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Increasing Indigenous Participation and inclusion in Global Water Governance

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1. Background

Increasing Indigenous Participation at the Global Level

Participation is the cornerstone of good water governance, as it contributes to equity and justice (1,2,7).

Despite this, Indigenous peoples continue to be excluded particularly from water governance processes, at the global level (1,2,7).

Engaging Indigenous peoples in water governance processes is important for legal (duty to consult), ethical (advancing equity) and instrumental reasons (sustainability of projects, knowledge pluralism, social cohesion etc.) (1).

Even when Indigenous peoples and communities are provided the space to participate, their (Indigenous) norms, values and knowledge are ignored in these processes (7).

Given how global water processes provide an important avenue for water norm development and dissemination, it is imperative to engage Indigenous communities in global water processes (8).

2. Problem Statement

Unique Challenges to Engaging Indigenous Peoples

Classifying who is Indigenous in non-settler contexts can be problematic, while recognizing Indigenous self-determination in settler contexts presents other challenges (5,7,13).

Current participatory water governance processes view Indigenous peoples as mere stakeholders, when in fact, they may be rights-holders (13).

Procedural barriers (e.g funding and capacity) can limit participation, but even when these are addressed, such processes may be built on colonial understandings of water (7,9).
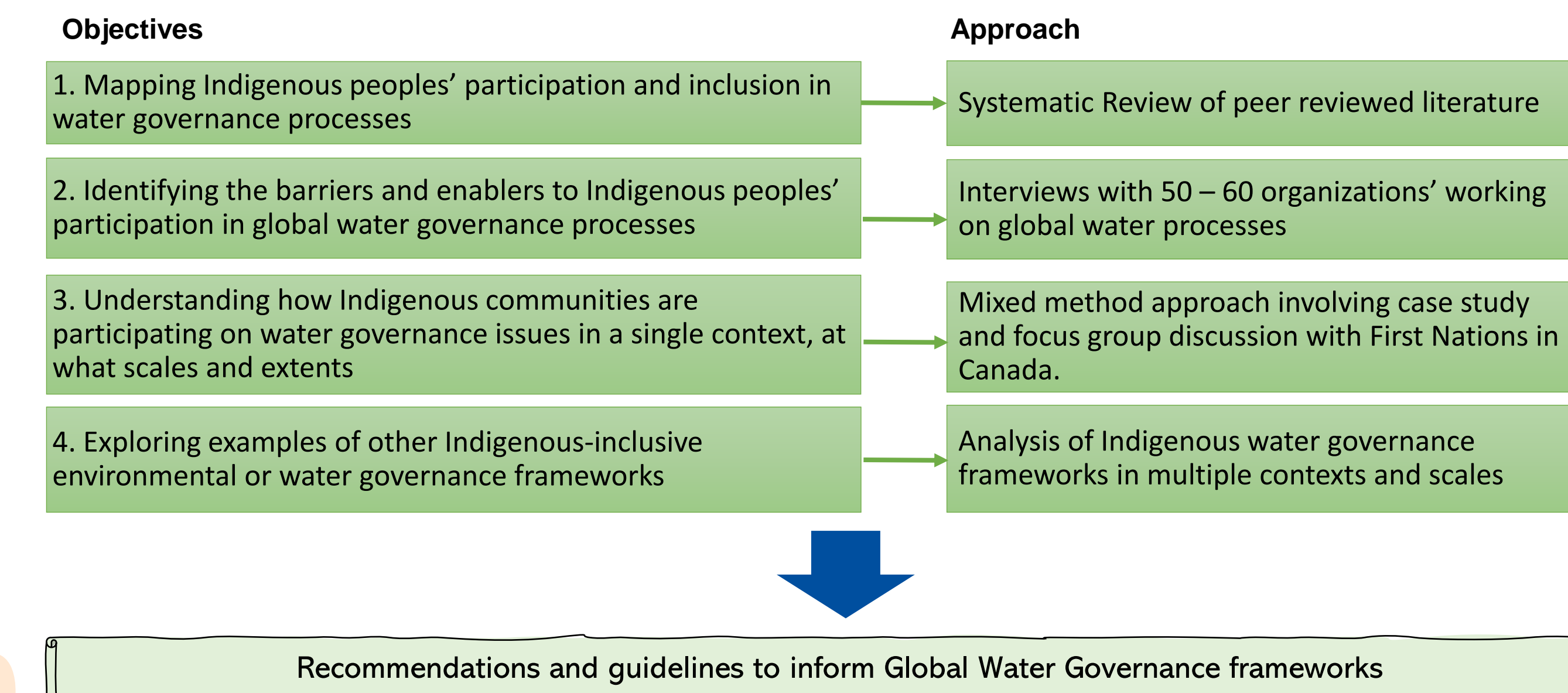
Participatory processes can be tokenistic, without providing any meaningful voice to Indigenous peoples who are deeply impacted by decisions related to the environment (1,3,12).

