



POLLUTION PROBE
CLEAN AIR. CLEAN WATER.

2020
NOT-OUR-TYPICAL
Conference
& Gala



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About Pollution Probe

Pollution Probe is a Canadian charitable organization that operates as a leading agent of change at the intersection of communities, health, and environment. Since 1969, Pollution Probe has used research-based advocacy and partnership-building to promote understanding through education, and practical solutions through policy engagement. Through its actions, Pollution Probe has been instrumental in structuring Canada's most effective policies to protect human health and the natural environment.

Our Mission

We seek to improve the health and well-being of Canadians by advancing policy that achieves positive, tangible environmental change.

Our Vision

We aspire to be recognized as a leading source of information on environmental issues, to partner credibly with government and industry in developing environmental solutions, and to be a trusted voice on environmental policy.

Pollution Probe has spent over five decades advocating for clean air and clean water. **We firmly believe that all Canadians should be able to participate in, and benefit from, a healthy environment and the creation of a sustainable, low-carbon society.** Here are a few of the ways we've contributed to advocating for a greener and cleaner planet for all in the past year:

Citizen Science in the Great Lakes: This report, prepared for Environment and Climate Change Canada, is the result of consultation with a wide range of stakeholders working on issues related to pharmaceuticals, toxicology, water quality, and citizen science, and was developed with the guidance of an expert advisory group. It examines the potential for citizen science to contribute to increased public engagement and the development of a more complete dataset on their presence in the Great Lakes.

Energy Exchange: This is a division of Pollution Probe that is dedicated to advancing energy literacy in Canada by arming the general public with critical knowledge on energy issues that affect them. By providing accessible information in the form of short and engaging blog posts, Energy Exchange aspires to a future in which Canadians are united in their energy prosperity and not divided by their energy options.

Opportunities for Low-Carbon Mobility Actions in Canadian Municipalities: This comprehensive study explores a wide variety of collaborative actions that Canadian cities can lead to encourage the use of zero emission vehicles (ZEVs) across all modes of transport to address GHG and air pollutant emissions and alleviate congestion.

The Great Lakes Plastic Clean-Up: This is the largest single deployment of Seabin and LittaTrap™ technology in the world to quickly capture and remove plastics and other litter at marinas from Lake Ontario to Lake Superior and everywhere in between. Through research, outreach and education, and collaboration with organizations like our founding partners Boating Ontario, CGLR, and the U of T Trash Team, the Great Lakes Plastic Cleanup works to identify sources of litter entering our waterways and explore how government, industry, and consumers can work together to reduce, reuse and recycle material waste.

About the Gala and Conference

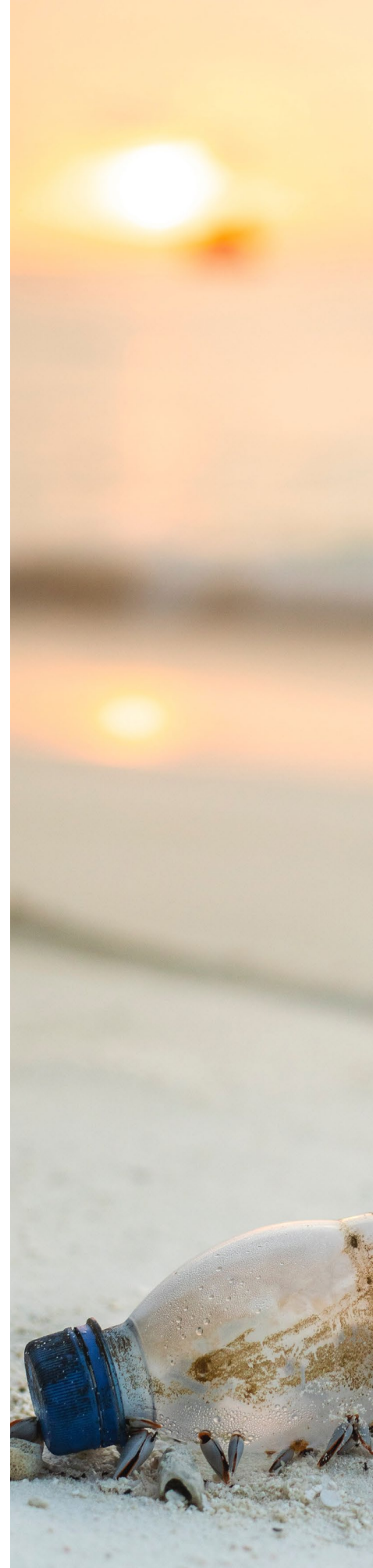
Pollution Probe's Gala is an annual tradition, and an opportunity to celebrate our work and show our appreciation to our passionate and dedicated supporters, who share and help advance our vision of a clean and healthy environment for all Canadians.

