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# Tribal Collaborations and Indigenous Representation in Higher Education: Challenges, successes, and suggestions for attaining the SDGs

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## Abstract

The earth is amid a global environmental and humanitarian crisis. To meet the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we must consider Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies that are framed by the interconnectedness and equanimity of all life on Earth and a deep attachment to place. However, given our colonial histories and their harmful effects on Indigenous communities, it is a very real challenge to center Indigenous people and their perspectives in meaningful ways that support the attainment of the SDGs. In this chapter, we share findings from our self-study on the Maryland Indigenous Higher Education Alliance (MIHEA), a grassroots alliance co-created by Maryland tribal community members and a Maryland Higher Education Institution (IHE). This study organically employed participatory action research, conversational data collection, and qualitative data analysis to feature the voices of some of Maryland's Indigenous people who have collaborated with faculty and staff through MIHEA over the past 15 months. Our locally derived findings suggest challenges and promising practices that support Indigenous/Higher Education collaborations to achieve the SDGs more broadly.

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## **Keywords**

Sustainability · Indigenous · Collaboration · Institutes of Higher Education

## **1. Introduction**

The earth is amid a global environmental and humanitarian crisis. As a policy response, the United Nations published the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) which directs us to consider Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies that are framed by the interconnectedness and equanimity of all life on Earth and a deep attachment to place. Although Indigenous communities are diverse and each are unique, at a global scale, they have created some of the most biodiverse ecosystems. Indigenous peoples and local community's (IPLC) lands cover up to 50% of the Earth's lands and represent "over a third of the world's most important places for biodiversity" (WWF et al., 2021, p. 31). The condition of IPLC lands is "good" because of traditional perspectives on land management that encourage symbiotic relationships among the people, land, and ecosystems. In addition, IPLC lands, "maintain ecosystem services of importance to people living far beyond the borders of their lands" (WWF et al., 2021, p.33). Therefore, "supporting Indigenous and local knowledge, and investing in Indigenous communities is absolutely critical to protecting Earth's remaining intact ecosystems and to addressing the climate crisis" (Kerry, 2021). In this chapter, we present findings from our self-study on our Maryland Indigenous Higher Education Alliance (MIHEA) efforts to centralize Maryland's Indigenous people and their perspectives in higher education and support Indigenous/IHE collaborations to meet the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **2. Research Objective and Conceptual Framework**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls us to challenge the colonial paradigms that have led us to our current humanitarian and climate crisis. However, given the colonial history of the United States and its harmful effects on Indigenous communities, it is a very real challenge to center Indigenous people and their traditional perspectives in meaningful ways that support its attainment. As Rico Newman, a Piscataway Conoy-Choptico Band elder and MIHEA participant,

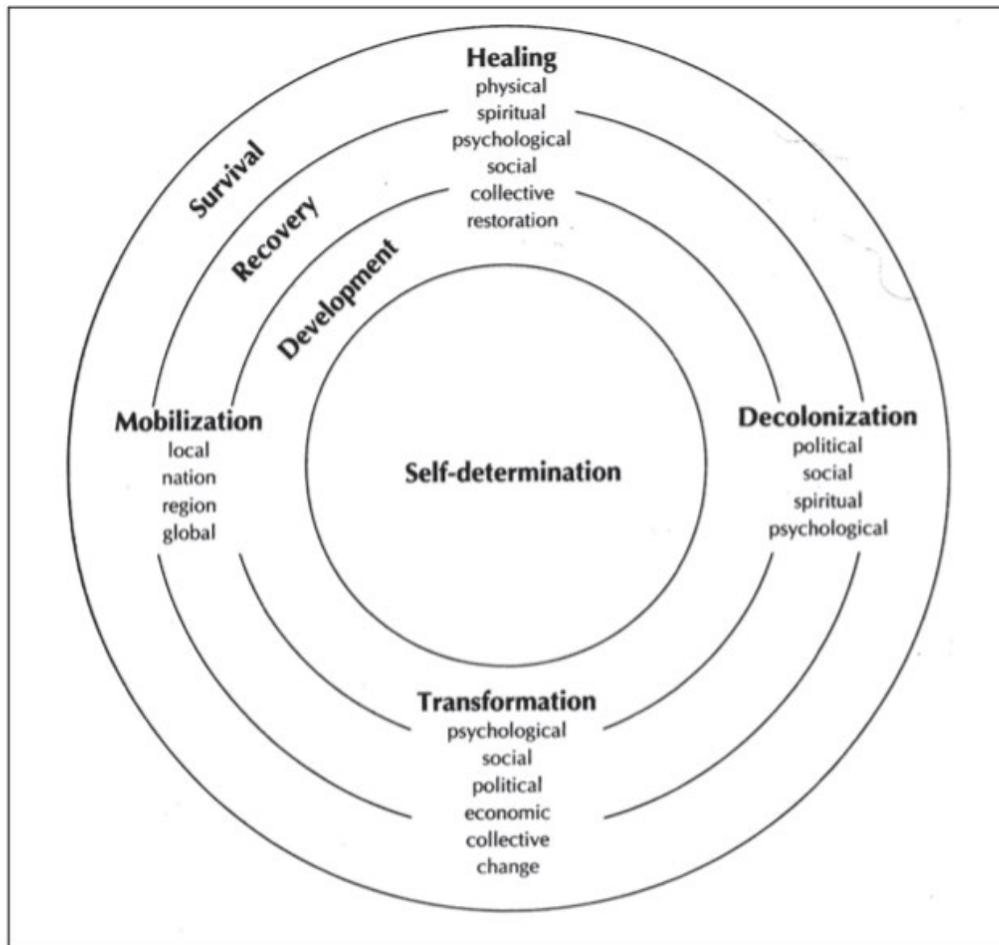
notes:

