

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action.

So welcome to our Earth Charter podcast, Turning Conscience Into Action.

Today, we have the pleasure of receiving Carol Anne Hilton. She is the CEO and founder of the Indigenous Genomics Institute and the Global Center for of Indigenous Genomics. Carol Ann is an Indigenous business leader and author of the book, Indigenous Genomics, Taking a Sit at the Economics Table. And she's also an adjunct professor at the Royal Rhodes University School of Business. Carol, thank you so much for joining us today. Thank you for having me. So my intention here is to get to our audience to know you better and more and also about your book and the work you do, there where you are.

Can you share with us a little bit about your community, where you were born and how it's a little bit about your community in ways that located, even about the beauty of it and its opportunities and challenges. Yeah, for sure. Thank you. So I am descended from the New Charnel North people. The community is a Heshquit Nation. It's the West Coast of Vancouver Island on Canada, kind of one of the most Western points. And the community that I come from is very small, very remote. You can only get in there by boat or plane.

There's no roads in there. Very strong kind of conservation, protection, sustainability and stewardship approaches, as with any small community. There's difficulties with just having the capacity of balancing the social and the business or the economic side. And so the membership is maybe just around just over 600. It goes up and down a little bit, but very small community. The majority of people, citizens of the nation don't live there. The majority live within the town or the larger urban areas in the surrounding region.

The areas was heavily logged in the kind of 70, 80s, 90s, and the nation had very strong leadership around sustainable practices, including Indigenous worldviews into harvesting practices, into long-term planning and reaching and exceeding forestry practices that pushed what it meant to have a long-term harvesting and industry in the region. So I think the nation's had very strong leadership over time of just being able to bring perspective around sustainability, resource management, and the responsibility around stewardship overall.

So that's the community that I come from. I'm very proudly descended from and strong family and strong community. Thank you. Do you have your own language? Yes, so it's part of a larger Nhan-Auth group. I was learning it for about five years. It was categorized as in danger of becoming extinct, but there is a very, very strong movement of elders, partial speakers, new speakers, and this historical recordings that are allowing this strong uptake of language revitalization, because in Canada the languages of Indigenous people were intended to be severed so that Indigenous people would no longer think they would become white or kind of of European descent.

So it was quite a violent undertaking of children being abused in schools to be essentially beaten to not speak their language. So language itself is something that's very much a very strong context around it of why there were so few speakers left and the trauma that was associated with relearning the language even. Amazing. So for those of us who are not from Canada, can you share a little bit about this history around residential houses in Canada? What is that and from when to when that took place and why?

Yeah, for sure. In Canada there was something called the residential school systems that essentially remove children from their families and from their communities. And as I was referring to the language, it was meant to remove any Indigenous identity. So the schooling system was to kind of take the Indigenous child out of their context and make them become mainstream. So in itself was very violent in terms of the children being abused and neglected and institutionalized. So there's been a significant movement around healing and wellbeing.

And the schools were a requirement to attend. So the place would actually set up a system of gathering the children and bringing them, but it also caused a lot of trauma in the older generation whose children were seized. And I think that the ability to understand the role of education, Indigenous worldview, language and continuity of people, that it's important to understand that the policies of Canada was intended for there to be no more Indigenous people, but I think that the policies that were directed from a federal level were facilitated by the church, but was a federal direction.

So those schools caused a lot of harm over maybe a hundred years. So three, four generations that were all removed which caused disruption in cultural ways of being and knowing and knowledge systems and the ability to function healthy as a family unit, were a lot of kind of social mis-ills and addictions and recovery had to happen after four children that were in the schools as well as the breaking up of family units over time. So in these schools, Indigenous people were removed from their family and their communities to go and live in those schools for years, I would say, and in that way they would lose their community identity.

But from then to when did that exist? So you said for a hundred years, but when did it? There was day schools so they weren't staying there anymore, but there was still day schools in the 1990s. And one of the things that also happened in Canada two or three years ago was the discovery of 215 graves of children at one of the residential schools that used LIDAR ground searching. So there's no other schools in anywhere in Canada that has graves of children. And I think one of the interesting things of these schools is that you're not called an alumni of the school, you're called a survivor, like if you actually made it out alive.

So it was very much connected to genocide, very much connected to the removal of Indigenous people and how that also allowed clearing of the lands to have access to resources. So it absolutely served as an economic function as well. It's amazing to see how in the mindset of some people they could see that as something normal to do. Amazing. Could you share with us a few of the opportunities and challenges you see currently of your community? I think that there's a very strong sense of alignment of the

inclusion of the nation into economic development opportunities. So whether that's fisheries, local fisheries, the requirement for Indigenous inclusion has shifted.

So that provides a significant opportunity of returning to economic activity. I think that there's this also alignment of balancing sustainable forestry or land management practices with economic development so that planning becomes really important around the ability of the nation to be included within opportunities where historically that hasn't happened as what we see today. So let's talk a bit about education and if you could share with us what are you thinking or examples of the education approach you have in your community or you had as a child as you bring up. What do you think is the key elements of the education approach of the First Nations in Canada?

