

## **PRIORITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **2. CREE CULTURE, EDUCATION AND RESEARCH**

Due to the rapid changes that have occurred over the past decades in Cree society, the transmission of Cree tradition and knowledge about the land remains a major preoccupation. This preoccupation is heightened in the context of climate change, which affects the very relation between people and their environment. Amidst fast social and economic transformations, youth do not enjoy the same level of access to the land and do not engage in harvesting activities in the same way as previous generations. Thus, creating gaps in intergenerational relations. Education and research can play a significant role in the recording and transmission of Cree culture, if adequate actions are taken to make sure that educational activities and means of producing knowledge become vectors of cultural transmission for the Cree nation. At stake is more than knowledge and skills, but also the Cree identity.

#### **2.1. Intensifying Cree research and recording**

Many people perceive Cree traditional knowledge as an important asset to address climate change impacts. They insist on the importance of recording and diffusing traditional knowledge possessed by elders to younger generations. Elders often have amassed a large amount of knowledge about life on the land. Traditional knowledge is largely embodied in practices and dependant on seasons and activities. Although it does not replace first hand experiences, filming videos of the elders teaching about ancestral practices and stories has already proven useful as an educational tool. Many consider that more resources should be invested in production of educational videos that could be available on Cree language internet diffusion platforms, the radio and television. The challenge is to ensure that all necessary knowledge is captured for educational purpose, and that Cree people are empowered to record their own traditions. Partnerships between the Cree School Board, Cree Trappers' Association and Cree Health Board could be considered to produce more videos on important aspects of Cree culture and knowledge.

An important aspect of Cree life consists of using knowledge about traditional plants for healing. Hands on learning should also be promoted through projects that record and allow diffusion of important knowledge and skills. Many believe there is a strong need to develop systematic documentation and teaching programs led by Cree Elders for documenting healing practices with traditional plants. The purpose is not only to collect knowledge about these practices, but also to make sure they are passed on to the younger generations through teaching programs offered by the Cree School Board. Many participants expressed the need to take ownership of all research and communication tools that would allow recording and maintaining knowledge about traditional healing practices.

An important constraint to the development of Cree research initiatives is the limited access to college and university programs. Although some attempts were made to set up college and university programs in institutions located in the region, some barriers persist in access to education. It was suggested that more programs should be offered online, to provide more access to specialized knowledge.

**Table 4.** Summary of priorities and actions to intensify Cree research

Priorities	Actions
Record elders' traditional knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set up local and regional programs to produce videos about elders' teachings</li> <li>- Empower local teams to record elders' teachings for educational purposes</li> <li>- Ensure intellectual property of ecological knowledge</li> </ul>
Intensify efforts to collect data about traditional activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identification of knowledgeable people, mainly elders, who should be participating in research projects</li> <li>- Encourage oral teachings and participation of Cree researchers in activities</li> <li>- Design research activities that respect Cree way of life</li> </ul>
Set up Cree research programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Integrate Cree knowledge and scientific knowledge in research projects in complementary ways</li> <li>- Promote Cree philosophy in research design</li> <li>- Set up partnerships to support recording and research on central aspects of Cree way of life and identity</li> <li>- Ensure the diffusion of knowledge gathered by providing broad access to videos</li> <li>- Experimenting with new technologies for diffusing Cree language educational videos</li> </ul>
Increase access to higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide access to online university courses and trainings</li> <li>- Implement Cree higher education trainings</li> </ul>

Photo Credit: Reggie Tomatuk

## 2.2. Developing Cree educational programs

As appropriate responses to climate change require adequate knowledge and skills, the forum allowed participants to express themselves on the current state of education programs in Eeyou Istchee. Many believe that educational programs and approaches need to promote more actively the use of Cree language. Some elders perceive that Cree language is being slowly marginalised in specific contexts and that this may preclude the transmission of culture and knowledge of the land. The promotion of Cree language is considered by many as a priority to maintain Cree culture and skills related to the land that have ensured Cree survival for many generations.

In addition, some have observed a decrease in large gatherings associated with hunting activities. Contrary to what it used to be, families are less inclined to go and spend a long time on their trapline. According to many participants, it is critical that Cree youth have access to the knowledge of previous generations. For some Cree youth, their lifestyle has been shaped by schooling and office work, and they feel that a large part of Cree culture has not been passed on to them. Some people expressed concerns regarding the progressive loss of Cree traditional knowledge and family values. Yet, many initiatives are being developed. The Cree Youth Council wants to set up a Cree Scouts program that would promote the teaching of traditional activities. Communication tools such as Cree language applications and television shows can be mobilised to reach a larger number of young Cree, focussing on traditions and culture.

It was suggested to organise more seasonal classes out on the land in which small groups of children would experience the lifestyle associated to hunting and harvesting. Officially recognized and credited 45-hour training course led by the Cree Trappers' Association is currently in place to teach youth about hunting and fishing. However, some issues were raised regarding the certification of trappers to provide teaching recognized by the Cree School Board. Suggestions were made to provide field classes to give access to the whole range of activities that take place on the land.

In order to bridge intergenerational gaps, it was suggested to set up community gathering spaces where youth and elders could meet and engage in common activities. This would be a designated place where elders could share their knowledge and develop relationships with the youth. A designated place for such activities could allow for daily sharing of knowledge. Current buildings such as schools and youth centers could be used for such activities to increase access and sustainability.



Photo Credit: Mistissini Participatory Video Team



**Table 5.** Summary of priorities and actions to develop new educational programs

Priorities	Actions
Implement new teaching tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Produce documentaries to record and diffuse elder knowledge and values</li> <li>- Use Internet platforms such as YouTube to improve access to Cree language materials</li> </ul>
Improve intergenerational relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide a space for the gathering of elders and youth for educational activities</li> </ul>
Design and implement culturally relevant teaching methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement a program to teach about harvesting activities and life on the land</li> <li>- Provide access to seasonal programs on the land for youth</li> </ul>
Develop social programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement a program to support and provide financial compensation to youth that decide to help elders while living on the land</li> </ul>

Photo Credit: Waskaganish Participatory Video Team