In the United States, we downplay the first three hundred years of a dark history of European-Indigenous relations with brevity and then dismissal. In doing so, the substance of Indigenous culture is rendered invisible. That dismissiveness and invisibility is continual and pervasive in all aspects of our social, political, and educational systems across the U.S. The absence of the Indigenous story perpetuates ignorance about history, economics, spirituality, technology, and lifeways, shaping the way non-Indigenous people think about and act toward Indigenous peoples when their presence becomes known.

In this chapter, we center the voices of Indigenous community members who have partnered with university faculty in developing a grassroots collaborative, the Maryland Indigenous Higher Education Alliance (MIHEA) to answer the research question: “What are challenges and promising practices for the inclusion of Indigenous people and their perspectives within higher education institutions (IHEs) as we pursue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?”

Our research is grounded in the concept of self-determination of Indigenous peoples “which necessarily involves the processes of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization as peoples” (Smith, 2021, p.120; Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Indigenous Research Agenda Conceptualized by Smith (2021, p. 121)*



Fulfilling the SDGs requires transformation of our societies, including IHEs, through the decolonization of our socio-economic paradigms, the healing of communities and relationships damaged by colonization, and local mobilization to achieve global sustainable development goals. The relational framing of decolonization, healing, mobilization, and transformation outlined in Smith’s Indigenous Research Agenda (2021) are well-aligned with MIHEA endeavors and outcomes.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Focus: Centering the Voices of Indigenous People

In *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2021), Smith describes the effects of imperialism and colonization on Indigenous people. These oppressive practices have shaped historical research on Indigenous people in ways that are misaligned with Indigenous beliefs, values, and practices. These traditional research methods harm Indigenous communities by framing them as “others” and misinterpreting their beliefs and practices through Eurocentric lenses. In contrast, Smith (2021), Wilson (2008), Braun, Browne, Ka ‘opua, Kim & Mokuau (2014) and many others have called for decolonizing research methodologies where Indigenous researchers are active participants, Indigenous perspectives are provided directly by Indigenous people, research questions are framed through Indigenous theories on knowledge and knowledge transfer, and the research conducted seeks to serve needs identified by Indigenous communities in meaningful ways.

Research methods aligned with decolonizing methodologies center Indigenous people and their perspectives and are often qualitative in nature. Participatory action research (PAR) and community-based participatory research (CBPR) are relational and aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing (Wilson, 2008). Thus, PAR and CBPR methods have the potential to be transformative (Kovach, 2009) by shifting away from traditional researcher/subject relationships to research partnerships, where power is shared, and collaboration and co-learning are critical. Blair & Minkler (2009) reported that findings from PAR studies are more likely to be action oriented, and PAR studies inclusive of Indigenous practices, such as storytelling and discourse, are well-aligned with decolonization frameworks (Kovach, 2010).

### ***3.2 Research Setting: Indigenous Maryland***

The region where this research was conducted is commonly referred to as the Mid-Atlantic region.

Indigenous communities, who have inhabited this region for thousands of years, refer to this region as the Chesapeake region, due to their significant relationships with the Chesapeake Bay and its watersheds [National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), Smithsonian Institution, 2006]. Prior to colonization, Indigenous people of this region “practiced diplomacy and developed political and military alliances. They were deeply spiritual and expressed their religious values and beliefs in cyclical ceremonies and rituals that kept their world in balance” (NMAI, Smithsonian Institution, 2006, p. 2). While European contact and colonization caused “devastating losses” (NMAI, Smithsonian Institution, 2006, p.2) for the Indigenous communities in this region, many Indigenous people belonging to these communities remain connected to their ancestral lands and this region.

