

Indigenous Peoples

What does Indigenous mean?

Indigenous means native, so in the context of peoples, it means the distinct ethnic groups of people who are native to a place that has been colonised by another ethnic group.

Other terms for Indigenous people that you might hear are First Nations/first peoples, Aboriginal people, or native peoples, depending on where in the world they are.



A Maasai woman from the Rift Valley, Kenya



An Indigenous mother and child from Guangaje, Ecuador



A Lakota Native American man at Pow Wow, USA



An Inuk sea ice fisherman, Greenland

For thousands of years Indigenous peoples have been sustainably managing their land by cultivating plants that are useful for food and medicine, encouraging biodiversity, and passing knowledge and respect for the natural world down the generations.

Both population numbers and land ownership were decimated in Indigenous populations in North America by European diseases in the 1700s and then again by colonisation in the 1800s. This combined with the massive growth of colonisation and the Industrial Revolution led to a large decline in the quality and quantity of properly managed natural resources.

There is growing evidence that land under the management of Indigenous peoples does better in biodiversity, carbon storage, and other ecological benefits, than under governments or conservation charities.

In fact, patches of land formerly tended by Indigenous peoples ('forest gardens') that have been left untended for hundreds of years have been found to still support much higher levels of biodiversity than the 'native' forest around them!

Indigenous peoples have a firm belief in respect, care, and protection for the planet and the lands they inhabit, often fighting against exploitative and destructive plans for their land.

These four young activists are no different. They each have stood up and been vocal about environmental issues that not only impact our planet, but disproportionately impact indigenous peoples and cultures.

Autumn Peltier

Born
2004

First up we have Autumn Peltier, a Canadian water activist from [Wikwemikong First Nation/Manitoulin Island](#) and is from [Ojibway/Odawa](#) heritage.

Autumn's activism focuses on clean drinking water for First Nations communities and across Mother Earth. She is the chief water commissioner for the [Anishinabek Nation](#).

Autumn started her fight for the universal right to clean drinking water at just 8 years old!

Advocating for access to clean water runs in her family, with Autumn's aunt, Josephine Mandamin, having walked the shores of the great lakes to raise awareness for water conservation.

Autumn has already made big impacts, having met with the Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, in 2016 to insist that he do more to protect indigenous peoples' access to safe water after over 100 communities received warnings that their water could be contaminated. She has also addressed the United Nations on multiple occasions to stress the importance of clean water and the alarming numbers of indigenous communities who do not have access to it.



Autumn Peltier, also known as the 'Water Warrior' for her activism fighting for access to clean water

Image credit: Water Wise



"Water is the lifeblood of Mother Earth, Our water should not be for sale. We all have a right to this water as we need it."

More info:

- [Meet Autumn Peltier](#)
- [Water Wise](#)
- [NAAEE](#)



Quannah Chasinghorse



Quannah Chasinghorse is an Indigenous activist fighting for the Arctic
Image credit: Vogue

Quannah Chasinghorse is a [Hän Gwich'in](#) and [Oglala Lakota](#) climate activist and model from Fairbanks, Alaska.

Born
2004

Quannah and her mother, Jody Potts who is Han Gwich'in, have fought for many years to protect the [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge](#) from oil drilling and other ecological damage.

This region is known by the Gwich'in as "Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandali Goodlit," meaning "the sacred place where life begins", because it is where a huge herd of porcupine caribou head each year to have their calves. The caribou are incredibly important to the Gwich'in way of life.

Climate change is impacting the Gwich'in people in many ways; the pipeline for transporting oil from the fields across Alaska runs the entire length of the state, from north to south coast, directly impacting wildlife in and around its path. The impacts of climate change are also being felt, in the increase of wildfires, the melting of permafrost, and in hunting, fishing, and berry seasons. Especially with the COVID-19 pandemic, some Indigenous peoples lost access to imported food and had to rely more heavily on the natural resources around them.

Quannah has been on the Youth Council since she was 17 and has spoken with Senators in Washington DC about protecting her ancestral land (and the rest of the Arctic). Quannah met with some of the USA's biggest banks and persuaded them to commit to no longer funding Arctic drilling projects.

More info:

- [Quannah Chasinghorse Is Fighting to Save the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge](#)
- [Eco-Warrior Profile: Quannah Chasinghorse Fights for Indigenous Rights and Climate Activism](#)

She credits her activism and drive to fight for the planet to her mother and other strong women in her life who taught her a lot about activism, fighting for your land, and standing up for what you believe in.



Xiuhtezcahtl Martinez

Xiuhtezcatl ([pronounced Shoe-Tez-Caht](#)) is an American environmental activist and hip hop artist.