I think that's almost too big of a question to answer. If you look at my community specifically, it was about maybe 15 years ago that a new school was built and one of the beautiful things about the event was that when our children went to the residential schools, their traditional names were stripped and they were provided an English name. So when we built the school in the community, even though it was a Western style of education and all of its kind of regulated aspects for education outcomes, when the children entered into the school, it was very well thought out of having the children return to their traditional names.

And I think that was a very powerful demonstration of re-including Indigenous worldview and perspectives and I think there is a whole movement of a different way of Indigenous teaching and education and worldview of understanding that. But again, I think Canada itself is so massive that any distinction across many, many, many different cultural groups, you're not going to find the same answer. There's just so many cultural distinctions because the country is so massive. And there are also many different Indigenous communities and groups, right?

I think the last number was over 630, so all distinct groups and different languages and practices. Yeah, it's quite diverse. So let's talk a bit about the, again, the worldviews. So Indigenous communities, worldviews or Cosmovision, or more specifically even the Cosmovision or worldviews of your community. If you could identify or share with us some poor underlining values. Yeah, sure. I think one of the main ones is a much more longer term perspective around value and relationships. So there's a concept that's well known around seven generation thinking that this generation hasn't inherited the thinking and decisions from the last seven generations and that the decisions we make today must be based around thinking about future generations and how the impact of those decisions will be made.

I think that there's a whole language structures and inherent sense of responsibility that that worldview is very much shaped from being in alignment with the natural world and instead of ownership of what we would think of land or resources, and I think more about relationship and distribution and exchange. And I think those aspects are really important in activating what it means to be Indigenous today is that to know how those teachings of how to operate the world, how to respect each and how to express itself is very formative to what an Indigenous worldview is.

And the sense of responsibilities with the decisions we make now with the impact of future generations and now you're just mentioned seven generations which are beautiful and also the focus on relationship. I think there's a lot of reflection of that also in the reshutter. Of what you know of the reshutter, do you see what are the synergies you see in the, in what is articulating the ideas that are articulated in the reshutter in the, in the world views of your community, what are the synergies you can find.

I mean just kind of a quick perspective of that without kind of going into all of those, I would absolutely say that you know respect for life, those concepts of alignment of ecological integrity. What does that mean from an Indigenous perspective of maintaining respect for life itself. We're seeing a very strong movement around Indigenous led conservation and protection areas where Indigenous decision making around resources or water or extraction or transportation or the balance between management decision making and creating a livelihood are better managed through an Indigenous decision making framework.

You have been highlighting the importance of inclusion and revaluing of Indigenous world views and knowledge. Inclusion and revaluing Indigenous knowledge in economy and business, something that is of a paramount. What do you mean by that and how, how do you envision this happening and why do you think that's so important. So, when Indigenous people remember a time before there was Canada, and in that time there was highly functioning systems of relating to each other to trade to unique systems of economy.

And a lot of those systems were based around ceremony around the ability to be able to make a very clear distinction of positioning Indigenous perspective into how you operate. And with that, it becomes important to understand that in the establishment of Canada itself, it had to be the dismantling of Indigenous ways of being and knowing. And so that happened through the Indian Act, which regulated Indigenous identity and mobility, and all of the acts that regulated like forestry or fisheries or water or mining excluded Indigenous people.

And I think to understand that the re-inclusion means also that stewardship, responsibility, ecological integrity, the management of risk means that decision making without Indigenous peoples is no longer possible. So now it's really this time of revaluing Indigenous perspectives and decision making frameworks and planning and how those management practices happen now from an Indigenous perspective. You mentioned about this Indigenous Act, law, regulation, when did that, when was that created? The Indian Act.

The Indian Act was one of the first, I think it was 18, I want to say, 1846, it was a correlating to the same time as the establishment of Canada. What it did was differentiate, 1876, what it did was it differentiate Indigenous people, externalize their definitions, so then the government controlled who was or who wasn't Indigenous. They also controlled movement, so Indigenous people had reserve systems, which restrained them, removed them from access to resources to lands to economy. It forced the requirement for the residential school systems and it established this entire foundation of the Indigenous relationship and the formation of Canada, so the Indian Act was central in that.

Amazing, amazing. You talk about value creation in Indigenous economies. What is that value creation, what is this and how do you envision making this happen? Yeah, I use the term value creation very specifically because in a mainstream economy, it's the measurements of economy are much aligned with gross domestic product as the benchmark number of the definition of economy itself.

I think that there's a lot that's missing in just using GDP as a sole metric of what economy is, so in understanding what value creation is an Indigenous economy, when you put it in the perspective of Indigenous peoples were denied a seat at the economic table of this country, that that space of our ability to return to the economic table that's based in our territories as Indigenous people, that the ability to understand how value is created to look at kind of the trends and patterns and some of those aspects that we're seeing today include very specific tools or investment structures, things like trade mechanisms, procurement as a policy tool, and the investment funds that are Indigenous led.

Those aspects of value creation, I think, has the ability to look at kind of hotspots, economic enablers around how value creation is actually happening.