**3.2.1 *The Piscataway.*** Rico Newman, Piscataway elder and MIHEA participant, relays some history of the Piscataway people:

The Piscataway-Kanawha (Piscataway) are the “People Who Live Where Waters Blend Below Rapids.” Prior to colonization, the Piscataway developed well-orchestrated lifeways that sustained them for centuries. The traditional economy was based on subsistence practices that provided for the needs of the community, and traditional technologies sustained local resources and ecosystems. During colonization, Piscataway men transitioned into fur trading, crop production, and hunting to obtain colonial goods, and Piscataway women took on domestic roles in colonist’s homes, when they found their traditional skills unneeded in a Eurocentric market economy. The Piscataway were pressured to use the English language when conducting affairs with the settler-colonial government and its people, which threatened the survivability of the language.

The social fabric and leadership roles of Piscataway communities were dismantled by encroachment of colonists and northern tribes who sought lucrative fur bearing animals, massive population loss due to wars, the assignment to designated land areas (reservations), and the dismissal of Clan Mothers and village leaders. Colonization interrupted the Piscataway's traditional seasonal migrations from permanent villages located along major waterways to their winter encampments. Upon returning to their established villages in the spring, they found colonial squatters who made claims, under rules set forth by the colonial government, that marking off and making "improvements" to Piscataway lands gave them title to village sites. The displacement of the Piscataway from their traditional lands and waterways continues to deny them access to resources required to maintain their traditions and subsistence.

In 1700, after signing a treaty of friendship and amity with the colonial regime, the Tayac (hereditary chief), along with many Piscataway tribal members left their homelands. Many remained, and others later returned to find their lands usurped. They faced threats of violence when asserting claims to their homelands but have proven to be resilient. They reframed their lives as tenant farmers/sharecroppers, and a few became landowners of small farms. Despite ongoing exclusion and erasure from most public discourse, histories, and education, the "People Who Live Where Water Blends Below the Rapids," have sustained their identities and are tenacious in restoring their place in their homelands.

**3.2.2 *The Nanticoke***<sup>1</sup>. Kyle Harmon, member of the Nanticoke Indian Nation and MIHEA participant, shares some of the Nanticoke story:

The Nanticoke traditionally occupied the lands between the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. The word “Nanticoke” is derived from an Algonquian word “Nentego” meaning “People of the Tidewater.” The Delaware and Hudson River relations also referred to us as “Tiawco” and “Tawachguano” meaning bridge builders. This was a term used to signify our ability to build positive relationships through inclusiveness and sharing.

Nanticoke customs and practices were very similar to our neighboring Nations. One custom that stood out was the amount of respect given to the bones of our ancestors. Special ceremonies were held to honor those who transitioned into the spirit world. Bones of the dead were sacred and cherished. When one traveled into a new region, they would bring the bones of their ancestors with them and bury them in the new ground they inhabited.

The Nanticoke made treaties with the colonies of Maryland starting in 1668. Each treaty was broken, and the land that was deeded to the Nanticoke was encroached upon by colonists, forcing the Nanticoke to divide and relocate. Some went north along the Susquehanna River and lived among the Haudenosaunee people. Others moved west to join other Nations in Oklahoma and Ohio. Some remained on their

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<sup>1</sup> We want to acknowledge the other Indigenous communities native to what is now Maryland who were displaced or extinguished by colonization. They include the: Annemessex, Assateague, Choptank, Delaware, Doeg, Massawomeck, Mattapanient, Matapeake, Mattawomen, Nacotchtank, Ozinie, Pamunkey, Patuxent, Pocomoke, Shawnee, Susquehannock, Tockwogh, Transquaking, and Yoacomaco, as well as the Accohonnack, who remain in Maryland, but are not current participants of MIHEA.

traditional homelands and created their own blended community of other displaced Indigenous people of the Delmarva Peninsula. This community lived alongside the colonists and adapted to their newly imposed way of life. They purchased land, built their own schools, and created a new community centered around their principles. In 1881, they created the Incorporated Body that was recognized by the state of Delaware, and “in 1921, the Nanticoke Indian Association was established and granted nonprofit status” (The Nanticoke Indian Tribe, 2011). The Nanticoke experienced segregation and many attended the Haskell Indian Boarding School in Lawrence, Kansas. Today, Nanticoke families do not live on reservations. They own property much like their non-Indigenous neighbors and attend non-Indigenous public schools and institutions.

**3.2.3 *The Lumbee.*** Sherry Ayers, member of the Lumbee and Coharie Tribes of North Carolina and MIHEA participant, shares some of the history of the Lumbee:

The Lumbee “are the amalgamation of Siouan, Algonquian, and Iroquoian speaking tribes” (Lumbee tribe, 2021) whose name is associated with the Lumbee River. Although “Pembroke, North Carolina is the economic, cultural, and political center of the tribe” (Lumbee tribe, 2021), a large population of Lumbee have also been in Baltimore, Maryland for over a hundred years. They came en masse to Baltimore after World War II to find jobs, and today, roughly “2,000 Lumbee reside in Baltimore” (Garcia, 2020).