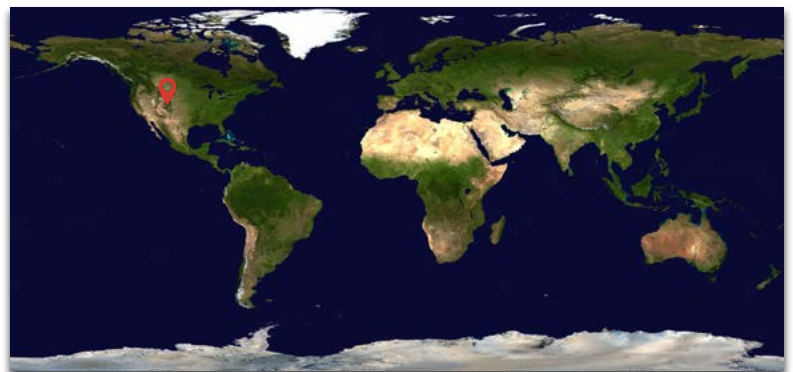
Xiuhtezcatl lives in Colorado in the USA, but was raised in the Aztec tradition, with respect for nature and the planet a core part of his childhood. He's been fighting for the environment for many years, giving public speeches about the environment from age 6!

At age 9 he was instrumental in banning the use of pesticides in the parks in Boulder, Colorado, by organising with other young people and using their voices via public speeches.

Xiuhtezcatl is a co-founder of the organisation [Earth Guardians](#) who began as an experiential learning high school in Hawai'i in the early 90s and has now developed into a world-wide organisation that trains young people to be leaders in environmental, climate and social justice movements. Earth Guardians use art, music, storytelling, civic engagement, and legal action to find solutions to the current climate crisis and other big issues.



Image credit: Green Matters



Xiuhtezcatl has been a face for the next generation of Earth Guardians, speaking at the UN, addressing the General Assembly, and speaking on panels with people like Bernie Sanders and Pharrell Williams. He's also been featured on many popular TV shows and magazines, helping to spread the word of the Earth Guardians to do better for the planet. Something you might know him for is filing a lawsuit against the Obama administration for not doing enough to fight the climate emergency. He truly believes that we can solve the climate crisis and that future generations shouldn't have to fight this hard in the future.

More info:

- [Guarding the Earth for Future Generations](#)
- [Wikipedia](#)
- [Earth Island Journal](#)

“Hopelessness and apathy are the natural responses to really overwhelming stuff. And I think the most important thing to do is to bounce back from that, and to pick yourself up, even when nothing makes sense in the world.”

Xiye Bastida



Image credit: Twitter @xiyebastida

Born
2002

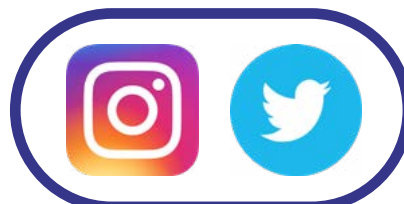
Xiye is Indigenous Mexican (Otomi-Toltec) and Aztec and was born and raised in Mexico.

The Otomi people believe that if you take care of the Earth, it will take care of you. Having witnessed the impacts of the climate crisis on both her hometown (long droughts followed by extreme rains and flooding) and the after-effects of Superstorm Sandy when she relocated to New York City, she became driven to do something about the climate crisis.

Xiye is a climate leader both locally and globally. She is a leader of the Fridays for Future youth climate strike; she has previously organised a climate strike at her school in New York and is currently organising to join the Global Climate Strike; she is a member of the [Peoples Climate Movement](#); and she is a co-founder of the Re-Earth Initiative, to make climate activism as inclusive and intersectional as possible. As well as working with all of these organisations, Xiye has organised a youth activism training program, filled her school with climate posters, and shared loads about the climate crisis on social media!

In 2021 she addressed the White House summit, giving a speech to 40 global leaders about their culpability in the climate crisis and their responsibilities to fix it. She said that the global climate emergency was caused by the powerful in society “**perpetuating and upholding the harmful systems of colonialism, oppression, capitalism and market-oriented brainwashed solutions**”.

She has had a short documentary made about her, [We Rise](#), and worked on a video exploring how cities and landscapes could look in the future, [Imagine the Future](#).



More info:

- [America's Greta Thunberg](#)
- [Wikipedia](#)
- [Xiye's speech to world leaders](#)

Activity: Climate Protectors Poster

Fill out the template below about one of the many projects the Indigenous activists above are involved with. Feel free to create your own design, but remember to include the key information listed below!

What does the project do?

Who are the indigenous people running the project?

Project name:

How is this helping fight climate change?

Where is the project located?



Africa



Image credit: Seeds of Hope

In this section, we're exploring how countries across Africa are being affected by climate change and the amazing initiatives young people are spearheading to fight for climate justice.

Africa is a huge continent with a variety of climatic zones and habitats ranging from dense rainforest to scorching deserts. This means that African countries are impacted very differently by climate change depending on their location.