We decided to make environmental equity the key focus for this year's Gala and Conference as the result of dialogues fostered during our Pre-Gala conference in 2019, which focused on developing a collective vision for environmental action in Canada out to 2050. A key theme that emerged from the event was the many ways in which vulnerable and marginalized communities are being impacted by climate change and pollution, and the fact that they are often left behind in discussions concerning climate action. It became evident that Pollution Probe could help foster dialogues during this year's Conference and Gala related to how environmental action ought to carefully consider questions of environmental equity and fairness, in order to mitigate the harms perpetuated against marginalized communities.

In keeping with the theme of environmental equity, and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's Conference and Gala was **held virtually and was 100% free to attend**, ensuring that financial considerations did not pose a barrier to access. This event also presented an opportunity to learn from the experiences of leading experts on environmental equity and, as such, integrated the insights and perspectives of a wider selection of panelists and moderators who had experience in dealing with the ethical and sociopolitical impacts of environmental issues. Together, we focused on how the environmental community could work collectively to ensure that equity and social justice become fundamental elements of sustainable development.

The 2020 Not-Our-Typical-Gala event was structured around two plenary panels that looked at **Equitable Access to a Clean Environment** and **Equitable Participation in Climate Change Solutions**. As well, the event presented the **2020 Pollution Probe Award**, a gala highlight.

The insights gathered during both panels, as well as during the award portion of the event will be presented herein. This report will also outline the proposed solutions to issues of environmental equity as discussed during the two panel discussions. In concluding the report, a summary table of the barriers and proposed solutions is provided to guide the environmental community towards applying an environmental equity framework in its endeavours. Gala discussions pointed to the fact that climate action is a collective responsibility, whose policymaking process requires the representation, inclusion and participation of marginalized communities. Significant improvements occur when a society rethinks how it perceives and engages marginalized communities in climate action and the policymaking process. By understanding the relationship between the effects of climate change, environmental equity, and human well-being, the environmental community can work together to transform how we engage in climate action and policymaking.



2020 Pollution Probe Award

The Pollution Probe Award is a Gala highlight, and it celebrates extraordinary achievement by individuals and organizations working toward positive, tangible environmental change. This year, we were delighted to present the Pollution Probe Award to the inspiring and accomplished Larissa Crawford, in recognition of her extraordinary achievements as a leader in advancing equity and climate justice.

Larissa was an excellent addition to our Conference and Gala this year. She is a renowned Indigenous and anti-racism researcher and activist whose work applies to renewable energy policy and program development in Canada. She has worked internationally as a policy consultant and a professional public speaker. She has also worked with the Government of Ontario as an Indigenous Policy Advisor with the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development, and Mines, and as an Advisor at the Ontario Anti-Racism Directorate. Larissa works as an Indigenous Community Liaison with Calgary-based non-profit, Calgary Learns. In 2018, she also recently founded Larissa Crawford Speaks, working with diverse clients in areas relating to renewable energy, youth upskilling, and policy.



A particularly impactful part of Larissa’s acceptance speech was an analogy that illustrates how the complex barriers affecting marginalized communities can often be unapparent:

“ A bird owner only sees the bird and assumes the bird cannot fly because it is ill or unconfident. They are seeing the bird that’s the problem – when in fact, it’s the cage that’s the problem. The bird owner may only see one or two bars if they step back, and may even remove some bars, and this may reaffirm their initial assumptions when the bird still does not fly. However, stepping further back they’ll see its multiple bars reinforcing one another, and it’s these multiple bars that are preventing the bird from flying. ”

Larissa noted that these barriers stem from colonial and Western structures that still remain and continue to base knowledge on the completion of traditional education and acquirement of degrees and certifications. This may undermine any knowledge possessed by people from diverse backgrounds. However, there is a need to value other types of knowledge and skillsets, with marginalized populations often having the experience to identify and critically analyze gaps and barriers that are normalized to others. Organizations can circumvent these barriers by embracing environmental and social equity and restructuring how they value knowledge. This creates inclusion by recognizing the competencies and perspectives of people in marginalized communities. Larissa’s insights highlight a duty to circumvent traditional perspectives and structures that limit vulnerable populations from exploring and participating in solutions across a diverse community of environmental professionals, researchers, and other stakeholders.

