

**APEC
Covid-19
Indigenous and
Diverse Women-Led
MSME Responses**



**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**

Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy

Mihi – Acknowledgments

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Ki a koutou katoa, ngā rangatira tapairu o te motu, o te ao, tihei mauri ora!

—

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Designer: Spencer Levine

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We give our thanks to the incredible wāhine (Indigenous women) who shared their wisdom, challenges, successes and hopes for themselves, their families, communities and businesses. We appreciate the courage, optimism, innovation and relentlessness that it takes to lead economic, social, environmental and cultural development for our peoples.



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Background

For over two decades, APEC has been working to advance women's economic integration in the region. In 2011, APEC Leaders welcomed the 'San Francisco Declaration on Women and the Economy' that encouraged economies to take concrete actions to realise the full potential of women. APEC's work has focused on the integration and empowerment of women, by enhancing their access to:

- capital and assets
- markets
- skills and capacity building
- leadership opportunities, voice and agency
- and access to innovation and technology.

However, women of diverse backgrounds continue to face multiple and disproportionate barriers to economic empowerment compared to men. In 2019, 'Women, SMEs and Inclusive Growth'¹ was identified as a priority to give new momentum to efforts through the 'La Serena Roadmap'.

The 'Roadmap' seeks to encourage action in key areas, including:

- Empowering women through access to capital and markets
- Promote and facilitate cooperation in the public and private sector to help ensure that women, including women of diverse backgrounds, and women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), can access capital and assets, in both local and international markets.
- Enhance women-owned and women-led MSMEs' ability to participate in global value chains.
- Provide capacity building activities and opportunities for networking, mentoring, and digital skills-building, among other core skills, to increase women's business competencies and encourage their participation in the digital economy and innovation.
- Exchange experiences and best practices that can effectively increase the participation of women in local, regional, and global markets.

1. Small and Medium Enterprises

Project Overview

Sitting within the 'La Serena Roadmap' and with a focus on Covid-19 recovery strategies, this APEC project looks at ways member economies can build capacity to support the recovery and participation of Indigenous and diverse women-led MSMEs in the Asia-Pacific region.

The project shares the stories of nine Indigenous, women-led MSMEs and their experiences under Covid-19.

Interviews with these business leaders sought to understand:

- How and why Indigenous women establish their businesses?
- What defines their business as Indigenous? How their business operates?
- How Covid-19 impacted their business and how they have responded?
- What helps and hinders Indigenous women in business?
- What additional support would help grow their business?
- What advice they have for other Indigenous women?

Case Study Participants

Carola Barria

El Fogon

Chile

Olinda Silvano

Shipibo artist

Peru

Annette Sete

**Maku Gifts and
Lava Girl Fashion**

Papua New Guinea



Gretta Carney

Hapī

New Zealand

Maire Kipa

**Kahukura Māori
Healing**

New Zealand

Heather Te Au

Skipworth

Iron Māori

New Zealand

Marie Delorme

The Imagination Group

Canada

Denyse Nadon

Bear Vision Inc

Canada

Victoria LaBillois

Wejipeg Excavation Inc

Canada

Emerging Themes

What is an Indigenous business?

It is clear that there is a continuum of what being an 'Indigenous business' means.

Most had a strong focus on lived values with cultural knowledge and practice often built into their business model. Similar themes emerged through conversation with these business women:

- The importance of Indigenous employment and enterprise to thriving communities.
- The strength and skills that were drawn from networks, collectives, and solidarity with other Indigenous women.
- The multiple roles they performed – as leaders in their businesses, their communities and tribal organisations.
The centrality of family and community to their endeavours.

Minimal start-up support

Very few businesses could identify any support that they had accessed in the start-up phases and most reflected that they had to "go it alone".

Many remain 'informal' businesses, which means that some benefits of having a business cannot be accessed, e.g. financial support.

Ongoing technological support, to promote their goods and services, is a common theme for many women. This ranges from selling goods online, connecting communities, establishing websites and running online training and development.

Underestimation of the business's value

Participation in the case study allowed the business owners to reflect on the value of their business, not only for themselves, but for their families and communities. Generally, women under-estimated the importance of what they do and who they do it for.

A number of the business owners shared issues to do with intellectual property and sharing of their knowledge.

Strategic and operational tension

Most of the business owners recognised that they spend too much time working 'in' the business and not enough time working 'on' it (financial management, business development, planning, understanding future trends), and Covid-19 seems to have amplified this.

Covid-19 responses did not hit the mark

Government Covid-19 welfare responses and business support were generally difficult to access:

- Businesses weren't eligible or the process was overly bureaucratic.
- Support that was accessed didn't meet the business's need or only met it for a short period of time.
- A number of the businesses risk going out of business due to the impact of Covid-19.

The changing regulatory environment, (as a result of Covid-19), was a challenge for business owners and limited support forced them into finding new ways of operating.

What APEC Member Economies Can Do

The experiences and wisdom shared by the women who participated in this project, highlighted ways that member economies can further support Indigenous women-led MSMEs.

We recommend the following:

- The development of strategies and policies that recognise the value/s of Indigenous businesses and enterprises, including the social benefits and sustained cultural identities. Understanding and recognising the diversity of business entities – formal and informal.
- The provision of business advice and support for Indigenous women and Indigenous women's networks.
- The provision of technology training and development.
- The provision of start-up funding and development support for Indigenous women.
- Offering targeted support for women-led Indigenous small businesses.
- Develop opportunities that support Indigenous enterprise networking across APEC economies.



Carola Barria
El Fogon
Chile

About El Fogon

Dalcahue is a port city on the island of Chiloe, off the coast of southern Chile. Fishing has been part of the local economy for centuries, but the increased allocation of quota to large fishing companies is impacting the livelihoods of the artisanal, traditional, fishermen. Carola Barria's family, of Mapuche Huilliche descent, have fished the waters around Chiloe for generations, but in recent times have had to adapt their practice to remain viable.

In 2020, Carola and her family opened El Fogon, a restaurant run by them and supplied by their fishing and seafood business. They saw it as an opportunity to:

- add value to their existing business;
- employ family;
- and serve the local tourist market both with seafood and tours of their island.

In processing their catch for the restaurant they have also discovered markets for their higher value product.



Carmen Nancuante, from the sector of Calen, Dalcahue, Chile

Where did the idea for El Fogon come from?

The name 'Fogon' comes from the concept 'kun', which means refuge or a place of protection – especially to seafarers in stormy conditions. The Barria family wanted their restaurant to be a place of protection, refuge and comradery for their guests.

Carola and the women in her family have been involved in the fishing industry for generations. After serving food to tourists in the summer months, the Barria family decided to build the business and opened the restaurant, El Fogon. They were unaware of many of the requirements necessary for opening the restaurant when they began, and retrospectively gained the permits and licenses to be compliant.

Native women in business

Carola identifies as Native, rather than Indigenous.

Without much knowledge of how to establish a business, Carola faced challenges. Regulations are applied to all businesses – whether they are large corporations or women in MMSEs – and they are often difficult to navigate.

Despite this, Carola notes that positive changes for women have an empowering effect. There is increased participation of women in politics as well as local and Chile-wide business networks. On Chiloe, they think of themselves as a network where every point is important, especially across the new tourism niche developing on the island. They practice solidarity with other women, sharing their experience as political leaders and business owners.

Impact of Covid-19

It was difficult to imagine how Covid-19 could affect their community and life on Chiloe. However, as a business that relies on tourism, the global pandemic had an almost immediate effect on trade. They closed the restaurant in 2020 and have been forced into other employment to support their families.

Tourists have begun to venture to Chiloe again and the Barria family are offering boat tours of their island to the returning visitors. They are planning on reopening El Fogon in September 2022, and are looking forward to working as a family again in the business they love.



