

BREAKING BARRIERS: INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS CATALYSTS FOR EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

In the article, the role of indigenous women in promoting personal and collective empowerment through advocacy for public policy is discussed. Even though there are many different ways that indigenous women experience prejudice and conflict, initiatives to uphold their rights are having an impact. The challenges that Aboriginal women have encountered throughout history are discussed in this article, along with the social and cultural obstacles they have overcome. It also takes into account the effects that empowering indigenous women will have on society, the economy, and politics. Using research findings and real-life examples, we look at indigenous women's suggestions for overcoming obstacles, protecting their customs, and building successful communities.

Keywords: Indigenous Women, Community Resilience, Aboriginal Women, The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

INTRODUCTION

For Indigenous women historically, there have been considerable obstacles and prejudice because of the intricate connections between gender, ethnicity, and cultural identity. Debates on gender equality and human rights occasionally overlook their challenges and successes. However, there has been a growing appreciation of the importance of Indigenous women's rights and empowerment in achieving gender equality and global social justice in recent decades.

Indigenous women have long had a significant and distinctive role in their communities, acting as the foundation for the conservation of the environment, the preservation of natural resources, and the upbringing of future generations. Despite this, dominating civilizations and colonial powers have ignored, disregarded, or openly rejected indigenous contributions and rights.

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Native American females are vital to removing obstacles, defending their rights, and fostering community resilience in their unique cultures¹.

Indigenous females have been the bearers of ancestral wisdom for millennia, passing on customs, dialects, and ecological knowledge from generation to generation². They may be the land's protectors, intimately familiar with its complexities and rhythms through their cultural heritage³. They have shown an unwavering dedication to their communities' well-being by working as healers, peacemakers, and leaders⁴. Indigenous people have overcome institutional barriers to assert their rights, promote gender equality, and build community resilience⁵. Their actions have not only raised their status within their communities but have also contributed to the overall power and sustainability of Indigenous civilizations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT

Throughout history, indigenous women have faced discrimination due to the impact of European colonization in regions like the Americas, Australia, and various parts of the world. The colonizers typically sought to eliminate indigenous traditions, reduce the roles and responsibilities of women, and impose patriarchal norms⁶. This resulted in indigenous women experiencing both gender-based discrimination and bias due to the alteration of traditional gender roles brought about by colonization.

In the face of these adversities, indigenous women have consistently displayed remarkable resilience. Their deep connection to their culture, spiritual beliefs, and strong community bonds

¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2021). Indigenous Peoples and Development: A Review of Engagement and Impact. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/indigenous-peoples-and-development--a-review-of-engagement-and-i.html>

² Anderson, K. (2000). *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources*. University of California Press.

³ Simpson, L. B. (2014). *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing.

⁴ Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*. University of Regina Press.

⁵ Smith, A. (2012). Indigenous Women's Activism: A Framework for Analyzing Social Change. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 29(1-2), 42-48.

⁶ Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. "Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples." London: Zed Books, 2012

provided them with strength⁷. Their commitment to preserving their languages, customs, and values proved essential for the survival of indigenous cultures.

Indigenous women have long been at the forefront of endeavors to promote indigenous rights and gender equality. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, indigenous women in the United States, like Zitkála-á and Gertrude Bonnin, tirelessly campaigned to raise awareness about the hardships faced by their people. They fought for improved living conditions, educational opportunities, and the protection of their land and resources.

More recently, indigenous women have played a pivotal role in the establishment of global indigenous rights, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)⁸. Figures like Wilma Mankiller, the first female Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, have advocated for the recognition of indigenous sovereignty and the right to self-determination⁹. Despite these advancements, indigenous women continue to face specific challenges, including a disproportionate prevalence of assault, poverty, and limited access to healthcare and education¹⁰. These challenges are exacerbated by the complex intersection of gender discrimination and racism.

The historical hardship and tenacity of Indigenous women frame their ongoing fight for rights and empowerment. Indigenous women have played a critical role in maintaining the survival of their communities and the preservation of their cultural heritage as protectors, heroes, and leaders of their cultures.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO BREAKING BARRIERS

The ability of a community to withstand and recover from a range of hardships and disasters while retaining its social, economic, and cultural well-being is referred to as community resilience. Individual empowerment and group resiliency are fueled by acceptance and support

⁷ Lajimodiere, Denise K. "Native Women and Land: Narratives of Dispossession and Resurgence." University of New Mexico Press, 2015.

⁸ United Nations. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." 13 September 2007. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

⁹ Mankiller, Wilma, and Michael Wallis. "Mankiller: A Chief and Her People." New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999.

¹⁰ Totten, Mark. "Stolen Sisters, Second Class Citizens, and Fetal Subjects: Indigenous Women and Amnesty International's Human Rights Campaign against Indian Residential Schools." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2016.

for Indigenous women's rights. Indigenous women, who experience discrimination and alienation on a regular basis, are critical to the expansion of social integration.

Indigenous women serve as the foundation of their society, conserving knowledge, a sense of community, and cultural traditions. Their rights and the ability of a community to recover are closely linked for the following reasons:

- Indigenous women are the primary custodians of cultural practices, languages, and traditions in their communities¹¹. We safeguard cultural heritage rights, which are critical to a community's identity and coherence.
- Indigenous women engage in traditional economic activities that help their communities regularly¹². These businesses can thrive when their rights are recognized and protected, thereby contributing to the economic stability of their communities.