Our Panels

Panel 1 – Equitable Access to a Clean Environment

Panel 1 drew from diverse perspectives to explore issues related to equitable access to clean water and clean air, and the role inequity plays in putting some communities at greater risk to the impacts of pollution and climate change.

Moderators



Michael Jacobs, CEO, Cambium Indigenous Professional Services Inc.



Melissa DeYoung, Director, Policy and Programs, Pollution Probe



Mariana Eret, Policy Analyst, Pollution Probe

Panelists



Dr. Anna Banerji, Faculty Lead, Indigenous and Refugee Health, Post MD Education, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto.

"Today, as it stands, there are over 50 First Nations communities who don't have access to clean water. Not having access to clean water impacts health at multiple levels and every day that Indigenous people don't have access to clean water is another day where human rights of Indigenous peoples are being violated."



Dr. Heather Castleden, Canada Research Chair in Reconciling Relations for Health, Environments, and Communities, Queen's University

"When natural resources are overexploited, those who depend on them, not only for their livelihood, but also their cultural identity, their relational accountability to each other and the land, and their health and wellbeing are affected the most, and the same could be said about the impacts of climate change."



Ana Gonzalez Guerrero, Co-founder and Managing Director, Youth Climate Lab

"[Hurricane Wilma] was the first time I saw the differing approach that we take on climate change depending on the identities that factor into the conversation."



Kerry Ann Charles, Environment Partnership Co-ordinator, Cambium Indigenous Professional Services

"We really need to provide spaces for Indigenous voices, but in a meaningful way. We talk about diversity and making space, but a lot of these organizations don't really make space and, even when they do, Indigenous voices become token."

Panel 2 – Equitable Participation in Climate Change Solutions

Panel 2 explored issues of representation in the development of strategies to address climate change and other environmental concerns to ensure that all groups have input into the design and implementation of potential solutions. This panel also discusses inequities in access to clean energy and clean transportation across Canada, particularly in Indigenous and remote communities.

Moderators



Chris Henderson, Executive Director, Indigenous Clean Energy and Chair, GLOBE Series



Richard Carlson, Director, Policy and Programs, Pollution Probe

Panelists



Armi De Francia, Active Transportation Coordinator, Town of Ajax

“Meaningful engagement can be both challenging and joyful: collaborating across departments to engage beyond usual suspects. We should build relationships by meeting people where they are at. Transportation prioritizes privileged, able-bodied, white men. But we are trying to change that by providing more affordable options that will boost the mental and physical health of marginalized people.”



Dr. Runa Das, Assistant Professor, Royal Roads University

“One way of addressing [the energy burden in Ontario] is through Energy and Knowledge which may increase public participation and engagement in decision making. We want people that are being impacted to be at the decision making table.”



Sam Arons, Director of Sustainability, Lyft

“About two-thirds of users on the Lyft platform are from minority communities who are the most impacted by GHG emissions from transportation. To address this problem, Lyft is committed to reach 100% electric vehicles on its platform by 2030.”



AJ Esquega, Mashkawiziwin Energy Projects Coordinator, Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek – Gull Bay First Nation

“We need to build capacity in the community and engage children to inform them on the energy grid and the need for clean energy.”



Meaghan Reid, Executive Director, Vibrant Calgary

“We need to engage people living in poverty, putting inclusion as a focus point. What we have seen during COVID-19 is how people are not recognizing their own privilege of how they can show up and participate.”



**PANEL 1: Equitable Access to
a Clean Environment**

Barriers to Equitable Access

The four barriers below were identified by panelists in Panel 1. These barriers have been described as having an **interconnected and pervasive nature** that causes harm to vulnerable populations, notably First Nations communities. They must be addressed as part of advocating for intersectional climate action solutions and the well-being of populations who are most affected by environmental injustice.