Mirna Cheuqueman from the sector of Calen, Dalcahue, Chile

Challenges

As a Native woman in business, Carola finds there is a gap between government policies and the reality in their territories. There is very little funding or support for new small businesses. Most of the funding seems to be allocated to bigger, established businesses, leaving them feeling disadvantaged. She reflects that better access to the technical and legal knowledge and support for small business start-ups would be a great help.

Carola feels that Native women are beginning to be recognised, seen and heard in an industry that has traditionally been male dominated. The fishing industry tends to have small profit margins and the quotas are generally allocated for a fixed term to older men. Diversifying into products and services that complement the family's fishing business has been profitable. It has provided alternative income streams for the boat and created jobs for others in the family, especially women.

The Future

Carola is committed to reopening El Fogon restaurant, attracting tourists to the island and creating employment opportunities for the whole family. She is hopeful they will be able to engage in a more meaningful way with the new government and that changes to the regulatory framework will better serve the needs of Native business-people in Chiloe.



Carola Barria and family
owners El Fogon Restaurant and
fishing businesses

Tribal affiliations
Mapuche Huilliche (south of Chile)

Sectors
hospitality, fishing, tourism

Olinda Silvano
Shipibo artist
Peru

About Olinda

Olinda Silvano lives in the Cantagallo, a Shipibo-Konibo community in central Lima. Originally from the Ucayali region of the Amazon, Olinda moved from her community 22 years ago to explore opportunities in Lima, Peru's capital city.

Olinda began selling her traditional Shipibo-Konibo handcrafts on the streets of Lima – necklaces, paintings and embroidery work. This was a difficult way to make a living and led her to enrolling in a tourism and marketing course at University. Olinda recognised that wider exposure of Shipibo arts would promote interest and generate sales.

Olinda and other women from her community formed a collective – Las Madres Artesanas (The Artistic Mothers) to support each other and work to promote their arts and culture. Olinda has encouraged women in her community to be proud of their traditional knowledge and to tell their own stories through their work.



Growing a women's collective

Shipibo communities are defined by the arts – it is what they know and how they express themselves. There are 243 Shipibo families in Cantagallo. Las Madres Artesanas make art, paint, sing and embroider. They make jewellery for different markets in the city, and they promote their art in restaurants and other places that attract tourists.

Although they want to formalize their business, they haven't done so yet.

Olinda, a leader of the Shipibo community in Cantagallo, is also a housing advocate for her community. She divides her time between making and selling art, and improving the housing situation of their community. "Housing is important, it is where our kids sleep and study and where we can work."

Impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 has impacted the Shipibo community of Cantagallo. 80% of their community have contracted the illness and five people have died. Traditional medicines, herbs and tinctures are used by the Shipibo community to treat illness and maintain good health and the wellbeing. Strict lockdowns were stressful for the Cantagallo residents

as they were required to stay within their community at all times, guarded by the police and military. Being confined meant that Cantagallo had no access to food, running water or sanitation.

Let's make art ...

During the lockdown, Olinda encouraged the women to work rather than watch TV coverage of Covid-19. Olinda believed that seeing the rates of disease and death from Covid-19 created fear amongst the community, and working became therapeutic for the women during this time. Las Madres Artesanas negotiated with the city council who provided them with materials to make face masks. As soon as lockdown was over they organised themselves and went out to sell the masks.

Following this, they entered a contest in Madrid, Spain, which they won. They used their winnings to buy supplies to make 850 face masks. This enabled them to provide their children with materials to participate in online classes. This really motivated and uplifted the community and gave them a sense of relief after all the difficulties endured during Covid-19.

"Covid-19 brought both bad things and also good things," Olinda reflects.



The future

Olinda inspires others, “Art is going to change your life. Art is going to open your pathway. Art is going to take you very far. I don’t have money, but I have travelled everywhere. I’m a humble people person, and I am full of knowledge and wisdom and aptitude and courage. I am strong.”

Las Madres Artesanas are currently focussing on an exhibition with ten other women working as muralists in Mexico and Peru. Las Madres will exhibit a Shipibo show in Lima, in August, expressing how they are maintaining their identity through their work.

Olinda’s dream is for Las Madres to be able to support their families and provide education for their kids – through school and then to study something professional. Las Madres Artesanas want to travel internationally to offer workshops, participate in community art projects, and share their music and medicines.

Indigenous women in business

Olinda has overcome many challenges, the first being the language barrier – learning Spanish has allowed her to participate more widely in the city. Olinda feels she has an internal drive to make things happen, she shares her knowledge and painting process both locally and internationally.

Embracing technology has enabled Las Madres Artesanas to establish an online profile which showcases their community and arts to a much wider audience. It has also helped with orders and sales of their products. Olinda uses Zoom to teach some of her workshops and further promote Shipibo arts and the work of Las Madres Artesanas.

Her request to government is for more support to women and art in all its forms, and for getting their work to different markets. As well, she feels that assistance in developing technological capabilities within their collective is important. Olinda believes it will allow them to secure their futures – economically and socially – and give them reach into the world as the living culture, “cultura viva”, they are.

Inspiring other Indigenous women

Olinda’s story represents community, family, courage, resilience, strength, collectivism and activism through Indigenous Shipibo-Konibo identity and arts.

“For other Indigenous women of the world, I will say to all women, never give up. Because women have a lot of knowledge, even if you don’t have studies, there is value in what you have learned from being a kid. From your ancestors, from your grandmothers, from your mom. Never let yourself feel as if you’re unworthy. Never let yourself fail. You can learn everything along the way. There is no age to learn. Just learn. Never be ashamed of your roots. Be proud of your roots and where you are from.”



Olinda Silvano
Shipibo artist

Tribal affiliations
Shipibo-Konibo

Sectors
art, handcraft, painting,
community development



Annette Sete
Maku Gifts and
Lava Girl Fashion
Papua New Guinea

“If you have never wanted to quit your business, you have not really started yet. This journey is long, with many ups and downs. Most times, it requires you to be brave. Bravery is being scared, knowing it could all fail but doing it anyways, trusting in the journey, believing in yourself but most importantly having a plan to succeed.”

Annette Sete

Starting the business

The difficulty in finding authentic Papua New Guinea-made gifts prompted Annette Sete to create her own fashion, home decor and jewellery lines. She established Maku Gifts, seven years ago and runs her businesses from Kokopo, the capital of East New Britain province.

Annette is from Morobe province and is married with two children. She has a background in the creative sector, corporate communications, business management, strategic marketing and sales, media and public relations – skills she has harnessed to strengthen her businesses.





Maku Gifts, Lava Girl, Xplosion

Annette says, “We’re trying to use what we can find within the environment to create jewellery, home decorating pieces, things like small gift items for the Papua New Guinea (PNG) market but also for the international market. The biggest part of our business is fabric designs and garments with local motifs and stuff like that, so pretty much anything and everything PNG.”

Annette imports fabric as there are no local, (or Pacific), manufacturers. “Almost every country is importing and we do that as well. But we try as much as possible to have a lot of PNG inspired themes in the fabric, as well as garments and other accessories.”

Annette currently employs 53 people, sewing her clothing and working in studios and workshops making her home decor and jewellery. About 85% of her workers are women.

Her current brands are Xplosion, Lavagirl Ltd and Maku Gifts. She and her businesses are a positive inspiration for other women in business.



Maku and Lava Girl have become household brands across PNG. Supplementing their imported fabric, they buy local raw materials, fibre and shells to make earrings, wind chimes, pillows, frames, baskets, clothing for men and women, and wearable art that customers use and treasure. Maku Gifts have four stores in PNG and are looking to expand across the Pacific region, including into the New Zealand market where Annette believes there would be huge interest in her goods.