Indigenous women face an array of barriers to their rights and empowerment, including the following:

- Indigenous women continue to face marginalization as a result of institutional bias and previous misdeeds¹³. Examples include limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.
- Indigenous women have a disproportionate number of victims of violence, including domestic violence and sexual assault¹⁴. These types of violence make it much harder for people to exercise their rights and contribute to community resilience.

Despite these challenges, Indigenous women emerge as empowerment and community resilience agents in a variety of ways:

- Many Indigenous women serve as community leaders, advocating for change for their people¹⁵. Their example motivates others to fight for their rights and to strive for resilience.

¹¹ Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.

¹² Anaya, J. (2004). *Indigenous peoples in international law*. Oxford University Press.

¹³ United Nations. (2021). *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*.

¹⁴ Anderson, K. L. (2016). Life histories of Canadian Indigenous women living with violence. *Qualitative Social Work*, 15(1), 27-42.

¹⁵ Parpart, J. L., & Zalewski, M. (2008). *Rethinking the Man Question: Sex, Gender and Violence in International Relations*. Zed Books.

- Indigenous women continue to pass on traditional knowledge, giving future generations a feeling of identity and belonging¹⁶. This awareness is essential for preserving cultural resilience.
- Activists for Indigenous women's rights work tirelessly to raise awareness about the difficulties that their communities face¹⁷. Their advocacy influences policy and increases support for Indigenous rights.

CASE STUDY: THE STANDING ROCK SIOUX TRIBE

The Dakota Access Pipeline protests in 2016 emphasized the vital role of Indigenous women in community resiliency and activism¹⁸. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe joined many other Indigenous groups and supporters in opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was proposed to run beneath the Missouri River near their North Dakota reservation¹⁹. This project put their drinking water and ancestral sites in jeopardy.

Standing Rock's indigenous women's campaign drew international notice and support. The protests not only drew to light the dangers that Indigenous communities face, but they also sparked a larger debate about Indigenous peoples' rights and the importance of addressing environmental issues²⁰.

In the end, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's protests, which gained support from individuals and organizations all over the world, resulted in a reroute of the pipeline and a brief halt in construction²¹. The Dakota Access Pipeline protests are an inspiring example of Indigenous women's tenacity and potential to encourage people in favor of a more just and sustainable future, even as things change²².

¹⁶ Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teaching of plants. Milkweed Editions.

¹⁷ Smith, A. D. (2012). Indigenous peoples and the ethics of development: "An unusual problem in ethics". Cambridge University Press.

¹⁸ Archambault, D. (2017). Standing Rock, #NoDAPL, and Mni Wiconi: Intersecting Indigenous Knowledge and Transformative Praxis. *Environmental Communication*, 11(4), 415-420.

¹⁹ "Dakota Access Pipeline: What's at Stake." National Wildlife Federation, <https://www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Threats-to-Wildlife/Infrastructure/Dakota-Access-Pipeline>.

²⁰ "Standing Rock Sioux Tribe History" (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, n.d.), <https://www.standingrock.org/history>.

²¹ "The Dakota Access Pipeline's Environmental Impact." National Geographic, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/dakota-access-pipeline-keystone-xl-how-it-affects-the-environment>.

²² "Standing Rock Protests: A Chronology of the Dakota Access Pipeline Protests." Amnesty International USA, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/resources/standing-rock-protests-chronology-of-dakota-access-pipeline-protests/>.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

The importance of indigenous women's rights as a source of empowerment and societal resilience is rising. In order to defend and strengthen Indigenous women's rights for the benefit of their communities, this study examines the underlying legal principles and implications of this relationship.

Indigenous peoples' rights, particularly those of Indigenous women, are recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)²³. According to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the elimination of discrimination against Indigenous women and the promotion of gender equality in Indigenous communities are key goals.

International human rights accords, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), demand that governments uphold gender equality and non-discrimination, even within Indigenous communities. General Recommendation No. 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly covers Indigenous women's rights, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity in addressing their rights.

Indigenous women's rights are not only an issue of human rights; they are also essential for communal survival. Both international and domestic legal systems recognize these rights, and states are expected to safeguard and promote them. Empowering Indigenous women through education, economic opportunities, and anti-violence initiatives can contribute to Indigenous communities' overall resilience, assuring their sustainability and well-being.

CONCLUSION

In the quest for empowerment and societal resilience, the advocacy for the rights of Indigenous women stands as a formidable and burgeoning movement. This essay delves into the complexity of this struggle, tracing its historical origins, contemporary challenges, and the remarkable resilience of Indigenous women. They have tirelessly labored to dismantle barriers, not only fortifying their legal standing but also igniting substantial societal transformation.

²³ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), G.A. Res. 61/295, U.N. Doc. A/RES/61/295 (Sept. 13, 2007), art. 22.

Their activism transcends the realm of gender equality, intertwining deeply with the broader fight for Indigenous rights.

Confronting institutional injustice, brutality, and marginalization, Indigenous women have exhibited astonishing resolve and ingenuity. A new generation of activists adeptly navigates the intricacies of their identities, raising their voices and galvanizing communities in the pursuit of justice and equity. Given their roles as community builders, custodians of culture, and champions of environmental causes, the rights of Indigenous women are intimately connected to the larger spheres of social and environmental justice.

Ultimately, the empowerment of Indigenous women transcends mere justice; it serves as a positive catalyst that ripples through entire communities and civilizations. Their enduring dedication, unwavering commitment, and relentless pursuit of progress offer a beacon of hope for a more equitable future, one in which the rights of all individuals are acknowledged and upheld. It is our shared duty to bolster and amplify the voices of Indigenous women as they continue to lead the charge towards a more inclusive and resilient society.

