earlier in 2022, for the first time, a forum within a major United Nations water conference was dedicated to Indigenous Peoples, recognizing Indigenous Peoples as global leaders, actively shaping, through their knowledge and wisdom, national and international water governance^[4]. Within the scientific community, water governance is agreed to be much more complex than merely a series of 'technical' problems and calls to give social sciences equal footing with natural sciences in tackling global water challenges are growing^[5]. Transdisciplinary dialogues are emerging, incorporating the humanities, ethics, and arts communities, in order to fully engage with global Indigenous-led water justice movements.

There are many facets to water justice: equity of access to water, recognition of distinct water traditions and cultures, and expectations for fair participation in wider, multi-stakeholder processes of water governance. To understand these different forms of water (in)justice, research must be grounded on the experiences of Indigenous Peoples' water (in)security. Recent research has begun to investigate the lived experience of water (in)security, and how it is embodied and manifests under the skin, and in our mental health, through feelings of shame, anger, and humiliation^[6,7,8]. For Indigenous Peoples, the concept of historical/intergenerational trauma calls attention to the complex, collective, cumulative, and intergenerational psychosocial impacts that resulted from the depredations of past colonial subjugation, including water injustices and their persistent effects^[9].

Water connects generations over time and can do so in both healing and destructive ways. Water, physically and figuratively can be conduits to transmit knowledge of Elders to youths through time and collective memory. There is now an urgent need to explore alternative means of incorporating diverse voices and perspectives into observation networks and their emergent policies. These alternative means should be co-created with Indigenous Peoples' and based on their long-term knowledge and observations, especially of water and land. Arts-based approaches may include art, ethnobotany, ceremonies, as well as expressions of individual and community identity, cultural values, and lineage^[10]. Art practices, such as storytelling, have long been used by Indigenous Peoples to share knowledge and promote intergenerational healing. The contribution of these arts-based practices to observing long-term changes to the environment, land and waters, remains underexplored.

In the context of healing, Indigenous youth are playing a critical role by connecting with Elders and learning to lead an intergenerational dialogue through traditional and contemporary arts, including music, arts apprenticing, and storytelling, to inspire change and co-create solutions to address historical trauma to Indigenous Peoples and the living water they co-exist with^[11,12]. Indigenous youth will be at the center of future Arctic governance and observing environmental change. Indigenous youth leading initiatives need much more support to ensure Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and practices are represented by new technologies and observation networks^[13].

We therefore recommend that:

- Through the careful and respectful blending Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing within an intergenerational and intercultural dialogue, the international community can support truth-telling and reconciliation to visualize alternative water futures and observe changes through a common language: art.
- Research agendas need to be collectively designed and Indigenous-led, by prioritizing local needs, co-conducting research through active community participation, co-learning in the research process, and finally, co-producing knowledge.
- Solutions should continue to be place-specific, emerging from a deep understanding of the place-based identities that have developed over millennia.
- Scientists and artists should co-collaborate to incorporate diverse knowledge and ways of knowing. Creativity and innovation can play a vital role in responding to water injustices and adverse mental health outcomes.
- Art and science are interconnected forms of observation. Through art-approaches to water justice and wellbeing, it is possible to gain new insights from closely observing these issues at the community and regional scale in the Arctic.

Arts-based approaches can create more equitable processes that bolster creative and innovative thinking to respond to the daunting justice challenges that endure, living in harmony with other communities, our selves, and as part of nature in a complex and ever-changing world.

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