Environmental inequity

Environmental inequity was mentioned by multiple panelists as a barrier to access and a violation of human rights. For example, though the numbers have decreased, Canada still has some 100 First Nations communities who don't have access to clean water. This impacts health and well-being on multiple levels. Dr. Anna Banerji mentioned numerous potential health outcomes, including parasites, as well as the labour and financial costs associated with the need to boil water or purchase water bottles. When environmental inequities are not sufficiently addressed, vulnerable populations can feel as though they are disposable, which, in turn, can have devastating impacts on mental health.

Structural inequity

Along with pre-existing environmental inequity, marginalized populations are often sidelined due to structural and systemic inequities that prioritize the needs and wants of privileged and "Global North" populations. Dr. Heather Castleden noted that there is a need to diversify policy planning in order to combat the influence of these inequities and to provide robust and meaningful solutions for low socioeconomic status and racialized communities.

Lack of significant interventions

Aside from making space at the decision-making table, many panelists felt that to achieve meaningful change, the environmental community must address the root causes for why inequalities exist and persist. While this could take many forms, panelists felt that there is a need to balance Western developments with Indigenous and marginalized perspectives, shifting towards a co-governance framework for the management of environmental resources. Without a more intersectional approach (i.e., one that appreciates various social and political identities and forces), current climate action measures will continue to perpetuate inequities and won't improve the quality of life for vulnerable populations.

Lack of inclusive representation

Multiple panelists noted that marginalized populations face distinct struggles in having their voices heard and that there is a need to create more spaces for inclusive participation. Kerry Ann Charles mentioned how First Nations communities on Lake Simcoe are struggling to protect their source water from development that could lead to pollution and contamination. Ana Gonzalez Guerrero mentioned a similar need to amplify youth voices, with environmental impacts on youth populations being severely overlooked.

Approaches for Moving Forward

1. Advocating for “Minimum Standards”

One way that we can work to reduce environmental inequity in Canada is by advocating for legally enshrined, minimum standards of living across populations. Rather than providing funding during an emergency, laws that ensure that the rights of marginalized populations stay protected may mean that situations, such as toxic spills or water contamination, are quickly addressed or prevented in the first place.

2. Inclusive Spaces for Decision-Making

In order to create a more inclusive society, we first need to start with inclusive meetings and collaborations. Inclusive spaces are those that value and reserve space for input from marginalized individuals in order to better understand the situations that they are affected by. They are also spaces where marginalized voices are represented equitably, rather than just there as a token. While a minimum quota for representation can be a good start, meaningful collaboration must go beyond such an approach to openly inviting diversity at the decision-making table.

3. Intersectional Policymaking

Ensuring that complex identities are represented in policymaking can address systemic inequities by combatting cross-cutting forms of discrimination, as it empowers diverse and marginalized populations so that their needs can be recognized and met. Furthermore, an intersectional approach to policymaking and ensuring the meaningful representation of marginalized peoples, can help uncover discrimination that may not be apparent because it is normalized, such as the current disparities in access to clean water.

4. Meaningful Allyship

Individuals with privilege and status can leverage these to give more voice and space to marginalized people so that they can articulate their needs and conditions to a wider audience. To cultivate meaningful allyship, we need to be able to share and redistribute access to certain spaces and forums so that marginalized populations can benefit from them.

5. Hope-Based Research

There is a need to shift from “pain narratives” (i.e., those that focus on historical trauma and damage) to working with communities directly to produce the research that they believe will improve their quality of life. By doing so, researchers give these populations more ownership in research narratives and build more equitable research partnerships.





Panel 2 - Equitable Participation in Climate Change Solutions

Barriers to Equitable Participation

Participants in Panel 2 identified the following barriers as those restricting participation in climate change solutions for marginalized populations. Many of the barriers related to equitable access were relevant or similar to those that restricted participation. The discussions in Panel 2 reveal how [capacity building can help to alleviate barriers among marginalized communities](#).

Lack of engagement

In the past low income individuals and those from minority communities have not been adequately included in creating solutions to complex challenges such as homelessness, food insecurity, or climate change. [Meaghan Reid](#) noted that the poor are always quick to be blamed and overlooked when inclusion should be the focal point. Not investing the time to build relationships and understand the vulnerable in the community creates gaps in the creation of equitable climate solutions. [Armi de Francia](#) mentioned that the Town of Ajax used innovative engagement methods to improve its engagement with marginalized groups, using hands-on activities to stimulate participation.

