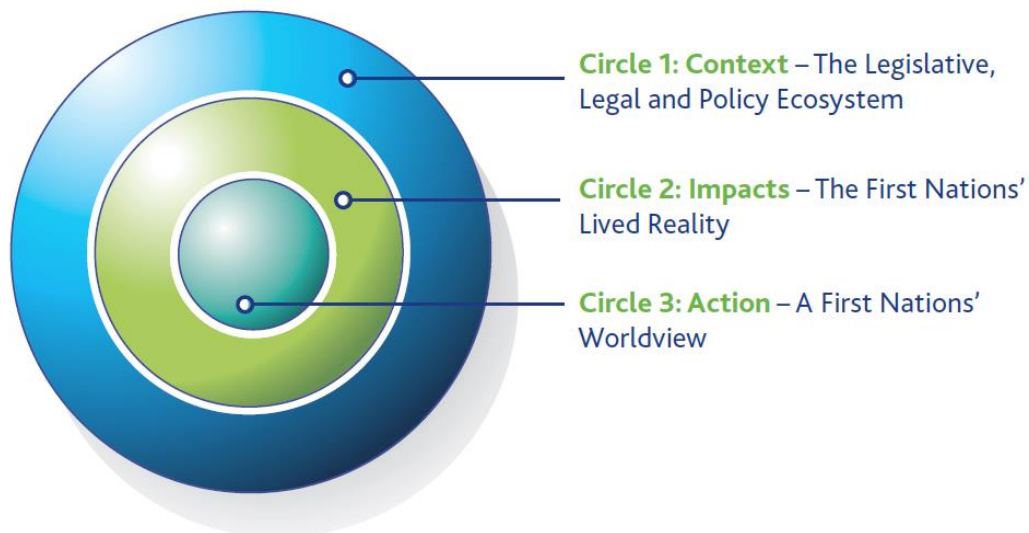


## **First Nations Climate Lens**

For First Nations, the climate crisis is inseparable from our daily experiences and realities, navigating what some refer to as ‘colonial déjà vu’.<sup>1</sup> In this context, First Nations face unique climate risks as a result of how colonialism, in conjunction with capitalism, has shaped where we live, our socio-economic conditions, and how we exercise our relationships with Mother Earth. These experiences, and interconnections, cannot be overlooked when contemplating climate related solutions for (or by) First Nations.

As a starting point, a First Nations Climate Lens challenges the conventional conceptualizations of First Nations as vulnerable ‘canaries’ in the proverbial coal mine, and passive recipients of climate impacts. Instead, it emphasizes how our unique connections to the land, water, air and non-human beings have enabled us to live reciprocally and in balance with all of Creation for thousands of years, denoting how First Nations are leaders and active drivers of change. The cultural, spiritual, and social connection to the land may increase First Nations’ exposure and sensitivity to climate change impacts, but they also provide a unique source of strength, understanding and resilience for all citizens in Canada.

It is with this foundation that we are advancing a First Nations Climate Lens; a lens based on the alignment of three concentric circles to bring focus to the relationships between First Nations’ climate impacts, climate action, and the broader climate context.



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<sup>1</sup>Whyte, Kyle. (2016). Is it Colonial Déjà Vu? Indigenous Peoples and Climate Injustice. 10.4324/9781315642659.

### ***Circle 1: Context – The Legislative, Legal and Policy Ecosystem***

Climate action for First Nations occurs within a legislative, legal, and policy context. Recently, this has included the federal government’s commitment to pass legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, and action on the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. In addition, there is a growing body of Indigenous-related jurisprudence from the Supreme Court of Canada, as well as the protections afforded to First Nations by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. A First Nations Climate Lens acknowledges these legislative, legal, and policy contexts by positioning climate action as both a rights- and responsibilities-based activity. Given our inherent jurisdiction over lands and territories, as well as our affirmed right to self-determination, First Nations must occupy a place of priority in any climate action discussion.

### ***Circle 2: Impacts – The First Nations’ Lived Reality***

Vulnerability to climate change is often socially constructed, meaning that factors such as income and social status, social support networks, education, health, and gender influence the ability of individuals and communities to build adaptive capacity. The challenge, however, is that this vulnerability often plays out as a vicious cycle whereby climate hazards aggravate existing socio-economic inequalities that, in turn, underpin greater exposure and vulnerability to climate impacts. According to the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, this has the potential to lead to a new form of ‘climate apartheid’ in the global context.<sup>2</sup> In Canada, these conversations often disregard the historical legacy of colonization, which has included relocating First Nations, removing children from their families and forcing them into Indian Residential Schools, and banning languages and ceremonies, among other atrocities.

Climate change exacerbates many of the resulting impacts of colonization. These include those relating to mental health and wellbeing, poverty, poor housing, food and water insecurity, and the erosion of rights, culture and access to lands. The incorporation of these kinds of diverse factors and their intersectionality – that is, how specific combinations of factors shape their own social position and thus affect experiences of power, oppression and vulnerability – is essential to understand the impacts of the climate crisis on First Nations. A First Nations Climate Lens can be used in this context to incorporate the lived reality of First Nations, looking to find ways to understand and approach multiple, intersecting experiences that shape how impacts will be distributed and experienced. In this regard, addressing the climate crisis cannot be separated from the broader project of First Nations self-determination and reconciliation.

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<sup>2</sup> In this context, it means that growing inequality will allow high-income individuals and communities to develop climate-resilient solutions at the expense of longer-income individuals and communities, who could face a perpetual erosion of adaptive capacity.

***Circle 3: Action – A First Nations’ Worldview***

A First Nations Climate Lens emphasizes solutions that are multidimensional, interrelated, interconnected, and grounded in First Nations’ law, knowledge, language, and governance. While acknowledging the heterogeneity of First Nations, the core of a First Nations’ worldview has a common foundation: an understanding that we are the land and the land is us. All animate and inanimate elements of the natural world are imbued with spirit, representing a sacred and personal relationship with all of Creation. This recognition lays the foundation for a set of legal principles and orders that, while unique to each individual First Nation, represent natural, spiritual, and environmental law. It is this sacred responsibility that continues to guide how First Nations interact with, protect, and respect Mother Earth. To guarantee the survival of our species and all others, First Nations traditional government and knowledge must stand equally with Western systems of government and knowledge, and the reclamation of traditional relationships with the land must supersede profit or greed.