

MNI KI WAKAN

2017 Report



Mni Ki Wakan: World Indigenous Peoples' Decade of Water

Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States

August 1-2, 2017

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Introduction

The inaugural *Mni Ki Wakan (Water is Sacred): World Indigenous Peoples Decade of Water* was held in Minnesota, United States. Minnesota is Dakota ancestral territory, known as Mnisota Makoce: The Land of Misty and Foggy Waters. The original maps of the land were the sacred water ways of the Dakota people, and their sustainable source of transportation was the Caha'asan Wata, the Birchbark Canoe.

Today, Mnisota is known also as the land of 10,000 lakes and it is a part of one of the world's richest aquatic regions that holds a third of the world's fresh water, the Great Lakes. Today, the Great Lakes Region is the ancestral home to many diverse indigenous nations who are working to ensure its protection, preservation, and restoration of water.

To date, the Mni Ki Wakan: World Indigenous Peoples' Decade of Water was announced to the world at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2016 calling for indigenous peoples, youth, diverse actors to unite in supporting indigenous voices on water. Preceding history had shown that the global water crisis was escalating, and indigenous peoples were being increasingly forced to defend their water rights.

The inaugural Mni Ki Wakan brought together indigenous peoples, youth, and allies from the surrounding region. Its keynote address was provided by, Ta'Kaiya Blaney from the Tla'Amin First Nation who has called for the global implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Blaney provided the opening plenary and was followed by a traditional protocol invocation of the Dakota people honoring the sacred spirit of water.

During key sessions, indigenous peoples, youth, and ally participant stakeholders provided guiding input into diverse thematic areas on water through interactive dialogues. Participants organized into *innovation circles* where they developed *innovations* (unprecedented action and ideas) for solution-oriented water approaches. Their voices helped to begin the journey of revealing what the water map and its sectors looked like for indigenous peoples, expanding previous understandings of indigenous water governance to include core elements.

SESSIONS

Each question comprises a session occurring in the following order throughout the summit. Participant comments are distinguished by semicolons.

Session 1

What unique path have we traveled?

Conservation of water; water crisis is an issue that is occurring now, and the need for action is now; meeting people who have been directly impacted by contaminated water has helped me (participant) personalize the issue, developing a real connection.

A water effort that utilizes a community building approach is a meaningful and collective approach; we've gathered information and knowledge water cultures, practices, and approaches. Strengthening this is key.

Session 2

What unprecedented journey has yet to come?

Indigenous youth create new organizations that attend the summit each year; concentrate on issues we can impact while establishing goals in the global community; international youth voices are important for the future of water and changing the course of history; Connecting knowledge between youth, adults, and elders is critical to the future of water.

We need to travel the journey of preparing our communities for our dream world. Help our youth to be ready for this dream world; incorporate actions such as cleaning a lake; A journey yet to occur is youth, adult, and elder participation resulting in cleaner water and closer communities.

Establish increased dialogue with others who might not have been previously receptive to action, change, and the stories of indigenous peoples; There is a need to understand history and broken treaties, indigenous peoples, and the reparations needed towards clean water and sacred land; developing a worldwide youth network, inspiring, and demanding change and transformation for a world that protects water and the earth; the creation of diverse youth groups to attend the water summit; restoring a practice of working with the land and water and not on it.

Session 3

What Seeds can we plant today that would make the most difference to the future of indigenous peoples and the water summit?

Increase the participation of indigenous youth; integrate the utilization of modules such as concerts, music workshops, and creative outlets; develop a youth advisory board council purposed for youth organizing and feedback; use social media for advertising, and communication.

Youth involvement should include adults, culture, and community programs (youth will not be inspired to get involved if adults aren't inspired to do the same). Develop the role of regional ambassadors (regional water summit ambassadors. Regional ambassadorship is supplemented with use of funding, resources, and educational toolkits to aid implementation; Garner support and sponsorship from local businesses, and foundation.

Mni Ki Wakan should provide transportation for elders and youth; accommodation for lodging could include indigenous based centers, e.g., friendship centres in Canada. Additionally, they may include travel scholarships to increase participation, and fundraisers.

The work of Mni Ki Wakan should be year-round. The conference should be culture centered along with space. This includes use of culture building and spaces for family. Mni Ki Wakan should work to include South American indigenous participation. Building connections should entail to “come as strangers, and leave as family with shared goals.”

Resources for outreach can include sessions, brochures, video to attract participation. Build a strong network of elders and youth to increase participation and implementation; include high usage of inclusive dialogical process for diverse stakeholder voices are recognized, respected, and acknowledged.

“We don't know where our seed will grow, but we plant it anyways.”

Build a self-sustainable community where members can take care of its members so they can live a healthier life in a healthier environment. Develop a program where people and contribute to providing water to indigenous communities need it and are experiencing water contamination until the water is drinkable again.

Connect Mni Ki Wakan with indigenous-led groups, organizations, and leaders; increase initiative and outreach to tribal nation schools; develop youth leadership opportunities and make it engaging; Use social media to tell digital stories; Connect with indigenous youth groups, and develop youth water-based groups.

Develop partnerships with entirely separate groups and people impacted by water issues, expanding the water map, i.e. solidarity with Flint, MI. Increase mutual support across shared issues; Talk to governments at various levels, they have to work together. There are four indigenous women in the Minnesota government, explore partnership with them. Bring youth leaders to summit and conferences. Develop long-term lasting relationships.

Connect the summit to a very large and visible event, e.i., dead zones.
Create a vision board:

- Goals.
- Share goals on the website.
- Visual representation of goals.
- Manifest goals in the arts, e.g. dance, song.
- The power of stories.

Develop a process for participants to coordinate in their communities to increase participation, and involvement; Have conversations with youth leaders.

Session 4

What conversation is begun today would make the most difference for the future of water and indigenous peoples? What question if asked today could make the most difference for the future of water and indigenous peoples?

Develop a virtual space for youth network and communications; establish an indigenous youth caucus; develop database on water issues; develop peer to peer methods of information sharing; state and share historical significance of water to indigenous peoples; How can we clean water, and what are the factors to be considered.

New inventions and sewer systems that do not use water; purification of lakes; include water as Mni Ki Wakan to be honored; learning water as a living source of life; Identify ways to reduce water waste.

Engaging diverse religions in a value based conversation around water; Connecting with artists and musicians in bringing attention to water issues; Developing a water music festival, art festival, and art exhibit; How does climate change impact water; How do we address water before crises impacts our communities.

How do we tell the stories of people who are already hurt by water issues?; How do we connect with people not impacted by water issues?; Moving the conversation from our head to our heart; How can we guarantee that everyone on earth has access to clean water by 2030?; How can we have inclusive conversations about water

across diverse worldviews?; How can a conversation about water create new possibilities for communication and collaboration world-wide? How do we use new development technologies to project our ideas?; How can we learn from the success of past movements to inform our paths?; How can we use our shared identities, backgrounds, and experiences to unite us in organizing, despite differences?

What are the best learning methods for Mni Ki Wakan? (visual demo, hands-on, reading, listening, and discussions, etc.); What people and groups might bring entirely new perspectives to the table?; What organizing and brainstorming tactics and strategies have you seen prove most effective in the past.

Integrate the rights of all living beings; Use the framework such as rights of mother earth, and rights of water; How can we be fair to those in need of water?; Develop an educational component on water.