“Our jewellery is made by men and many people think that it’s females that make earrings, but we have a workshop full of men making something nice for women to wear.”

E-commerce – a work in progress

Annette previously established accounts in Australia to resolve some of the issues associated with online shopping and to reach non-domestic markets. However, she has recently transferred back to PNG with a focus on physical stores for her local markets and customers. Moving to e-commerce has been relegated as a lower priority due to:

- the low appetite of locals for online shopping
- the time required online to respond to local purchasing enquiries that often don’t result in a sale and banks being able to transfer e-payments, payment gateways, across PNG.

She is hopeful that over time e-commerce will become more viable and believes this will grow as an accepted retail tool in the region over the next two years.

Annette has also been studying fashion and building networks and relationships in Fiji as a foundation for expansion once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. She is considering ways to expand her business to a wider international market, while retaining the local feel of her products.

Impact of Covid-19

“It’s really awkward trying to get above the Covid-19 impact and all the challenges.”

Covid-19 has impacted Annette’s existing reach into Australia and the broader Pacific region. Annette views this in a positive light, with her focus becoming the expansion of the PNG market where she is well supported by locals.

Fortunately, prior to Covid-19, they had moved to import goods directly, rather than through an intermediary. Two containers landed during the two month lockdown, which meant that goods were available and customers were keen to shop when restrictions were lifted. Subsequently, they employed another 30 people to help with production, sewing and sales.

However, continued delays with international freight, distribution and production, along with the diminished tourist market, have had ongoing impacts on the business and sales.

Covid-19 has forced Annette to use her creativity and entrepreneurial skills to diversify her business. She has established a modelling agency and is building her brand through social media, sponsorships and

endorsements for domestic travel and tourism. Her domestic tour groups began in February 2022, leveraging her brands and promoting regional travel.

Government support during Covid-19

Annette has been able to access a Covid-19 recovery low interest twelve month loan of 50,000 kina (approximately \$20,000 NZD) to fit out and establish her stores. The loan was accessed through usual bank application processes, with the line of credit made available from government funding.

Business Link Pacific (BLP) has helped Annette with subsidised access to an accountant to help with her books, taxes and financial statements. She reflects that often when you are in business you focus on the production and sales of goods, rather than on the overall business development and needs.

BLP support has helped her negotiate registering her business as a company. She is hopeful that BLP will also support her with plans for marketing and brand promotion across the region and assist with her e-commerce plans.



Intellectual property, cultural rights and creativity

Maku and Lava Girl designs are inspired by local flora and fauna, Indigenous motifs and celebratory designs. They use modern materials and Indigenous design inspiration to ensure their goods are appropriate, durable and wearable. Being Indigenous, they are mindful of how they incorporate patterns and designs in their work. Consultation with local communities, elders and tribes is an important part of the process and they acknowledge that designs are often collectively owned and may have sacred meanings. Annette is considering using more generic, rather than traditional designs in her work.

Annette and other local, Indigenous businesses have been taking legal action against alleged copyright infringement by foreign multinational manufacturers, mass producing and copying their designs and those that belong to local tribes. This has been supported by a legal team working pro-bono to help protect the designs, income and ongoing viability of small Indigenous businesses.

Annette reflects that better guidelines for the creative sector around the use and protection of Indigenous, collectively owned intellectual property would be useful.

A business connected to and supporting families and communities

“It weighs heavily on me as a business owner that now has to feed not only my family at home but I have 53 other families that I need to feed. It’s not so much a burden, but it is a motivation because you know we need to raise this amount, we need to pay these people next week, we need to get our sales going, so I find a lot of motivation in just getting out there and getting things done and pushing sales, because I have a lot more people to feed now.”

Maku Gifts has provided casual work to family members of their staff to help with beading, printing, making jewellery, collecting natural resources, painting and decorating resources. This has provided local families with additional income. They have had seven students learning about and helping with the business, some of whom continue to work part time and study full time. Annette has helped with school fees as part of giving back to her community.

Advice for other Indigenous women

“I am big on advisors, I have several mentors in my network that I bounce ideas with, every other day if I need to.”

Annette believes that Indigenous women should not feel the need to gain approval from men in their families to follow their dreams of going into business. She noted that banking and loan applications that require spousal details (as part of loan security) are outdated. Annette remarked that some banks officially promote ‘women in business’ without having products that are specifically designed to support women in business. Sharing inspirational stories, building relationships and networks and sharing ideas are important to her.

Annette would love to promote her business and other Indigenous businesses from PNG across the Pacific and in New Zealand. She sees huge benefit in being part of a Pacific Trade Delegation, sharing ideas, skills, goods and services and looking at how our member economies can better support one another in business, particularly Indigenous women.



Annette Sete
owner of Maku Gifts and Lava Girl Fashion

Sectors
fashion, jewellery and home decor



Gretta Carney
Hapī
New Zealand

About Hapī

*He kai he rongoā, he rongoā he kai –
Food is medicine, medicine is food*

*Hapī is a way of living that
celebrates diversity in eating styles
and we believe everything you eat
should taste and feel delicious. We
are a wāhine driven business that
works hard to support our whānau,
our community and our whenua.*

The values that underpin Hapī
are mauri, māramatanga,
whānaungatanga manaakitanga
and wairuatanga.

With a supportive community
around her, Gretta Carney started
the business, Hapī, more than five
years ago with just \$20,000. It was
important to Gretta to spend time
developing the kaupapa and clearly
defining Hapī as a Māori business
– Hapī serves those ideals, those
kaupapa.

Hapī has a flagship cafe, a
production facility where they
produce high integrity food
and māra kai, which supply the
production kitchen.



Where did the idea come from?

Gretta had been working as a natural health practitioner and she had young children. She had spent quite a bit of time training and then had spent a year in clinical practice. Gretta quickly realised that it was going to be hard to earn a living from it, so she turned to working with food as medicine.

At its inception, Hapī was a health practice and Gretta was a health practitioner. The person she set the business up with was also a health practitioner and they put their names on the door with their credentials behind them.

Hapī opened selling all organic and all gluten free, dairy free, refined sugar free kai, creating a space where really healthy food for people on limited diets or for people who wanted to change their diets could come in and feel like they could eat everything.

Reflecting on her opening, which was two weeks before Christmas, Gretta says, “I think that if I had known what I was getting myself into, I would never have done it because it’s just been so much relentless work.”

Mana wāhine

There had always been men involved at the margins with Hapī, however Gretta says, “about a year ago I kind of just finally went, you know what, this is actually a wāhine [women] led business.” In Gretta’s experience, “women get on and do the job. It is such a tight business and women were the ones who served the kaupapa. In terms of getting the work done, it was the women.”

Impact of Covid-19

From Gretta’s perspective, “Covid-19 could have been really positive for our business because we have a lot to offer in this environment.” Hapī has nutrient dense food, cleansing packs, organic juices, and home care packs of bone broth.

Gretta says, “in December [2021], I don’t even know how the business ran itself because all I was doing was just trying to jump through hurdle after hurdle after hurdle of regulatory stuff that was just coming at you faster than you could manage it.”

Over summer 2021/22 there were around 13 full- and part-time employees, however the workforce is shrinking. One thing that worked in Gretta’s favour over this period was her careful financial management. She had put money aside which ensured Hapī didn’t operate outside its means.

Anticipating lockdowns, Gretta put the whole cafe online and then as the mandate process came into place, Hapī was able to promote their products to people who were no longer allowed to come in person to the café. Gretta has also been working with a marketing expert, redesigning her website and creating an online grocery range.

In terms of Government support for her business, Gretta says that there was good financial support in the initial lockdown. But there has been very little support to understand new regulations and requirements, and no financial support to compensate for the on-going restrictions to trade.