#### **3.2.4 *Research Setting: The IHE.***

The IHE resides on the unceded ancestral lands of the Piscataway. In 1859, it was established as an Agricultural College through the purchase of a slave plantation (University of Maryland, 2021).

Three years later, the Morrill Act of 1862 authorized the seizure of nearly 11 million acres of land from nearly 250 Indigenous tribes, bands, and tribal communities to raise the endowment principle for 52 land grant institutions located across the United States (Lee & Ahtone, 2020). The IHE involved in this study is one of those land grant institutions.

Although the IHE has identified diversity, equity, and inclusion goals and has an Office of Diversity and Inclusion to achieve them, there is little evidence that the institution has historically considered Maryland's Indigenous people or their inclusion in its efforts. Recent shifts in the IHE toward Indigenous acknowledgement and inclusion have begun with the inauguration of a new IHE President. The new IHE President initiated a campus onboarding system that introduces incoming campus community members to the IHE's leadership, history, commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and shared traditions (Office of Diversity and Inclusion, 2021). The initiative includes an institutional level land acknowledgement recognizing the Piscataway as the original stewards of the IHE lands and is related to the development of a Heritage Community composed of two residence halls and a dining hall. On November 1, 2021, the 1st day of Maryland's Native American Heritage Month, the IHE President dedicated the dining hall to honor the Piscataway. The dining hall's name, *Yahentimitsi* (a place to go to eat), land blessing, and ceremony were orchestrated through IHE and MCIA collaborations, as well as MIHEA networking. In alignment with these initiatives, the IHE President recently announced the development of five new cultural centers, including one specifically designed for Indigenous students.

The IHE has a series of sustainability goals to become a net-carbon neutral campus. Through campus-wide implementations of interdisciplinary sustainability education and innovation initiatives, the institution hopes to become a "living laboratory" that serves as a model of sustainability in higher education. As with many IHEs, there are mismatches between institutional

practices and the SDGs. One important disconnect is the lack of Indigenous/IHE collaboration to meet the IHE's sustainability goals which are necessary to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### ***3.3 Research Participants***

The research participants of this study belong to the Maryland Indigenous and Higher Education Alliance (MIHEA) which was cocreated by Indigenous community leaders and IHE faculty. MIHEA was created and is sustained by a number of IHE and Indigenous networks and proactive networking. Although she is a representative of the IHE, Angela has children who are members of the Nanticoke Indian Nation and has had close ties with Nanticoke community members since she was a young child. As a doctoral student, she pursued individual research efforts to bring Nanticoke people and their perspectives into the IHE, including in 2017, when she met with the Nanticoke tribal council to discuss the IHE's participation in a Solar Decathlon competition. This meeting connected her with Kyle, who was a Nanticoke tribal council member at the time. Kyle lived in Maryland and had Indigenous networks in Maryland. As a result of their combined networking, the Administrative Director of the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs (MCIA) and Nanticoke tribal leaders participated in the IHE's 2017 Solar Decathlon Competition as consultants (U.S. Department of Energy, 2021).

About a year later, Jing Lin and Angela (both IHE faculty) met on campus to discuss an Ecological Ethics and Education course which included Indigenous perspectives on sustainability. After multiple conversations, they applied for and received two small grants to fund an Earth Day Indigenous Panel Event. This event gave IHE staff, faculty, and students the opportunity to broaden Indigenous/IHE networks and develop an understanding of current issues faced by

Maryland's Indigenous people. Many current MIHEA participants collaborated on this event. Over the past 15 months of ongoing collaborations, MIHEA participation has continued to broaden through individual and collective social networking that intersects with MCIA and Indigenous/IHE leadership.

For example, one of the panelists on the Indigenous People's Day panel was the Administrative Director of MCIA. After the event, the Administrative Director of MCIA invited Angela to give a "Pathways to Partnerships" presentation to Maryland's Indigenous communities at the MCIA 2020 Native American Heritage Month Kickoff. This invitation led her to meet with her department chair and college dean to discuss viable pathways to partnerships and potential barriers to collaboration. The college dean advised that MIHEA coordinate meetings with unit leadership across campus to discuss Indigenous issues pertinent to their roles and responsibilities. This guidance informed MIHEA's strategies for presenting Indigenous issues to stakeholders across the IHE.

By involving the college dean in the question of viable pathways and barriers to collaborations, this initial meeting moved Indigenous issues forward to other unit deans and administrative leadership across campus. MIHEA's simultaneous faculty/staff/student networking within the IHE and Indigenous networking through MCIA and tribal leadership disseminated information so broadly across these individual streams that they intersect at multiple points and levels, including the IHE's Office of the President and Maryland's Governor's Office, where policies can be challenged and created to support meaningful change.