Indigenous peoples' priorities are clumped together with other groups, for example ethnic minorities or local communities (6) or viewed without distinctions (9, 13).
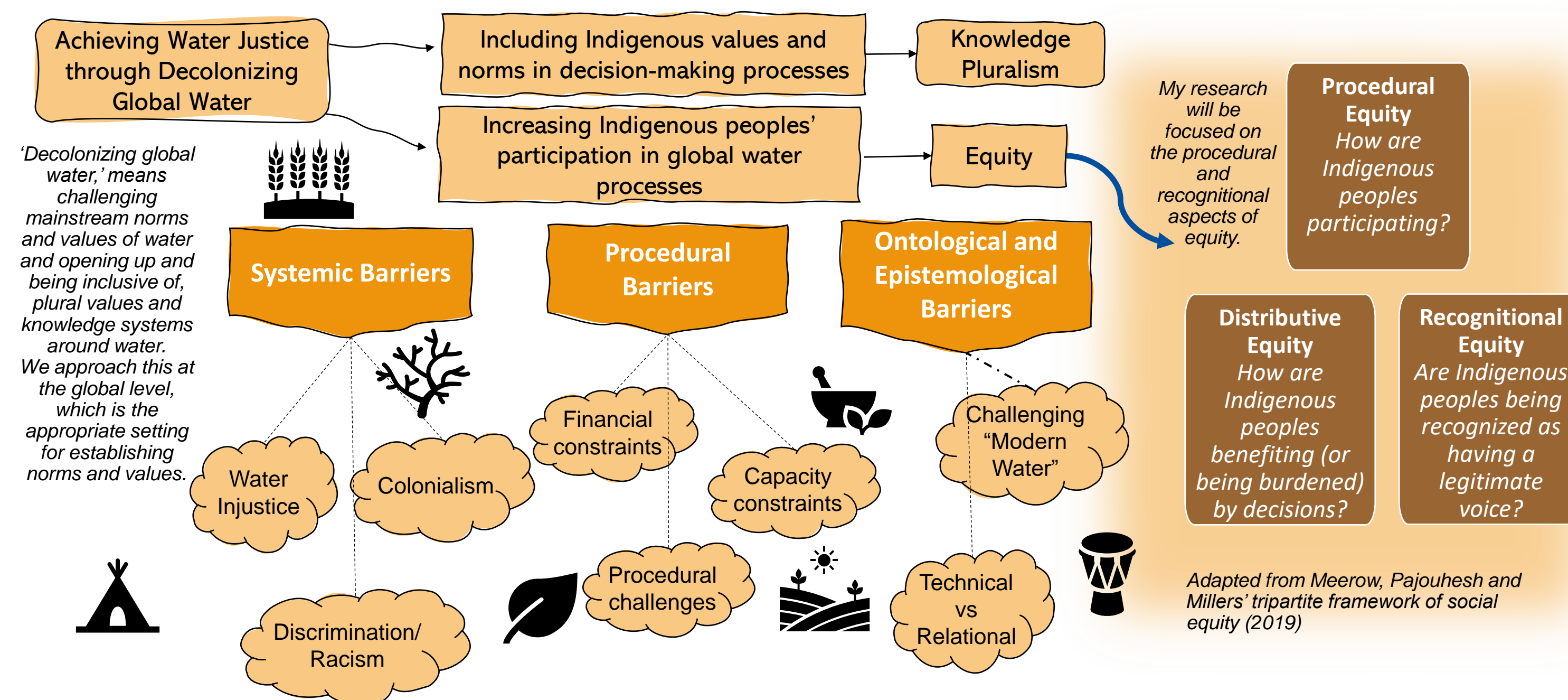
Indigenous peoples are framed as a population with deficits, with no recognition of their strengths and the contribution of their knowledge and values to water governance.