Given the increasingly difficult environment, Gretta feels that she needs to be adding everything up every day and every week, and then letting the team know what they need to turn over each day. They are at the point now where it’s critical. Gretta says, “we have to be really tight now.”





The future

During the first Covid-19 lockdown, Gretta realised that Hapī is very good at employing young people – bringing them in and helping them emerge super confident, and with a sense of their own self-worth. They applied for cadetship funding and secured funds to upskill their rangatahi, which is also a way of safeguarding an income stream for training and upskilling.



The last two years have also made Gretta appreciate the importance of diversifying the way Hapī does business, including having one flagship product that promotes the kaupapa.



Gretta has also started testing their offering, services and rosters, to ensure she can run a minimum viable model if needed, including opening the doors with just two staff on Waitangi Day.

Gretta says, “we really just need to be more locally focused and working with the community and upscaling ourselves to be self-reliant.”

Tribal affiliations

Te Ātihaunui a Pāpārangī

Sectors

food and beverage, health, education and training



Maire Kipa Kahukura Māori Healing New Zealand

*Whakapai te whenua, whakapai
te whānau – heal the land and you
heal families*

About Kahukura

Kahukura Māori Healing Partnership is the business initiative of sister and brother Maire and Aperahama Kipa.

Maire says, “Our vision is to push back on the negative impacts of urbanisation, and work to restore and strengthen the mauri of local waterways. If we heal the land, we heal the people, physically, mentally, and spiritually. We were recipients of a seeding grant from Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu* the South Island Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency.”

Te Ao Tūroa (our natural world) provides spaces and places for our spiritual, physical, and mental health and wellbeing. Our aims are to help people reconnect at whānau planting days, studying and learning the art of rongoā Māori healing. Kahukura is a whānau-led, whānau centred initiative sharing local and traditional knowledge.

Kahukura believes that when whānau know their local whenua, ngahere, puna and awa they can sustain mahinga kai practices, nature based healing and ancestral connection. These activities all serve to strengthen whānau and community resilience.

*<https://www.teputahitanga.org>





Where did the idea for Kahukura come from?

Maire and her whānau follow family traditions of healing people and land. Their Aunty Heeni was a traditional Māori healer who worked from her own clinic in the 1980s. It was her dream that Māori land and reserves would be places where Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous medicine, and healing could be practised. Maire was a founding trustee of Aunty Heeni's clinic, and her vision to source and share rongoā across Aotearoa stems from time spent with her aunt and other traditional healers.

Kahukura was established in 2019 and Maire used personal savings to support the business for the first five months. Maire and Aperahama have combined their family skills and knowledge to build a business, and make a living. They have also connected with Māori artists and weavers to share their knowledge and skills.

They took a three-year lease on premises in 2020 and a nine-month grant from Te Pūtahitanga helped establish the clinic and connect the practice with environmental work. For 30 hours a week they tend a plantation of Māori medicinal plants they have established on a nearby

reserve. In line with their kaupapa of sharing their knowledge, Kahukura has run two community wānanga¹⁵ one supporting Matariki and the other Rongoā.

This is an Indigenous way of existing and aligns with their small business values.

Mana wāhine

Maire looks to all her female ancestors for inspiration as mana wāhine, powerful women.

Kahukura's vision is to grow knowledge and access to rongoā and for whānau to return to the ways of exercising kaitiakitanga of the natural world. Maire's mother, Terehia, taught her that, "We need to focus on healing the people and their ancestral connections with the land."

Impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 gave Maire the courage and commitment to leave her employment, establish Kahukura full time and take a risk. She has had experience and support from whānau and others to be able to carry them through the rocky start of Kahukura.

Covid-19 has seen a significant loss in income. Prior to the last lockdown, they had two practitioners doing up to 20 sessions a week – now there are only three or four clients a day. The ongoing impacts of Covid-19 variants have disrupted the clinic for in-person services and there is more hesitancy for new patients enrolling.

Kahukura have moved into environmental projects and reduced from five to three days for the clinic. Kahukura are wanting to focus on building up their rongoā dispensary at the clinic and selling online.

Kahukura has adopted a collective approach whereby other practitioners can use clinic facilities for a set fee. Off-site clinics have also been helpful in providing alternative ways of delivering their services.

Growing the business

A focus for Kahukura will be accessing funding from tribal and government agencies to help develop a business plan and website. Alongside this, Maire believes it is critical that they become accredited as a provider of health services. This will mean their clients can access their services at subsidised rates.

Some support in digital or e-commerce would be useful as Kahukura moves into the next phase of development. Maire is aware that administrative assistance, financial planning and marketing support is also important for the business as it grows.

Another idea is a travelling clinic, or collectivising a consulting practice in each of their rohe across Te Waipounamu (the South Island).

Indigenous women in business

Maire reflects that Māori women do manaakitanga really well for others and less well for themselves. Māori women often have multiple roles in their family and communities, and Maire sees a Māori women's business network as a good way to provide support, inspire, share knowledge and encouragement with others.

Only a few traditional practitioners have ventured into Māori medicine as a business. Maire says although it helps that they are whānau based, there are negative views about charging for traditional healing and for selling medicine sourced from te taiao (the environment), "We must strike the right balance of collective responsibility for precious natural resources, traditional sacred knowledge and being prosperous as an Indigenous business."



Maire Kipa
co-owner Kahukura Māori Healing;
Kahukura Rongoa Māori Charitable
Trust

Tribal affiliations
Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungunu,
Ngā Pae o Raukawa ki te Tonga,
Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāi Tūhoe

Sectors
health, education, training, Indigenous
development, environmental
protection and restoration



Heather Te Au Skipworth

Iron Māori

New Zealand

About Iron Māori

Iron Māori was created by Heather Te Au Skipworth almost 14 years ago and its core values are whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and aroha. It was conceived as a half Iron Man triathlon event comprising a 2km swim, 90km cycle and 21.1km run. The original vision was of “healthy and vibrant whānau participating in all aspects of life and promoting wellbeing from kaumātua to mokopuna”.

First held in the Hawke’s Bay region of Aotearoa New Zealand, the original Iron Māori was designed to be so physically demanding that participants would have to make significant lifestyle changes to be able to participate. Its aim was to ensure that the changes were permanent and would then permeate a participant’s wider whānau.

During each event, up to 20 people are contracted to support the two full-time staff and around 500 volunteers are engaged. Between events, around 50 people are involved in supporting the training and preparation of participants.

The half and quarter events attract over 2,000 participants each, plus the whānau who come along to support. Over the life of Iron Māori, there have been around 60,000 participants in the events alone.



Over time, Iron Māori has grown from a single annual event to nine events in several regions across Aotearoa New Zealand, with the most recent launch being Iron Māori Toa – a full Iron Man event to be hosted at the end of 2022. However, it is important to understand that Iron Māori is not primarily about the events – it is a kaupapa, a movement or initiative.

Where did the idea come from?

Iron Māori came about through Heather's desire to contribute to improving health statistics for Māori and Pasifika whānau. She was working in the hauora space and saw that the key performance indicators (KPIs) for existing programmes and services weren't focusing on the things that would lead to sustainable health outcomes for Māori.

Heather recalls how difficult it was to get initial support for the kaupapa, as potential funders preferred to stick with existing initiatives. However, she persevered, in the end finding supporters in senior Māori politicians who helped her deliver Iron Māori and its kaupapa.

Mana wāhine

Heather reflects on the conscious decision to steer away from funding sources such as lotteries, gambling and alcohol because they didn't align with the Iron Māori kaupapa. This is an area that she has been challenged on, particularly by men. She acknowledges that this decision may have held back the development of Iron Māori, but remaining true to the kaupapa has proven to be valuable in itself.