### ***3.4. Data Collection and Analysis.***

This research is a self-study of MIHEA, a grassroots Indigenous/Higher Education collaborative.

PAR methods organically developed as the methods employed in this study. Data was collected using conversational methods (Kovach, 2010). Conversational data was captured during weekly, two-hour, research team meetings which occurred over a three-month period of time through verbatim notetaking. Between research meetings, research team members added written commentaries, questions, and comments to the conversational data. This commentary was addressed at the following two-hour team meetings to achieve clarity and consensus around the data and preliminary findings. Conclusive findings emerged from these iterative cycles of research team conversations, independent and collective review of conversational data, and consensus seeking.

In terms of data analysis, first, conversational data was used to identify key topics. The topics that emerged from our conversational methods were the impacts of colonization and colonial paradigms on Maryland's Indigenous communities; the importance of Indigenous perspectives in meeting the SDGs; barriers to Indigenous/IHE collaborations, and promising practices that support Indigenous/IHE collaborations and the achievement of the SDGs. The conversational data within each topic was then developed into narratives. Narratives were manually coded to identify themes within the key topics (Saldaña, 2013). Themes identified through thematic analysis of the narratives were also validated using NVivo software (QSR International, 2021)

#### **4. Research Results and Discussion**

***4.1 Impacts of Colonization and Colonial Paradigms on Indigenous Communities Must Be Acknowledged and Deconstructed.*** MIHEA participants concur that naming the atrocities and enduring impacts brought about by colonialism and capitalism is the first step toward demonstrating care and respect for Maryland's Indigenous communities. Maryland was ground

zero for colonization of the United States, which officially began in 1632, and Maryland's tribal histories are convoluted because of colonialism and its pervasive effects. As Tiara Thomas, member of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe and MIHEA participant, points out, "These complexities need to be acknowledged and deconstructed and not used as an excuse to disengage with Maryland's Indigenous communities."

Colonial paradigms have had detrimental impacts on maintaining Indigenous traditions:

Today, Maryland's Indigenous communities live predominantly urban lives. Access to traditional foods, participation in traditional methods of food production and preservation, and the relationships between the people and the land have been disrupted. From an urban Indigenous peoples' perspective, I did not have access to fresh vegetables and fruits on a regular basis. My diet consisted mainly of processed foods and fast-food restaurants. Most of us have no idea how our food ends up on our table (Kyle Harmon).

Capitalism has damaged traditional relationships between the land and the people. Through capitalism, all of nature is commodified and all of Earth's "resources" are considered in terms of finite consumptions, versus cyclical relationships involving stewardship and reciprocity. As Peter Brooks, Piscataway Conoy Affiliate and MIHEA participant, remarks:

Nature [in our current society] is used to manufacture money. Everything that is natural to us and everything from the Earth is somehow turned into an opportunity to make money. Money is even the tool of sustainability for this civilization, and so, it is incompatible with what we think of as sustainability, if we had a word for that in the first place. Money keeps us from loving one another as people. It is not

sustainable; it is the enemy of sustainability.

Maryland's Indigenous people experience ongoing trauma and dissonance as they struggle to maintain traditions and core values in the midst of colonialism and capitalism. As Peter Brooks shares: "There is a real sense of people not thriving because they lack role models or even a visible, viable path to be both traditional and capitalist." As Kyle Harmon states, communities able to maintain relationships with traditional homelands, "have seen those lands sold and dispersed with each passing generation, and families increasingly move to urban areas for employment. Communities who once solely relied on the resources that nature provided have succumbed to participating in the exploitation of those resources for profit." This misalignment of core values and traditions with colonial and capitalistic paradigms leads to disease such as Type II Diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity, mental health issues, and heart problems. It "has also led to a more sedentary lifestyle, which compounds our health crisis" (Kyle Harmon).

Maryland's educational systems reinforce colonial and capitalist ideologies. Our children predominantly, "learn knowledge in abstract terms and use their minds mostly-neglecting their hands, hearts and spirits, and nature is referred to as objects and things, with no life or intelligence" (Jing Lin). Maryland's K12 and IHE curricula are devoid of Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. Thus, Indigenous students in Maryland are limited to culturally relevant and restorative learning experiences (McCarty & Lee, 2014) through after school programs, and non-Indigenous students gain little to no exposure to non-Eurocentric perspectives. Even then, only 3 of the 18 public school districts in Maryland eligible for federal funding to support Indigenous students in such programs have pursued them. The exclusion of Indigenous people and perspectives in formal educational spaces limits future generations from access to alternative views on how-to live-in ways that align with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As Rico Newman argues, "If

we accept the premise that there is power in education, we must also accept that excluding education relevant to Indigenous peoples, can and has a known impact, not just on Indigenous people, but on every student and community.”