Energy poverty

Energy poverty refers to individuals or communities that are unable to access and afford modern energy services such as electricity and clean cooking facilities. The combination of low income, and high energy costs leave marginalized communities with tough choices that may involve foregoing other essentials to keep up with their energy bills. In addition, some individuals may suffer from mental health, respiratory or other illnesses from living in cold, moldy, or drafty homes because of lack of access to modern energy services. When faced with these barriers, marginalized communities cannot equitably participate in climate change solutions.

Lack of affordable and sustainable options

Marginalized communities, especially those in low-income areas, have continuously faced challenges relating to their access to affordable and sustainable modes of transport. Our partners in industry can do their part by investing in sustainable solutions that can benefit vulnerable communities. For example, as mentioned by [Sam Arons](#), Lyft's Resilient Streets initiative caters to multimodal travel (i.e., that which involves two or more means of transport) and works to create safer and more convenient routes for marginalized populations.

Lack of energy sovereignty

Often, those living in vulnerable communities lack the necessary support (technical, financial, and moral) to develop climate change solutions. When vulnerable communities are able to have more capacity to make decisions that directly benefit them, they're better able to participate in making their communities greener. An example given by [AJ Esquega](#) is how his community, the Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek, were able to lead their own solar power project, after receiving funding and training support. Having ownership of the energy transition allowed the Gull Bay First Nation to be energy sovereign, as it was no longer reliant on diesel fuel, and also generate profits by selling its solar power to Hydro One.

Approaches for Moving Forward

1. The Value of Lived Experiences

The representation of people from marginalized communities and those with lived experiences should be encouraged and the feedback they give should be taken into account. Doing so can enable climate change solutions tailored to those most affected. A few examples of measures that can lead to more inclusive representation include providing sign language interpreters to collect feedback and including vulnerable populations in policy-making processes.

2. Education and Advocacy

As noted by multiple panelists, advocacy can help create equitable participation in climate change solutions because it helps to raise awareness. Education, just like lived experience, is a form of knowledge that may help inform the views of marginalized communities and guide their decision making process. Through education and advocacy, community understanding is developed and this helps build relationships and foster meaningful engagement.

3. Innovative Research

Lyft's Resilient Streets campaign is a great example of how innovative research can be instrumental in promoting equitable participation. By having drivers with cleaner, lower-emission vehicles, options for rideshares and the ability to have car-free zones where people can cycle or walk safely, lower-income and marginalized communities can take more ownership of the public space where they live, while participating in more sustainable modes of transport.

4. Capacity Building

Investing in communities and providing mentoring options, as well as technical knowledge and expertise, can go a long way towards improving participation in climate solutions. Panel participants' experiences demonstrated that running community projects (such as those focusing on clean energy) can enable a community to participate in climate change solutions on their own terms and in a way that can generate long-term financial and healthy environmental benefits to the community.



Summary of Barriers and Recommendations

The table below identifies and explains some of the key barriers to environmental inequity as identified in the panel discussions. The first column identifies the barriers, the second column further explains how these barriers hinder access to a clean environment, and some potential solutions are outlined in the third column.