Heather has been Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and led the kaupapa since its inception. She is currently transitioning a young Māori woman into the CEO role, who will take over from November 2022.

Impact of Covid-19

Events based businesses were hit hard during the pandemic.

The impact of Covid-19 has financially crippled Iron Māori. In 2020, they had to merge the quarter and half Iron Māori events and half of the participants chose to transfer their registration to 2021. In 2021, they ran just two small events and had to issue refunds for other events, which consumed their operating budget. "It was hard, because it felt like someone had stolen your baby," Heather said.

There was no support to help them understand the ever-changing rules and how they could run their business. In 2020, a loan programme and wage subsidy helped, but in 2021 the subsidies were less and they were harder to access. Heather would have liked to see e-commerce support offered to businesses such as hers.

However, Covid-19 has pushed Heather to innovate further and as a result Iron Māori Toa was created. It is being pitched as a world class, world-leading international Indigenous long distance triathlon event, which aims to attract global participants. The course takes in the landscape and features that make the Hawke's Bay region a renowned visitor destination, and in particular, showcases Māori culture.





Heather is also working with her husband to reinvigorate the Iron Māori merchandise brand, to bring money back into the business. That way, even if the events can't go ahead, Iron Māori can leverage the exponential increase in online shopping that occurred as a result of the pandemic. Heather is clear what ongoing or further Covid-19 restrictions means for Iron Māori, "If we can't have events at the end of the year, that will put me out."

The future

Heather has a vision that over time, shares in Iron Māori events would be owned by the hapū and iwi where the event is hosted, believing a local ownership model could lead to a range of benefits for Māori.

Alongside the important health messages of kai and exercise, Iron Māori is looking at more ways to incorporate Te Ao Māori. With both Māori and non-Māori involved Heather sees this as a positive way to educate participating whānau about things Māori. However, the immediate priorities are financial viability through the next six months and to ensure the new Iron Māori Toa event goes ahead at the end of 2022.

Heather has political aspirations. In 2020, as a candidate for Te Pāti Māori (The Māori Party) she contested the Ikaroa Rāwhiti seat in Aotearoa New Zealand's general elections. Motivated by shared beliefs, support from her wider community and commitment to uplifting Māori, Heather will stand again in 2023.

Indigenous women in business

Heather's advice for other Indigenous women in business at this time is, "Don't be so proud to try and ride it alone."

Not asking for help earlier made getting through the impact of Covid-19 harder than it needed to be. "Let go of the ego and reach out," she said. "And if you get to the point where you feel like you can't lead, let someone else lead for a while."

Heather Te Au Skipworth
co-owner of Iron Māori IP Limited;
Iron Māori Events Limited; and Iron
Māori Merchandising Limited.

Tribal affiliations

Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tahu,
Te Arawa, Tūwharetoa

Sectors

hauora (health), arts and recreation,
education, clothing manufacturing



Marie Delorme
The Imagination Group
Canada

“Twenty-two years ago when I was contemplating leaving the ‘big corporate world’ for the world of entrepreneurialism, it was undoubtedly the most challenging decision I had ever faced. In retrospect, it was the best decision I have ever made. The journey has been interesting, rewarding, and filled with new adventures and opportunities. I have a poster in my office that reads, “You cannot discover new oceans unless you have the courage to leave the shore.”

Dr Marie Delorme, Métis Nation

About The Imagination Group

A Canada that embraces and is inspired by Indigenous art and culture.

The Imagination Group employs six full-time staff and up to five part-time staff, 50% are Indigenous. Two of their employees are men. Marie’s business came about 22 years ago over a nine-month business planning period, during which she was working as an executive in a Canadian telecommunications company. Marie’s background from twenty years in corporate business helped develop and hone her business skills. When she was planning the business, her son, who owned his own business, was her business mentor. He has been President of The Imagination Group for 20 years.





The Imagination Group is 100% Indigenous owned. Their business values include a commitment to quality products and services, pride in the many people and communities who are customers, suppliers, and business associates, blending culture and tradition with technology. Indigenous values are important to The Imagination Group:

“We are guided by the teachings of love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth. In our tobacco business we are guided by Indigenous elders and ceremony.”

The number of Imagination Group customers are estimated to be between 2–3,000 over the 22 years of operations. In the past, approximately fifty Indigenous artists whose works were promoted through their products, retained copyright of their designs. The artists benefited through a mixture of fixed fees and royalties on goods sold. When asked about Indigenous practice in the business Marie said:

“In the consulting practice our clients determine the protocol and ceremony as this differs from nation to nation. With the tobacco aspect, everything is culturally driven. We engaged and gained the support of Elders before we launched the business. Elders continue to be involved as this is a sacred product.



Every aspect of the tobacco from warehousing, to processing, to packaging is informed by ceremony.”

Indigenous procurement throughout the value chain has been a key focus and being exposed to women-led Indigenous businesses, particularly those in western economies. Dr Delorme noted that their designs for goods are Indigenous inspired. The tobacco is sourced through a Canadian organic grower. Their suppliers of promotional products and packaging are both in Canada and offshore.

Impact of Covid-19

The negative impact of Covid-19 on The Imagination Group has been minimal, and possibly even beneficial due to uptake in online shopping and service provision. The business was future proofed six years ago to manage the provision of services and goods through technology adaptations and working remotely. This has been shored up during Covid-19 with an online marketplace and adapting the organisational structure and processes.

Government support during Covid-19

Imagination Group has taken up an interest free loan that was extended to all Canadian businesses during Covid-19. The loan was repaid in the second quarter of 2022. They do not require additional support from the government.

Future of the company

Business priorities over the next six months to two years include:

- Increase tobacco production capability.
- Website redesign.
- Accounting system transition.
- Enhanced use of SharePoint and other technologies.
- Expand use of online ordering technologies and e-commerce to process orders.
- Outsourcing some elements of the business to external parties for example, social media expertise to tell their story.
- Keep current on technology, address evergreen scheduling of software and hardware.
- Expand the line of 'Indigenous-inspired' promotional products.
- Create a Canada-wide presence in ceremonial tobacco.

Their hope for their business includes retaining and sharing success with their staff, growing the confidence of their customers and clients, and philanthropy. They are committed to a living wage with their lowest paid employee at approximately 30% above the minimum wage.

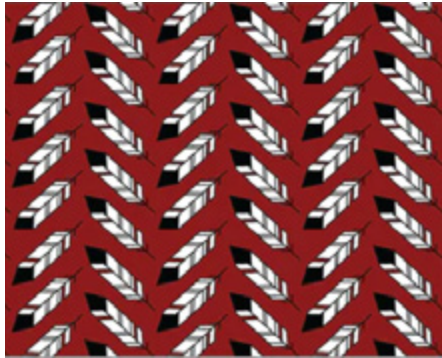
“We believe that our team should be well compensated and benefit from the success of the company. We are a small organization with a cohesive team. We do not have a hierarchy. However, we support the development of the team, financially and otherwise.”

Key success factors for The Imagination Group have been:

- excellent staff
- keeping their strategic plan current and using it to guide decisions
- diversifying into consulting
- focusing on Canada-wide markets
- maintaining the quality of their products and services
- maintaining good relationships with their bank, accountant and legal advisers.

The Imagination Group has a range of philanthropic activities that includes financial support, volunteerism, in-kind support, and governance to dozens of charities over the last 22 years. Marie has been a mentor and advisor to the Coady International Institute's Indigenous Women in Community Leadership program for 10 years. This is a network of over 140 women and more than twenty mentors support the programme.

Marie believes it is important for Indigenous businesswomen to reach out for advice from those who can help them to support their business, develop a good business plan, secure legal and business advice, and ensure adequate financial resources for a start-up contingency.



What can APEC member economies do to support Indigenous women in business?