#### ***4.2 Indigenous Perspectives Are Critical to Meeting the SDGs***

Indigenous people understand that there is a way to live in harmony with our non-human relatives and to sustain life for all through diversifying what we consume, practicing restraint, and engaging in reciprocity with the land. Indigenous agricultural practices such as, “crop rotation, permaculture, aquaponics, hydroponics, forest gardens, and urban gardening techniques practiced for thousands of years are models that can help us reconnect with the Earth and our non-human relatives and teach others how to grow their own food, no matter the setting” (Kyle Harmon). When combined with the core value of “the honorable harvest,” (Kimmerer, 2021), these practices represent and reinforce symbiotic relationships between humans and the ecosystems that sustain them.

The Algonquin people and Eastern Woodland Tribes traditionally operated under the "Great Law of Peace" codified by Hiawatha. This law outlined social, political, and ceremonial practices which were based on the principle that all decisions must be made on behalf of the seventh generation to come. Sustainability, is not an Indigenous word, but the concepts that support sustainability are core values that are tacitly understood within the code of conduct of Indigenous communities:

That the dominant society’s current way of life is not sustainable simply proves our ancestors were correct, that one must be a part of nature and not above it or exploitative of it. The Seventh Generation Principle intensifies the bond of community, promotes stability, and provides concrete values with which each person can test his or her everyday actions. Although Indigenous people practice

ancient traditions, their culture is not frozen in the past. Their ability to adapt to dramatic change and survive on their own terms is historically proven, but they are equally focused on the security of future generations (Peter Brooks).

Indigenous MIHEA participants emphasize that Indigenous values are not capitalistic or based on consumerism but rooted in the interconnectedness of humans with the natural world. In contrast to colonial perspectives that present land as a commodity and our non-human relatives as resources for our consumption, Indigenous people view land as their identity, their connection to their ancestors, the home for their families and their non-human relatives, a healer, a teacher, and a sacred entity (Kimmerer, 2021). Matt Aruch, an IHE MIHEA participant who has worked extensively with Indigenous communities in Latin America, shares that the Mēbêngôkre-Kayapó of Brazil refer to money as pi'ôk kaprī which literally translates to “sad leaf.” This translation, “that money is really about sadness, having and not having, hoarding and not sharing is fundamental when considering our attainment of the SDGs” (Peter Brooks).

Alignment with natural cycles are core values of Indigenous people. This includes the cycle of reciprocity which involves generosity: “If I want to help someone, it's because my heart tells me so, not because there is money involved, and that is very important because we have a heart-oriented spirituality-not a head or book or pleasure-oriented mentality, or even one that dwells on suffering” (Peter Brooks). It also includes the optimization of resources to minimize waste. As Kyle Harmon shares:

In the natural world and Indigenous traditions, nothing is ever wasted. Today, our societies need to rethink how we conceptualize products and waste to function more like the natural world. Using materials that are natural and determining how by-

products can be used to serve other functions after their primary intended use are strategies for rethinking the concept of "waste" in ways that align with the cyclic patterns found in nature and Indigenous traditions.

#### ***4.3 Barriers to Successful Indigenous/IHE Collaborations***

Ignorance of the histories and current state of local Indigenous people is a tremendous barrier to successful Indigenous/IHE collaborations which could move us toward meeting the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals. As Rico Newman remarks, "IHEs generally don't appreciate getting a history lesson on Indigenous communities." Yet, "IHEs do not understand their complexity well enough to forge ethical collaborations broadly across their institutions" (Angela Stoltz). IHE's are also typically decentralized. This means Indigenous/IHE collaboration protocols, expectations, and cultural competency training must be taken up by each unit independently, with little to no background knowledge or connections to Indigenous communities.

There is "an intended, or unintended invisibility of Indigenous people on IHE campuses" (Rico Newman) which is fueled by colonial histories and infrastructures. IHEs don't typically understand the value of increasing the visibility and presence of Indigenous people across their institutions due to broad and institutional level colonial norms. This makes Indigenous people who do end up in IHEs feel like they don't belong. For many, "the addition of an Indigenous person or land acknowledgement to certain meetings and agendas to check it off on a diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility checklist feels like tokenism" (Kyle Harmon). For Indigenous leaders, this tokenism demonstrates a lack of IHE commitment to meaningful Indigenous representation and collaboration. For example, "while the IHE has a land acknowledgement, there is no urgent plan of action to address the gross underrepresentation of students (32) and tenure track faculty (1) who self-identify as Indigenous at a university with a population of roughly 40,000 people" (Kyle

Harmon).