Nigeria

Nigeria is a big country in West Africa which faces different impacts in the North and South. Northern Nigeria is already seeing the impacts of extreme drought which is causing Lake Chad to dry out and shrink rapidly. The lake was a source of food and livelihood for millions of people, as well as a unique wildlife habitat.

The UN says that 80-90% of Lake Chad's population depend on farming or fishing as their livelihoods, so healthy and plentiful water supplies are vital. As access to water has decreased, poverty has increased and led to conflict over land and water rights between farmers.

In contrast, Southern Nigeria is at risk of coastal flooding due to increasing rainfall and sea level rise, endangering the lives of those in coastal towns and cities. These effects in Northern and Southern Nigeria are causing people to leave their homes in search of safer places to live. Unfortunately, the reception for climate refugees in other countries is often not very welcoming, but as climate change progresses the world will see more people displaced from their homes and looking for new, safe places to live.



This satellite image shows how dramatically Lake Chad has shrunk between the 1970s and present day.

Image credit: UN

Uganda

Uganda is in Central Africa, located right on the equator! It is another country that relies heavily on farming for the population's livelihood. Some areas in Northern Uganda, such as the Karamoja region, are considered among some of the poorest in the world, with high levels of malnutrition and poverty. As many of the people living in these areas rely on the land to grow food, they are the most vulnerable to the effects caused by climate change. It is in this way that climate change impacts are unequally distributed around the world.

Many of Uganda's inhabitants have personally contributed very little to the buildup of greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere, but are suffering more than many people from richer countries who are more able to survive the changes. Predicted impacts of climate change vary in Uganda, but it is expected that rainfall patterns will change and lead to droughts, which could also have the knock-on impact of increased wildfire risk.



Kenya

Kenya, a country in East Africa, is already suffering from extreme drought which is predicted to worsen due to climate change. Prolonged drought makes it very hard to grow crops, keep healthy livestock and source drinking water. This makes planning for the future difficult, but there are lots of youth activists campaigning for positive change in the face of the climate crisis. Check out the profiles of some incredible African activists below!

Oladosu Adenike

Born
1994

Oladosu is a **Nigerian** youth climate activist who goes by the name 'The Ecofeminist', as she advocates for women and girls' rights to help prepare them in the fight against climate change. She first started campaigning to bring attention to the shrinking of Lake Chad and the impacts that had on local populations, but quickly realised that those most severely affected were women and girls. Oladosu said:

"Everyone is vulnerable to climate change; it has no identity or alliance. However, due to the close nature of women and girls to their environment within my local community, and the ways in which women rely on it for income, security and safety, we are hugely affected by the climate change crisis."

To help in her quest to fight the climate crisis, Oladosu founded I Lead Climate, which through various campaigns has engaged over 15,000 people in grassroots climate actions. She is a strong believer that if women and girls are given the training and tools to farm sustainably, they can play a big role in restoring landscapes and combatting greenhouse gas production. Waste composting and reductions in deforestation are examples of sustainable farming that Oladosu teaches people about.

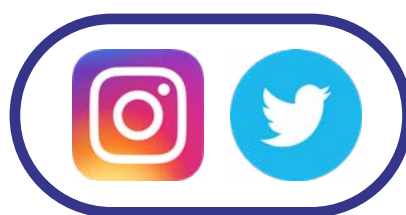
Oladosu's work has been recognised by the BBC when she was named one of their Key African Activists, and she also spoke at COP25.

More info:

- [Women and Crisis](#)
- [I Lead Climate](#)



Image credit: Twitter @the_ecofeminist

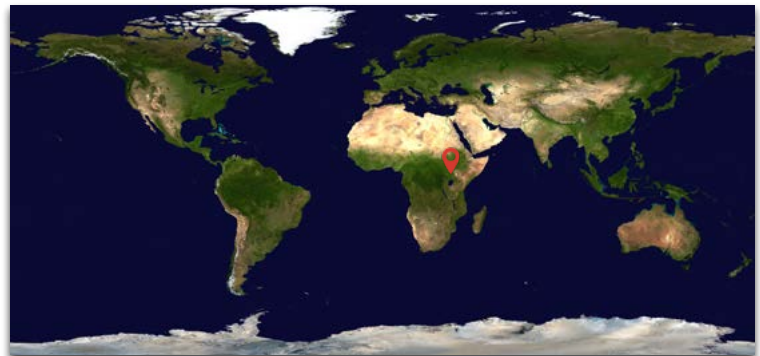


Vanessa Nakate



Image credit: Instagram @vanessanakate1

Born
1996



Vanessa Nakate is a young climate activist who has already achieved so much despite only being 24 years old! Having seen the impacts of climate change in her home country, she became the first person in **Uganda** to join in the Fridays for Future movement and strike to demand action on the climate crisis.