Marie's reflections on how APEC member economies can better support Indigenous women in business include:

- Setting minimum standards for procurement of goods and services from Indigenous women-owned businesses.
- Spotlighting Indigenous women role models.
- Supporting business tools and resources that reflect the culture and circumstances of Indigenous women.
- Sponsoring training, workshops, and mentorship programs.
- Providing financial support for Indigenous women who want to start a business or grow their businesses.



NATION Imagination is a for-profit operating entity, incorporated as Imagination Cards Inc. and is 100% Indigenous owned. The Imagination Group of Companies is comprised of three organisations:

1. **Imagination Gifting** is a full service, Canada-wide promotional products / corporate gifting company with a signature line of products featuring the works of aboriginal artists.
2. **The Imagination Group Consulting** practice engages with over 200 Indigenous groups, as well as governments, and industry. The organization focuses on the spectrum of challenges that leaders face – from long range planning to critical day-to-day business issues.
3. **Imagination Tobacco** provides organically produced tobacco that links the past with the future and the broader community with Indigenous peoples. Through education and support, Imagination has played a part in thousands of people showing respect through the gifting of ceremonial tobacco.



Dr Marie Delorme
CEO, Imagination Group

Indigenous Affiliations
Métis Nation

Sectors
brand management and promotional products; consulting to industry, Indigenous groups and governments in the area of strategy, governance, economic development, and human resources; manufacturing of ceremonial tobacco



Denyse Nadon Bear Vision Inc Canada

About Bear Vision Inc

Bear Vision has been operating for over 20 years, providing education and training services primarily to the mining sector in the north of Canada.

Through Bear Vision, Denyse Nadon provides culturally appropriate training through the use of the medicine wheel. Bear Vision also delivers career readiness, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), life skills and Mining Essentials training.

Bear Vision is guided by seven sacred teachings and the related values of respect, love, kindness, courage, humility, wisdom, and strength.

Denyse is the sole employee of Bear Vision, although in the past she has engaged sub-contractors.

Denyse estimates that she has worked with over 1,500 people since Bear Vision began operating. Just like a bear, there have been periods where Bear Vision has been in hibernation when Denyse has been engaged as a direct employee of other organisations.

Currently, Denyse is operating Bear Vision from her reservation in Matheson, Ontario, Canada.



Denyse Nadon (right) with Perlyn Chapais

Where did the idea come from?

Denyse was the Executive Director of a local Friendship Centre. She was 24 years old and in her first executive position. She had been there for three months, reporting to a Board of Directors. She said, "I call them the old boys club, Indigenous old boys club. And it was just complete control, 'Denyse, you got to do this. You got to do that.'" They would do things that she didn't understand, but she knew it wasn't how you should do business.

At 24 years old Denyse left the Executive Director role not knowing where this would lead her, "... I lit my smudge, my medicines, said my prayers, dug up courage because I was worried about money, and I packed up my personal stuff. Then I walked out."

She wondered what she was going to do next, when a friend suggested that she work for herself. Her initial reaction was, "Are you crazy? Only white people do that". Then her friend started talking about her gifts and asked her what she loves – it always came down to the service of people. The business started from there.

Mana wāhine

Denyse has found it interesting being an Indigenous woman in business. Some organisations will say that they don't want to engage a business, they just want to employ her as an individual.

However, for Denyse, she is Bear Vision, and the distinction has at times been frustrating.

She recalls that most often it was Indigenous men, who didn't want to engage her through her business. She has never understood if it is about money or more about control than anything else.

Impact of Covid-19

When Covid-19 first emerged, Denyse was teaching in Cambridge Bay. She was just finishing up a Mining Essentials program and there was a shutdown. Teaching was halted and she couldn't get into communities.

Initially, when leaving her teaching roles, she panicked and was worried about finances. However, she has since returned to school and has taken the opportunity to rethink the business.

Alongside her doctoral studies, Denyse began reaching out to people. She started doing some policy and advisory work with communities trying to navigate Covid-19. She is working alongside the leadership and executive teams of local organisations in various areas including health, telecommunications, strategic thinking and writing. There was no business support available to Bear Vision when Covid-19 first hit. Denyse, says she would have been happy if there had been support to cover the basic overheads such as the rent and vehicle, "It's like the government forgot both the trainers and the world of training."



Adjusting to classrooms with masks and barriers



Bear Vision, Mining Essentials Program for Indigenous People

The future

Denyse is optimistic about the future for Bear Vision. She certainly doesn't think that the impact of Covid-19 will put her out of business. She thinks what she is doing now is changing how she will do business. She is focusing on creating online opportunities for Bear Vision and the way she delivers her services.

Being online means getting out of her comfort zone, but she is figuring out what works for her, her business and the people she works with.

"I'm doing a lot of leadership stuff online and working with Directors through Teams and Zoom meetings. I'm seeing people's faces and getting them comfortable with it, so I think I just have to diversify as well."

Indigenous women in business

"Take some time to really sit with your business idea or sit with your business and get organised physically. With Covid-19, I got all nutty and worried about life and money. And then one day I'm like, you know what, I have a wonderful business. It has provided for me for 20 some years. I need to give it some love and care."

She advises, "Be with your business and take care of it like you would your children, because it is feeding you."

"I always tell people, did you organize your office? Did you do your filing? Get yourself a new laptop and get that logo done. Or get some swag to really give it life. Because we forget that it's not just the business – it's who we are. The way I carry myself is how I represent my business. So, if I look messy then chances are my business will be pretty messy."

Denyse reflects that there have been many people along the way that have opened the door and believed in Bear Vision, even her students.

"They're like, 'Oh my God, my teacher owns her own business'. It's those little things where I'm like, 'yeah, I do!'"

For Denyse, it's moments like these that empower her as a business owner.

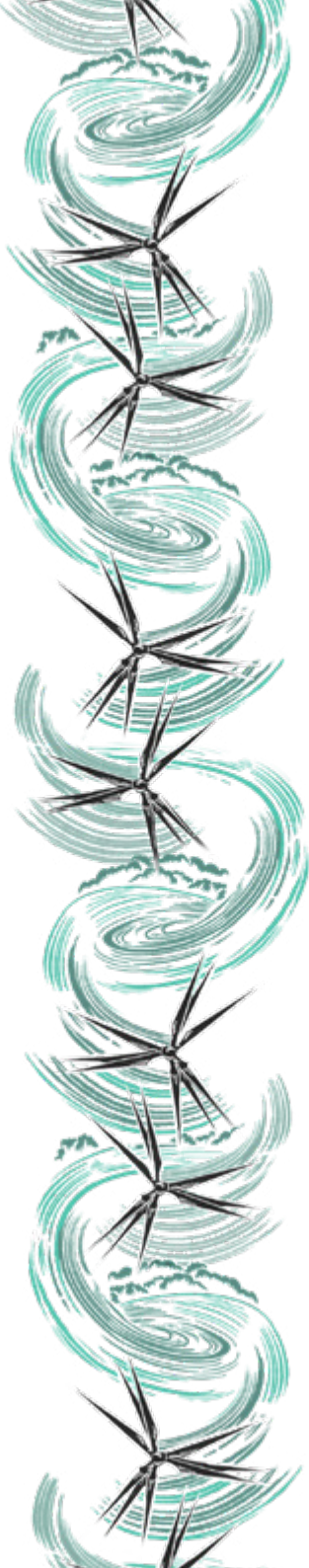


Denyse Nadon with Jason Chapais

Denyse Nadon
President of Bear Vision Inc

Tribal affiliations
Bear Clan, Algonquin Nation

Sectors
education and training – primarily in the mining sector



Victoria LaBillois Wejipeg Excavation Inc Canada

“Wejipeg means East wind. So when the elders talk about East wind it means something’s coming, though, the weather’s going to bring something in, Wejipeg.”