3. Aims, Objectives and Approach

The aim of this study is to develop guidelines for enhanced participation in global water governance processes and inform the development of a decolonised water governance framework that encapsulates Indigenous values and norms, using a strengths-based approach.

Objectives	Approach
1. Mapping Indigenous peoples' participation and inclusion in water governance processes	Systematic Review of peer reviewed literature
2. Identifying the barriers and enablers to Indigenous peoples' participation in global water governance processes	Interviews with 50 – 60 organizations' working on global water processes
3. Understanding how Indigenous communities are participating on water governance issues in a single context, at what scales and extents	Mixed method approach involving case study and focus group discussion with First Nations in Canada.
4. Exploring examples of other Indigenous-inclusive environmental or water governance frameworks	Analysis of Indigenous water governance frameworks in multiple contexts and scales

Recommendations and guidelines to inform Global Water Governance frameworks

4. Towards Water Justice through Decolonizing Global Water - Concept Map

'Decolonizing global water,' means challenging mainstream norms and values of water and opening up and being inclusive of, plural values and knowledge systems around water. We approach this at the global level, which is the appropriate setting for establishing norms and values.

My research will be focused on the procedural and recognitional aspects of equity.

Adapted from Meerow, Pajouhesh and Millers' tripartite framework of social equity (2019)

Indigenous peoples. We use the criterion of self-identification, as underlined in a number of human rights documents, to define who is Indigenous.

Water governance: We build on the definition used by Emanuel and Wilkins (2020) and define water governance as the spectrum of processes, principles, systems, and institutions, both state and non-state, involved in decision-making about the use, management, conservation, and protection of water.

5. Work Done so far: Systematic Map

Aim : To review peer-reviewed literature on Indigenous peoples' participation and inclusion in water governance.

Method: Relevant terms related to Indigenous peoples and water governance are searched within the Title, abstract and keywords in English, journal articles in both Scopus and Web of Science. These are screened at the abstract/title level and then at the full-text level. A final list is then compiled and coded.

Discussion: The final list of papers will provide insights on:
- *Where peoples are participating (geography)*
- *What issues they are participating on (dams, water quality, rights etc)*
- *The nature and level of participation (information giving, consultation, co-development, activism, political mobilization, legal engagement, inclusion in policy etc).*
- *The scale at which they participate (local, national and international)*
- *Any other insights*

Next steps: Initial screening is complete, and a final list of eligible papers have been compiled. Secondary verification is underway, and this will be followed by the final coding of papers.

6. Contribution of Research

This project will be relevant for:

(I) policy-makers, as they work towards building more democratic, inclusive water governance frameworks

(II) industry, as they often need to consult with Indigenous communities yet lack the cultural awareness of how to meaningfully engage with rights-holding peoples.

(III) water practitioners, who have often been taught scientific, empirical and technical approaches to water management, but lack understanding of Indigenous, cultural and social aspects of water and;

(iv) academics, who work on global water governance literature, which has historically excluded Indigenous peoples.

7. References

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