Barrier Type	Access to a Clean Environment	Participating in Climate Change Solutions
<p>Exclusion Factors such as poverty, mental health issues, and lack of knowledge and education contribute to social exclusion.</p>	<p>Most marginalized populations are constantly addressing immediate needs pertaining to their health and daily survival. As a result, living in a clean environment with things like a minimal carbon footprint, clean water, and proper waste disposal comes at a price that is beyond their means.</p>	<p>Building relationships by meeting marginalized populations where they work and live will not only encourage their inclusive participation, but also create empathy to their struggles. This will help policy makers avoid blanket solutions to climate change issues and factor in marginalized populations' perspectives.</p>
<p>Lack of Energy Sovereignty Empowering vulnerable populations means supporting their authority to make decisions leading to development that is resilience-oriented, and outcomes that support social and environmental justice.</p>	<p>When external companies own projects within a marginalized community, they take away the sovereign right of the community to freely enjoy their natural resources.</p>	<p>Energy sovereignty allows marginalized populations to govern local projects such as those focused on clean energy and waste management. These activities contribute to participation in climate change solutions.</p>
<p>Disparity There are many dimensions of disparity that factor into why some communities live in inequitable environmental conditions.</p>	<p>Economic and social disparities limit access to a clean environment. Lack of affordable options for clean energy and sustainable transportation for instance limit access to things which make local environments cleaner and healthier such as modern stoves for cooking and electric vehicles for transportation.</p>	<p>An equitable society should provide affordable options that marginalized populations can choose from in order to participate in climate change solutions. For instance, people living in low-income areas should be able to choose options such as walking and cycling, or affordable ride sharing and public transit.</p>
<p>Lack of Representation Populations such as the homeless, people living with disability, people living with mental health issues, people of colour, and First Nations people should all be represented in policy and decision-making.</p>	<p>When marginalized populations aren't represented in decision-making processes, they are hindered from advocating for themselves and the kind of environment they want to live in.</p>	<p>Representing marginalized populations in decision-making processes allows for the lived experiences of underrepresented groups to be included, which can also lead to policies that dismantle the barriers of inaccessibility while focusing diverse perspectives on devising climate change solutions.</p>
<p>Lack of Investment Disinvested communities are disproportionately First Nations, racialized, and low-income.</p>	<p>Without adequate investment, poor conditions in low-income communities remain unaddressed. For example, older buildings tend to have higher operating costs, which are passed on to low-income tenants as higher rent prices.</p>	<p>Marginalized populations should be able to innovate and build on ideas and spaces that encourage further participation to climate change solutions. For instance, investment in energy-efficient retrofits can lead to lower operating costs, smaller energy burdens, and mitigate the use of high-emission sources of power. Such investments can also be used to buy something that many marginalized populations have in short supply: time to participate in community building initiatives.</p>

Conclusion

Barriers to environmental equity occur at both the 'macro' and 'micro' level. They can take different forms, are interconnected, and can be difficult to identify in day-to-day life because they are entrenched and, often, normalized. This year's Gala successfully brought new perspectives on environmental equity to the forefront and engaged a diverse community of individuals who are helping to or are interested in creating a more just world for everyone. There is a need for greater cohesion of knowledge in the environmental community, so that we are all armed with the understanding that climate change and human well-being are interrelated. Significant improvements occur, especially for marginalized communities, when we rethink how we perceive and engage in climate action and policymaking.

Ensuring social equity among marginalized communities is a collective responsibility and one that requires deliberate and daily efforts from different orders of government, organizations, and individuals. As we work towards improved inclusion, it is important to remember that our efforts will be futile if the basic needs of all are not met first. Expecting the hungry, cold or sick to make meaningful contributions to climate solutions is unrealistic. When basic needs are met first, trust and meaningful engagement can occur and communities feel encouraged to participate in developing climate solutions.

Participation is also encouraged by including feedback from marginalized communities. Everybody wants their views and opinions heard. If a society explores mechanisms that account for the lived experiences of marginalized communities, then equity and inclusion, which help guide policies towards climate solutions, can begin to be factored into decision-making.

It is also necessary to provide affordable options to marginalized communities in order to provide the opportunity for equitable participation in climate change solutions. For instance, in the case of transportation, the option of using clean public transit or multi-modal streets allows people living in marginalized communities to affordably contribute to the reduction of GHG emissions without stressing them financially.

Lastly, societies are as strong as their weakest communities and capacity building helps strengthen marginalized communities. Providing knowledge, investment options, and sovereignty to projects encourages inclusion, participation, and helps to build relationships where marginalized communities can meet their basic needs and thrive in healthy environments.



Glossary

Capacity building	The process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world.
Clean energy	Refers to energy that is collected from renewable and zero-emission sources.
Energy poverty	Refers to barriers of affordability in the access of modern energy services and products.
Energy sovereignty	The right of individuals, communities and Indigenous peoples to make their own decisions on energy generation, distribution and consumption in a way that is appropriate within their ecological, social, economic and cultural circumstances, provided that these do not affect others negatively.
Environmental equity	Refers to the disproportionate environmental burden of certain marginalized and minority populations, such as pollution and the impacts of climate change.
Health inequity	Refers to differences in health status across different socioeconomic and racialized population groups.
Intersectionality	A complex term referring to the interconnected nature of identity categories, such as race, gender, and class, which overlap to create interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.
Marginalized communities	Communities that experience discrimination and exclusion because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.
Social equity	The active commitment to fairness, justice, and equality in the provision, implementation, and impact of services, programs, and policies to the public.