About the businesses

Wejipeg Excavation Inc is a privately-owned construction company offering general contracting services for civil engineering projects. Operating in Quebec and New Brunswick, Wejuseg is a Mi’gmaq majority-owned company with access to a bilingual Mi’gmaq team of professionals and tradespersons.

Victoria LaBillois is a Mi’gmaq entrepreneur from Listuguj, in the traditional territory of Gespe’gewa’gi. She owns Wejipeg Excavation Inc, which she established in 2011 to participate in wind park development across the territory. Victoria co-owns and sits as president of Wejuseg Construction Inc. Victoria serves on a number of councils and professional boards, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous including the National Indigenous Economic Development Board, and holds a Master’s degree in Business Administration. Victoria has built up income through her entrepreneurial mindset starting in 1991 with a T-shirt business, selling purses to buy her first apartment



left to right: Ashley Mitchell, Eric Martin, Dale Morrison, Victoria LaBillois, Kelly Mitchell, Austin Barnaby, 2021.

building which funded her excavation company, which in turn helped resource her move into construction partnerships.

“As an Indigenous woman, I thought there were opportunities on the territory. And prior to me creating this company, our people were not employed outside the community. We were spectators to this regional economy. We have a provincial highway that cuts through our reserve, and we watch, we just watch the trees go by and the resource extraction and everything. We don’t have to be spectators. I just said, no, that’s it. This is what I’m going to do. And you know what? I felt we had nothing to lose. What are they going to do? Send me back to the reserve. This is where I live. I’m here already.”

Victoria was driven to create her businesses to combat the exclusion of her people in the development of traditional lands and from industries including commercial fishing and forestry practices. The exclusion of Mi’gmaq peoples from participating in local industries was both systemic and legislated, leading to community-led protests and blockades across the region. However, in 1999 a Supreme Court ruling [R. v. Marshall] provided some access for Mi’gmaq to commercial fisheries.

Wind energy is the third largest industry on traditional lands and across the region. When this industry was growing in the region, the Mi’gmaq were not part of the original development. In 2009, Victoria secured a one-day job site tour. Through looking at the infrastructure, heavy machinery and land she saw the possibility of her people participating in sustainable, green energy work. This inspired her to set up an excavation contracting company, Wejipeg Excavation. Despite knowing very little about excavation, with her mindset and skills she was a quick student.

While working full-time, she developed her business plan and in 2011, she leased three pieces of heavy equipment for excavation and learnt about the requirements of the industry. She successfully worked throughout the boom of wind energy in the region as a sub-contractor, going on to purchase her own machinery.

Victoria realised that in order for her business to grow, she needed to be part of bid teams to head or lead general contracts, rather than continuing to operate as a sub-contractor. She reached out to a Canadian Executive Service Organization and was paired

with a mentor. He was a retired geologist who had worked with the Department of Transportation and had a good understanding of excavation and its processes. Mentoring helped Victoria conclude that, in order to grow her five-year old business, she should consider partnership or a joint venture with another company established in the region and sector. Her work had given her insight across a number of companies, but there was one, in particular, who had been on hand to provide advice and support for a number of technical and purchasing decisions.

The partnership became Wejuseg Construction. Wejuseg carries the meaning of strong wind in the Mi’gmaw language. Victoria is a 51% owner and president of this joint venture. They have three permanent staff, including Victoria, with skills in human resources, business development, bid preparation and financial and operating administration. Projects, because of the weather are necessarily seasonal and may require between four and one hundred staff, depending on the project size. Victoria aims for a seventy percent Indigenous hire across her project operations.



What it means to be Indigenous in business

“I’m doing this to bring our [Indigenous] participation in economic activity into our territory. We were absent from this. We were nowhere to be seen. And all these industries have been benefiting from our waters and from our land, and all our resources, for all this time. It was important for me to brand as Indigenous to say: hello, here we are, and we have a talented labour pool, and they’re coming too, the tide is rising for everybody. We’re all coming together.”

“Quebec is a French speaking province, and our people are bilingual in English and Mi’gmaq. There are not a lot of French language speakers in our community.”

Language policies requiring French speakers creates a barrier for many Mi’gmaq to work off-reserve. Victoria wanted to create an Indigenous company that could work outside her community, preserving smaller family businesses in the community. Overcoming institutional racism in the corporate sector requires Indigenous companies. These are the companies who provide employment and development for Indigenous peoples.

“Non-Indigenous companies aren’t beating down the door to hire our people. So, they don’t have work experience working on the outside, language is called a barrier because they don’t speak French and you need to for all of the certifications and the tickets that they have to have. We started to turn that all around when we were building our own wind park. So, getting our people accredited, and recognizing their hours, their experience through different education, and bringing that to the workforce, there have been a lot of challenges. I hire people that are around me that have the experience and the skills that otherwise wouldn’t have an opportunity to work in these projects.”

Helping community and focussing on Indigenous procurement is key to the vision Victoria has for the future of her work, “My vision is creating employment, helping our community, role modelling, hopefully, supporting local ancillary businesses related to construction. Like when I run a project, I try to hire Indigenous- owned companies. That’s my first choice.”

Victoria is driven by her community and sees families connected, proud and sharing in success, “When they go home to tell their kids, I was part of building that, and we benefit, and families benefit. So, there’s income coming into the house and the kids can get a bike or the kids can go to hockey lessons. I know the workers, I know their families, I know their stories. This is where I’m from.”

Working on her businesses and sharing her skills, knowledge, and experience in a multitude of Canada-wide and local Indigenous governance networks, as well as mentoring and filling leadership roles calls for her to be balanced and sometimes creates challenges for Victoria. One passion project she has been participating in since 2015, is Indigenous youth financial literacy in her community. This work is compelling for her because of the economic reparations for stolen land that saw lump sum dividends paid to members of her community. She is currently working on the gamification of the curriculum to provide access to training for more Indigenous youth.



Lori Martin, Mesgi’g Ugju’s’n windpark construction, 2016

Impact of Covid-19

When Covid-19 hit, all construction in the province of Quebec was shut down, stalling existing work. A \$3m project bid came out in her community to install storm water drains, which they secured. They worked through how to implement Covid-19 health and safety protocols in construction, but there was a constant fear of the project bringing Covid-19 into the community, which thankfully did not happen. Covid-19 has meant that many projects for her company over the last few years were in community, but Victoria is still keen for her businesses to provide her people with work outside the community to enable people to work off-reserve and on significant Canada-wide projects, gaining new skills and expertise.

Government Covid-19 resources and support for her business has been unsuccessful due to the nature of the information required and the type of sector Victoria's business operates in. Victoria notes that some other Indigenous business support for those who are Covid-19 impacted has been helpful and easier to source. She notes the volatility of the sector, in that you are only as good as your next contract, so securing contracts is a priority. She

is actively pursuing partnerships on large development projects that will provide new opportunities for people in her community to work, gain skills, qualifications, and knowledge.

What could help?

The strategy for Indigenous procurement in Canada is flawed and currently being overhauled. Victoria's application for federal business support for her, then fledgling, excavation company was not supported due to non-Indigenous government officials being far removed from the realities of the region. She reports that they refused to review her business plan as she proposed to project manage her firm, rather than be 'on the tools', which required heavy machinery licenses. The short-sightedness of decision-makers at the time inspired her to effect change and to take part in the National Indigenous Economic Development Board.

She sees Indigenous procurement as a means to accelerate change, to reduce barriers and increase support and growth of Indigenous-owned businesses. She believes that strategies such as Supply Nation in Australia, being replicated in Canada, are long overdue, and

are required to combat the 'black cladding' of non-Indigenous companies gaining disingenuous competitive advantage.