I think there's also a social dimension to value creation in the Indigenous economy as well that the purpose of business is to better fulfill the need of communities, so it's much more community based versus corporate based that revenues created through business supports the continuation of the culture of language of youth of elders and that that purpose of business is shifted and more distinct than what you would see within a corporate realm or understanding. So, about multi-generational Indigenous wealth creation and impact, what is that and how do you envision this?

I think that's along the same lines as that concept of multi of seven generation thinking so that what we see as wealth creation in a mainstream context is very short term thinking, but establishing revenue that supports outcomes that allow you to continue as people, outcomes that allow you to have Indigenous led money or wealth systems, outcomes that support revenue in this generation can shape and what that can do for the longer term generational value. I don't see that conversation happening as much where the responsibility of value creation as directed towards well being, continuity, health in a purposeful way becomes really important to think about and how Indigenous communities plan for their future.

Thank you so much. You wrote a book called Indigenomics, taking a seat at the economic table. Can you share with us some of the key ideas that we can find there and what triggered you to write that book? So the book was a kind of formative thinking of I had the ability to shape what is indigenomics to shape meaning and to establish a new space or domain around Indigenous economy and linking that from our past as people to our experience of now as well as really thinking about revaluing our Indigenous world view and economy and what that means.

The book concept of Indigenous peoples are taking our seat at the economic table, positions the narrative around the simple truth of how Indigenous peoples was excluded or disinvited to the economic table, what that experience meant and how the country can come to terms

with yes this is the truth of our past but also what is our response today of the effects of that truth and the effects of that early formation.

The concept is also very much embedded around a forward trajectory of \$100 billion Indigenous economy is that to establish a forward looking outcome creates the need to design the structures to design the tools and to design the relationships for inclusion and impact overall. Have you come across other people from other Indigenous community that are joining you in this? I suppose so because it seems that there is a growing movement around this idea and movement that you have been staring and you have been focusing on strengthening this idea of Indigenous economies. Can you talk a little bit about that movement and also the work you have been doing in the Institute and the Global Center on Indigenous?

I think Indigenous as a concept is very organic that it really brings focus to what is already happening in the field, how Indigenous peoples are designing their inclusion, how Indigenous peoples are designing economic outcomes today and Indigenous is really just bringing focus to those patterns and to those relationships and partnerships and leadership in that success.

The work of the Global Center is playing at the intersection of sustainability, technology, Indigenous worldview and to understand that the uptake of Indigenous increased economic activity to be able to put a collaborative space that brings visibility to the growth of Indigenous economies in that concept of the interrelationship between structures of sustainability, new tools like technology, utilizing ancient worldviews and applying that to what is our economy today and tomorrow and in our future.

The Global Center is moving towards establishing what is called Indigenous now, which will be a 24-hour online open source conference that will look at this global perspective of asking a question, what does a world Indigenous economic forum need to be and to think about the perspectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, how do we accelerate those rights and to advance those into the future. The Global Center is one of the main interests of the Global Center and I think technology is the center point to realize that we have our ancient ways and also modern tools and I think that's the beauty of being Indigenous today is to acknowledge our past, our history and what is being built and how we design that from an Indigenous worldview.

So that is our end point is to facilitate the foundation for a World Indigenous Economic Forum.

Okay, the World Indigenous Economic Forum. So that means that you are making links, building bridges with Indigenous communities from other nations or the countries or the regions. Is that right? Yes. Okay, so within Canada, maybe one of the last questions here, the relationship, can you talk a little bit about the relationship with the work you have been doing in your community with this academic sphere, so universities, with governments, local government or the federal government or provision government, how is that relationship between the different actors in joining, coming together to, with a shared vision on that work?

I think it's really just this recognition of this spectrum of how nations are recovering from exclusion. We see some highly advanced around sophisticated business and economic ecosystem and we see some that are possibly in more remote areas and have a lack of access to opportunity and I think that the strong central bridging is overcoming existing barriers that have been put in front of us as Indigenous people such as the Indian Act or such as the the quality of access to opportunity or systematic denial overall. So I think that is a movement that's happening is the re-inclusion of building opportunity and building business acumen in a way to respond to the immediate business environment.

I have a feeling that there is a lot of work that needs to be done in just communicating, raising awareness, of course, people from outside Canada but certainly even people who are in Canada, Canadians or second, third generation of people came to migrate to Canada, there's a sort of lack of knowledge, information about all of these things and therefore I'm just envisioning here a huge challenge to be addressing just educating people, informing people, awakening awareness around these people. Is that right?

I think there was a general event that was around the experience of residential school survivors and the ability to tell their stories in a way that shaped what's called the Truth and Reconciliation called to action. So those calls to action address the structures that Indigenous peoples were marginalized, continuously economically displaced or those Indigenous rights displaced overall. So I think there's a movement for reconciliation which means taking responsibility for learning the history, for learning what an appropriate reconciliation response is today.

Thank you so much Carol Ann, it's such a pleasure to receive you here for Earth Charter podcast, thank you for your time and I really hope and wish you, of course, a great success in this wonderful and much needed effort to strengthen Indigenous economics through your Institute, Global Center and also this eventually Global Forum. Thank you so much. Wonderful, thank you so much Mirian.