The lack of Indigenous representation in IHEs perpetuates the acceptability of systemic ignorance about local Indigenous communities: “It is common for students in higher education to have no exposure to Indigenous people or their perspectives in their courses” (Jing Lin). It is also common for faculty and staff to have no understanding of or interactions with local Indigenous communities across campus units. Sadly, this includes units responsible for recruiting and retaining students and faculty. It also includes units responsible for training K12 teachers. Thus, “most teacher candidates graduate with no knowledge of the Indigenous K12 students they will be teaching, let alone how to teach Indigenous students in ways that are culturally responsive, relevant, and restorative” (Angela Stoltz). Beginning teachers bring this ignorance to their K12 curriculum and instruction when serving Indigenous children and families, thus “maintaining the cycle of invisibility and exclusion of Indigenous people and their perspectives, including those pertaining to sustainability perspectives and practices that support our collective attainment of the SDGs (Angela Stoltz).

Through MIHEA, we have found little IHE infrastructure that supports Indigenous, recruitment and retention, program development, or collaborations. Absent the institutionalization of such infrastructures and targeted capacity building, we have found Indigenous/IHE collaborations severely limited by volunteer efforts that carry little weight in terms of institutional level change. As volunteers, each of us is pulled toward our work and family obligations before we can take on our MIHEA efforts. In addition to the significant amount of time it takes to move our efforts forward, we have low power and little influence to create the significant changes needed to support and sustain Indigenous/IHE collaborations to achieve the SDGs. Thus, we have witnessed some unit specific MIHEA suggestions not getting taken up by those with the ability to respond to them. Due to a lack of institutional level policies and protocols for ethical Indigenous/IHE collaborations,

we have observed IHE representatives tend to have superficial discussions of Indigenous communities in their absence, superficial recognition and valuation of their communities and perspectives in their presence, and deficit/colonial narratives and language.

#### ***4.4 Promising Practices that Support Successful Indigenous/IHE Collaborations to Attain the SDGs***

The structure of MIHEA holds promise for successful Indigenous/IHE collaborations that support the attainment of the SDGs. MIHEA is equally composed of IHE and Indigenous participants from diverse tribal communities and IHE units and is balanced in nature. This balanced design has fostered an increased understanding of and appreciation for Maryland's Indigenous people and their perspectives among IHE representatives, as Jing Lin shares:

I sense a deep sense of humility and respect for people and nature when interacting with Indigenous people, which is what I believe to be the utmost required trait we need to have in our world. I learn about Maryland's Indigenous peoples' histories and present situations, including their educational experiences firsthand. This helps to make my teaching more effective and impactful. I have since centered Indigenous people and their perspectives in all of the courses I am teaching. I have had Kyle present to my class. My students are highly interested in Indigenous perspectives and engaged. I have also gained opportunities to research with wonderful people and to collaborate in publications. Through MIHEA participation, I have realized that we need to recover Indigenous ways of knowing and living, and we need to build intimate relationships with nature.

MIHEA's balanced design also supports broader input from Maryland's Indigenous communities and broad dissemination of our activities across them. MIHEA was formed and is governed by

Indigenous community members and IHE representatives as a collective.

MIHEA has empowered each of its participants. Through our collective transformative effort, we have taken that confidence into our individual professional and social spaces to push our collaborative efforts forward in order to create positive systemic level changes. We have found that infrastructures that support Indigenous/IHE collaborations and networking are critical to the success of such efforts. The Indigenous leadership role of the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs (MCIA) in the Governor's Office and the IHE leadership's shift toward institutional level efforts that necessitate and rely on MIHEA networking have been key to successful outcomes, such as the IHE adopting the name *Yahentimitsi* for its new dining hall. This name was put forward by three generations of Piscataway, as well as tribal leadership, and the IHE's Native American Student Union.

While the direct English translation of *Yahentimitsi* is simply, "A place to go to eat," the worldview expressed by the Algonquin word *Yahentimitsi* is much more reflective of Piscataway traditions IHEs need to consider and adopt in order to collectively attain the SDGs. Rico Newman offered the following to the IHE as it considered honoring the Piscataway through the dining hall naming:

Piscataway traditions assure that food is shared via "Equitable Distribution." During times of drought, insect infestation, and poor crop production or failure, food was held in storage by the Village Werowance and/or the Tayac who would ensure that all would have ample food, especially during non-growing seasons, when foraging and low supplies presented possible "food insecurity" for villages comprising the Piscataway Polity.

These Piscataway traditions align with the Seven Pillars of Food Sovereignty (Sherry Ayers).

Particularly, that the people's need for food is at the center of policies and food is the Earth's sacred gift to us all (MIHEA). The naming of the IHE dining hall captures the Piscataway worldview "that assures we will be fed when we are hungry and that we will have a place to eat in community" (Rico Newman). When providing the suggested dining hall name to IHE leadership, MIHEA the following additional considerations which were brought forward by Indigenous MIHEA participants and local tribal networks:

1. How does the university reflect the Piscataway commitment to food security and food sovereignty for the IHE and broader community?
2. How does the university reflect the Piscataway perspective that food is sacred and central to the sustainability of a community?
3. How does the university reflect the Piscataway tradition that teaches the sacredness and inherent value of the flora and fauna who provide the people with food/nourishment and the practice of actively working to sustain their ecosystems/reciprocity with the land?