Victoria believes that a focus for our people on shifting from managing poverty, being able to utilise our lands and resources, is critical. Growing financial literacy, peer and leadership mentoring, entrepreneurship, and support for upscaling to take the principles of many of the small-scale enterprises run by Indigenous women to the next level is critical. This reflects the type of eco-system Victoria believes would create inclusion and participation of more Indigenous women in business and economic development.

Victoria encourages Indigenous women to rise above the challenges and barriers, and just do it, knowing deeply that we were not meant to be poor, or merely spectators in our lands. She counsels us to call upon our traditions of working together and abundance, refusing to accept the legislated, economic and colonial exclusion of prosperous Indigenous women and nations.



Wejuseg team at Listuguj reservoir project, 2021

Victoria LaBillios
co-owner and President, Wejuseg Construction Inc

Tribal affiliations
Mi'gmaq

Sectors
construction, project management, Indigenous economic development, entrepreneurship, training and development

APEC Indigenous Women in Business Workshop

An online workshop was run with wāhine who contributed to the case studies in this booklet – Denyse Nadon, Maire Kipa, Gretta Carney, Olinda Silvano and Carola Barria.

Three additional businesswomen participated – Vivian Chen of Hepta Education (Chinese Taipei); Anya Lim of Anthill (Philippines); and Daniela Vega Rojas, who provided Spanish language translation services for the workshop.

We gratefully acknowledge these women, their businesses and their willingness to share their experiences.

Anya Lim
ANTHILL
Fabric Gallery
Philippines



Vivian Chen
Hepta Education
Chinese Taipei

Daniela Vega Rojas
Therapeutic Massage
and Translation Services
Aotearoa New Zealand



Vivian Chen
Hepta Education
Chinese Taipei

Hepta Education believes every child has the right to learn how to learn and their supporters have the right to know how it's done.

Hepta Education is a digital ecosystem that connects teachers, learners and supporters (donors). The Hepta ecosystem functions to allow:

- its learners to access educational opportunities that best suit their needs
- its donors to choose the projects they want to support and track the outcomes.

Hepta's learners are often children from marginalized communities without stable financial support whose access to quality education is limited or non-existent. Hepta's donors can track their donations and see where and who they have impacted. Hepta uses crypto currency and NFTs to fund and reward participants.



Anya Lim
ANTHILL Fabric Gallery
Philippines

Alternative Nest and Trading/Training Hub for Indigenous or Ingenious for Little Livelihood seekers

ANTHILL's mission is to keep Philippine weaving traditions alive and to provide sustainable livelihoods for its partner communities. Alongside their mission statement is their pledge to promote and elevate Filipino culture and to honour Mother Earth.

ANTHILL works on a human and community-centred business model, that ensures a sustainable and inclusive supply chain. Most of ANTHILL's stakeholders are women artisans who are driving change in their respective communities, and managing their roles in homes and families. They believe that by lifting up other women artisans and artists, they will ensure sustainable economic development for all.



Daniela Vega Rojas
Therapeutic Massage
and Translation Services
Aotearoa New Zealand

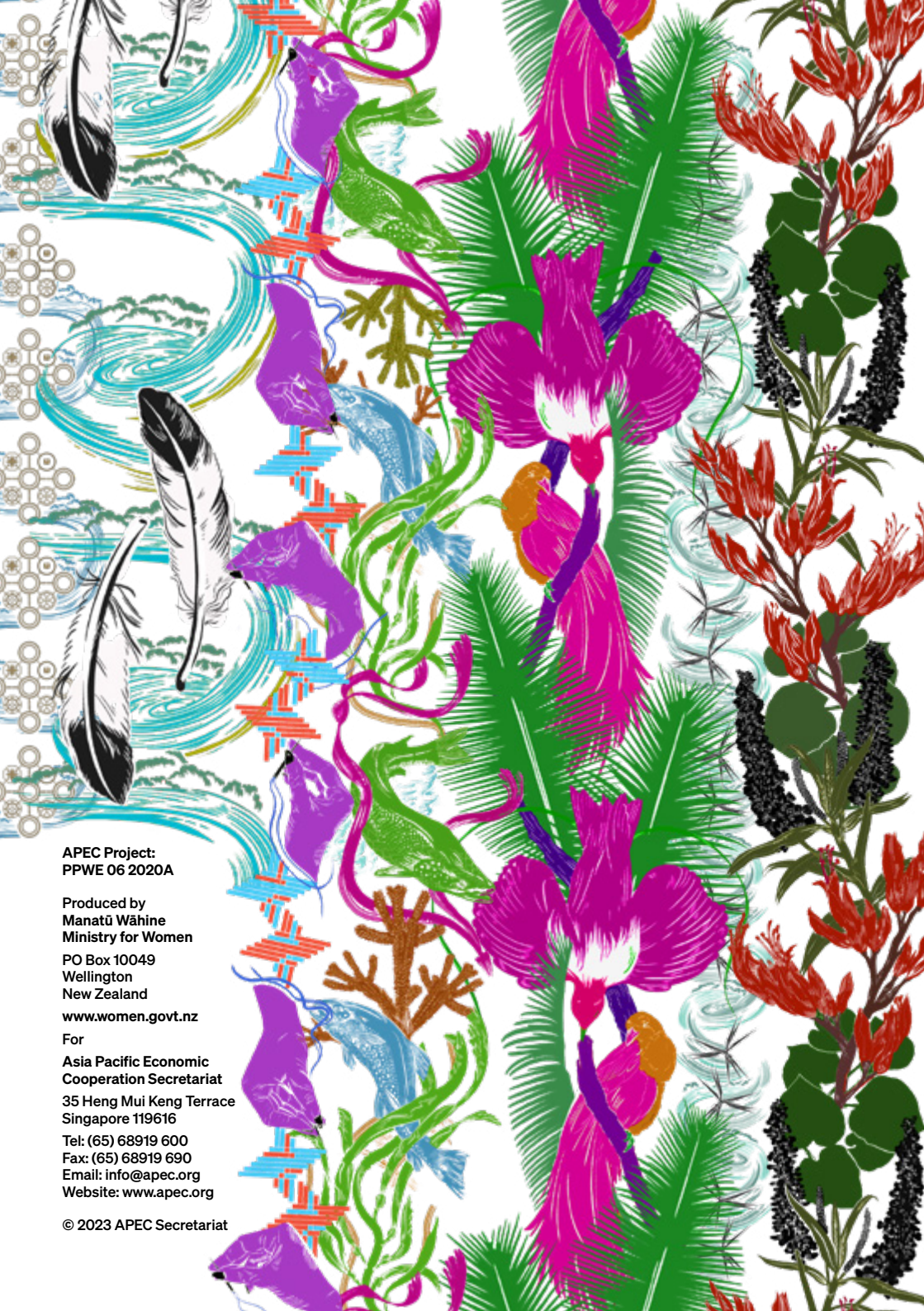
Daniela relocated from Chile to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2016. Based in Christchurch, Daniela has been working as a Deep Tissue Massage Therapist and in 2021 established her own business.

Daniela also provides Spanish translation services and was instrumental in facilitating the South American stories for this project.



Glossary

aroha	love
awa	river, waterways
hapū	sub-tribe
hauora	health and wellbeing
iwi	tribe
kaumātua	grandparents, older people
kaupapa	purpose
mahinga kai	garden, food source
mana wāhine	power of women
manaakitanga	hospitality, kindness, care
māra kai	garden
mauri	life force
mokopuna	grandchildren
ngahere	forest
puna	spring
rangatahi	young people
rohe	region
rongoā	medicine
taiao	environment
te ao tūroa	natural environment
wāhine	women
wānanga	workshop
rohe	tribal areas
whānau	family
whanaungatanga	kinship, connection
whenua	land



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