

VERSION 01

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IMPACT REPORT

University of Northern British Columbia

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9:00am - 1:00pm

**Ecosystems,
Not Empires:
Reclaiming
Kinship &
Wealth**



PREPARED BY MATRIARCH MEDIA

— *Intro*

Research Results

WHY WE GATHERED

The *Ecosystems, Not Empires* symposium brought together Indigenous entrepreneurs, UNBC students, community leaders, and allies for a solution-focused gathering centered on reclaiming economic sovereignty through kinship-based systems. This collaborative event served as a space for reflection, design, and dialogue rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems.

The symposium centered on a bold vision: not just to include Indigenous peoples in the economy, but to transform the economy itself through Indigenous knowledge and values. We acknowledged the legacy of colonialism and its effects on wealth-building, education, mental health, and financial systems. Our gathering asked not just *what is broken*, but *how do we build differently?*

Drawing from research, lived experience, and collective insight, this space affirmed that Indigenous prosperity is not solely a financial concept, but a relational one—where wellness, cultural continuity, and sovereignty serve as core indicators of success, ultimately benefiting all.



ECOSYSTEMS, NOT EMPIRES



COLLABORATIVE SOCIAL DESIGN

This project began with a simple but important question: how do Indigenous entrepreneurs define success in systems that weren't built with their beliefs in mind? Instead of asking how to fit into existing economic models, the research invites us to explore what becomes possible when approaches are culturally grounded and community-led. *Ecosystems, Not Empires* speaks to this shift—from extractive and individualistic infrastructure toward one rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Through this lens, and drawing on research into self-efficacy among Indigenous entrepreneurs, a few things became clear. Systemic and structural barriers like financial exclusion, imposed governance structures, and the long impacts of psychological trauma continue to limit opportunity. But that's not the whole story. What also came through—consistently and strongly—were the sources of strength that already exist: adaptability, cultural support, and intergenerational knowledge. These are not just personal traits—they are community assets that continue to shape and sustain resilience in the face of systems that don't always reflect who we are.

Keynote Presentation

RESEARCH DISSEMINATION

By Laura Mueller

KEY PARTICIPANT COMMENTARY

"I believe, as Indigenous peoples, we have thousands of years of ancestral knowledge in our DNA, and this is what made Indigenous pre-colonial nations so long-lasting and economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable. Today, in a time of late-stage capitalism/socialism, the values and protocols of society are not cohesive with those of our ancestors and our culture."

"We are working in a nation whose systems are based on eurocentrism and Western thinking, and therefore must challenge them, decolonize them, and indigenize them to make space for our differing ways of thinking. This has meant training several organizations on our history, its impact on our relationships, and introducing them to our way of knowing."

"Mindset, as first we need to know what those critical challenges are, and then how can we trust ourselves to move through them. If we don't have a strong mindset, we will be forever stuck in victimhood instead of thriving."

Panel Discussion

This conversation brought together three Indigenous Matriarchs working in Community Enterprise, First Nations Leadership, and Business Development. It began with a return to the “why”—what called each panelist into this work, and what keeps them committed to economic sovereignty. It quickly became clear that this work is deeply personal, shaped by lived experiences of poverty, systemic exclusion, and intergenerational trauma. Rather than viewing entrepreneurship as purely economic, panelists emphasized it as a form of reclamation—of identity, relational wealth, and future possibility.

Key themes included emotional intelligence and trauma-informed leadership. The discussion acknowledged that many Indigenous professionals are often navigating PTSD, lateral violence, and the absence of culturally relevant mentorship. Panelists noted how conventional leadership training often falls short, prioritizing productivity over healing. Instead, they called for spaces centered on empathy, reciprocity, and emotional safety, especially for Indigenous women, two-spirit, and youth working within colonial systems.

A powerful takeaway was the role of community accountability—not just as a business value but as a relational responsibility. Success was defined not by metrics, but by the ability to uplift others, stay grounded in teachings, and model leadership for future generations. When asked what’s still missing from the ecosystem, panelists pointed to culturally aligned mentorship, safe spaces for healing, and opportunities to lead from a place of identity—not assimilation.



Zandra Ross

Certified Trainer + Keynote Speaker,
Zandra Ross Consulting



Brandy Jarvis

Director of Community-Based
Enterprise, Sus’tut LP, Takla Nation



Ashley Provencher

Business Development Officer,
Aboriginal Business Development Centre

Carrying the Conversation Forward : Exploring next steps, shared solutions, and what it means to lead from lived experience.



We seek not only to include Indigenous people in the economy, but to transform the economy, as we incorporate Indigenous wisdom for a sustainable future and prosperity for all.
Christina Clarke Executive Director,
Indigenous Prosperity Centre



— *Profile*

Key Themes & Insights

Key reflections from participants that reveal where strength lives—and where support is still needed.



1. Healing as Leadership

Key Insight: Healing is not individual. It is a leadership practice rooted in visibility, community, and storytelling. There is a desire to normalize trauma-informed leadership and embed healing into educational and business pathways.

2. Identity, Confidence & Belonging

Key Insight: Imposter syndrome, especially among Indigenous youth and professionals, reflects structural gaps in representation and affirmation. Identity-affirming environments are essential for building self-efficacy.

3. Indigenous Knowledge & Two-Eyed Seeing

Key Insight: Systems transformation requires the centering of Indigenous worldviews—not as alternatives, but as leading frameworks. Ceremony, land-based cycles, and storytelling are legitimate methodologies.

4. Safe & Inclusive Spaces

Key Insight: Participants seek psychologically safe, inclusive, and trauma-informed spaces for learning, expression, and community leadership. This includes spaces that support women, youth, and non-traditional learners.



Continuing the Conversation

Indigenous-Led Solutions.

5. Mentorship & Intergenerational Learning

Key Insight: Intergenerational mentorship is essential for resilience and continuity. Youth want consistent guidance, while elders and leaders must be integrated into learning systems as teachers and role models.

6. Practical Supports & Navigation Tools

Key Insight: There is strong demand for streamlined access to resources—financial, legal, emotional, and educational. These should be centralized, culturally safe, and connected to lived experience.



Opportunities for Action

“We need people in our lives that love us and who we look up to.”

Opportunities for action identified through this work include the development of trauma-informed leadership programs that integrate healing practices, ceremony, and narrative repair into existing leadership pathways. Expanding peer and elder mentorship networks—with regular check-ins and identity-affirming guidance—was highlighted as essential for continuity and belonging. There is also growing momentum to bring cultural curriculum into academic spaces through Two-Eyed Seeing, creating room for Indigenous knowledge systems to stand alongside Western methodologies. Resource hubs—both digital and physical—can help streamline access to funding, mentorship, and culturally grounded tools for identity and storytelling.





NEXT STEPS

The conversations and insights shared here are just the beginning. If you're interested in collaborating, sharing knowledge, or continuing the dialogue, I'd love to stay connected.

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Prepared by Matriarch Media