MIHEA also suggested to the IHE that: "Honoring the Piscataway means that Piscataway traditions and ideas in and of themselves have value that supersedes our individual desires. In addition, honoring the Piscataway requires more than a name. It requires thoughtful considerations on how the university is aligned or misaligned with Piscataway traditions and how the university disrupts or sustains them." Through these efforts, MIHE has planted seeds of change which we hope will grow into a paradigm that aligns with *Etuaptmumk*, Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall, 2012). Two-Eyed Seeing, according to Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall, "refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing,

and learning to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all (Institute for Integrative Science and Health, 2021). This is the path to achieving the SDGs.

Over the past year, we have observed that the dissemination of our MIHEA efforts at IHE and publicly held MCIAs meetings has increased IHE interest in collaborating with Maryland's Indigenous communities and has led other state agencies to acknowledge their organizations' failure to include or attend to the needs of Maryland's Indigenous communities. Thus, MIHEA has helped to mobilize and plant seeds of change within our respective Indigenous/IHE communities and to cast stones that have ripple effects across the state.

## **6. Conclusion**

Our MIHEA findings reinforce that fulfilling the SDGs is a complex matter that requires “mutually reinforcing and beneficial” (Sanger, Pawling, and Soctomah, 2006, p. 327) Indigenous/IHE partnerships. In alignment with Smith's Indigenous Research Agenda Framework (2021), MIHEA's Indigenous/IHE networks and networking confirm that IHEs, “who learn and embody Indigenous understandings of relationality can aid in fostering authentic relationships with Native nations” (Stewart-Ambo & Yang, 2021, p. 35). Further, results of MIHEA networking strengthens the arguments that “we are the relationships that we hold and are part of” (Wilson, 2008, p. 80), and the embodiment of this perspective is critical to sustaining Indigenous/IHE relationships over time. MIHEA successes are rooted in our genuine respect, trust, and care for each member of our co-created community.

The cocreation of MIHEA and its shared leadership structure support collective movement toward Two-Eyed Seeing which fosters Indigenous healing and restoration. For such a path to manifest, acknowledgement of the long-term impacts of colonial paradigms on local Indigenous

communities is a necessary first step. Pathways to local Indigenous healing and restoration organically arise from discussions where Indigenous/IHE communities are equally represented, an ethic of care and trust has been established, and IHE representatives engage in deep listening with the intention of understanding how to collectively mobilize, support Indigenous healing and restoration, and cocreate mutually beneficial change.

Rossen (2006) argued that Indigenous collaborations must be “incorporated into broader activism that advocates friendship, mutual respect, communication, and cooperation with Native people” (p. 262). As our findings suggest, this path requires broad Indigenous and IHE representation, Indigenous and IHE leadership support, and a shared desire to mobilize both communities to serve common interests. Our self-study of MIHEA indicates that such structures and mobilization can lead to transformative changes that serve our collective attainment of the SDGs. While our self-study of MIHEA is locally contextualized, our findings align well with research across a variety of differing contexts. Thus, while our self-study is limited by its scale and study design, we argue that our findings have broad applicability for Indigenous/IHE collaborative efforts to meet the SDGs.

### **Future Prospects**

MIHEA efforts are ongoing, and we continue to push for changes that center Maryland’s Indigenous people and their perspectives within the IHE and across the state. We are currently supporting the IHE’s efforts to increase Piscataway and Indigenous student visibility and sense of belonging on campus by participating in the planning of Yahentimitsi and the Indigenous Student Cultural Center. In the future, we plan to develop Indigenous/IHE collaboration protocols to reduce the risk of furthering harm to Indigenous communities and undermining Indigenous/IHE

collaboration efforts. We will continue advocating for an Indigenous/IHE collaborative unit within the IHE that is modeled after MIHEA and for Indigenous/IHE leadership support for such a unit to ensure collaborations can be sustained over time. Finally, we will continue to advocate for broad Indigenous student, staff, and faculty representation across the IHE. This will include pushing for IHE instructor and staff trainings on local Indigenous histories and communities by local Indigenous people and the integration of that information into IHE curricula, programs of study (such as educator preparation programs), and unit policies (such as the office of admissions). Finally, we will continue to collaborate with other state agencies, such as the Maryland Department of Education to support Maryland's K12 school districts and educators' ability to incorporate culturally responsive, relevant, and restorative materials and instruction into their programs. These efforts will continue our effort to promote, "the appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" (SDG4.7, United Nations, 2015, p.19).

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