Vanessa was keen to highlight how the impacts of climate change are already severe in many places, particularly Africa, yet the worldwide response to combat it has been slow. Climate targets aim to limit warming of the planet to a maximum of 1.5 degrees celsius to 'reduce the impacts', however Vanessa has spoken about how a 1.2 degree increase has already caused Uganda to feel like 'hell' due to the increased droughts, floods and extreme weather events.

Vanessa has highlighted the disparity between which countries feel the impacts of climate change the most, versus which countries have contributed to the problem the most. She has spoken about how it is mainly people of colour who suffer the most severe effects of climate change and have the fewest resources to change the situation.

Vanessa herself was famously cropped out of a photo of otherwise white climate activists at a news conference and responded by fighting for her voice to be heard even harder, highlighting the environmental racism she was also fighting. She said:

"You didn't just erase a photo. You erased a continent. But I am stronger than ever."

Vanessa has also founded the Rise Up Climate Movement to help amplify the voices of African activists and particularly those of girls and women.

More info:

- [Vogue Essay](#)
- [Wikipedia](#)

Leah Namugerwa



Image credit: Twitter @NamugerwaLeah

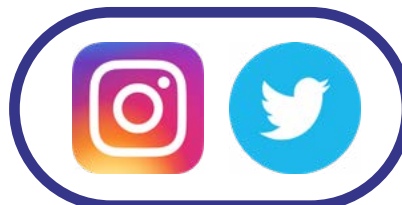
Leah is also an active member of Fridays For Future Uganda and encourages other young people to join her in school strikes. Rather than always striking outside school, Leah chooses significant locations that are suffering from environmental degradation, such as Lake Victoria, which is choked with plastic pollution.

Leah led a petition to ban plastic bag use in Uganda in an effort to reduce the massive amount of plastic waste; Uganda officially banned plastic bags in 2007 but the ban was not enforced so bag production and use continued. Alongside the petition, Leah & Fridays For Future Uganda organise regular litter picks to clean up and recycle some of the plastic waste.

Born
2004

More info:

- [Day in the life of a climate striker](#)

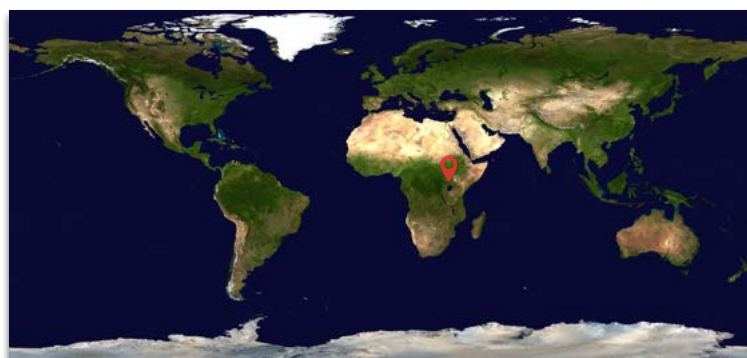


Leah Namugerwa is an incredible young activist who has planted thousands of trees as part of her project #BirthdayTrees! She encourages people in Uganda to plant trees on their birthday to help reforest our planet.

On her 15th birthday, Leah planted 200 trees, on her 16th birthday it was 500 trees and in 2021 for her 17th birthday, she planted 700 trees!



Image credit: Twitter @NamugerwaLeah



Elizabeth Wathuti

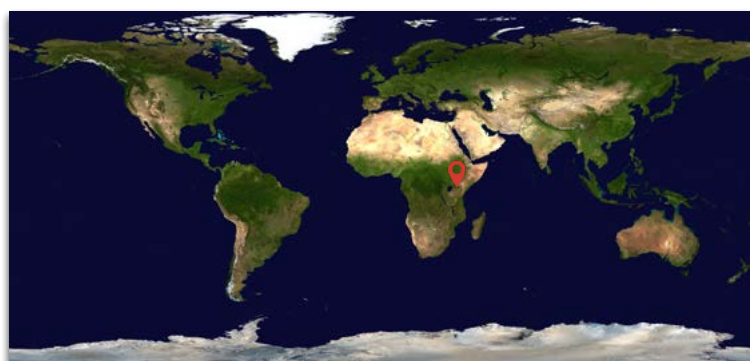
Elizabeth is a climate activist who is putting her recent Environmental Studies degree to good use! Whilst studying, she founded the [Green Generation Initiative](#) which uses tree-planting as a way to connect people to nature and teach them about climate change. Elizabeth received a scholarship from the Wangari Maathai Foundation that allowed her to establish her own tree nursery and increase how many tree-planting sessions she could run, rather than having to use her own limited funds to buy tree saplings. Elizabeth is passionate about young people setting up their own projects to fight climate change and has sound advice for any other young activists:

Starting out: 3 Top Tips

1. Know your goals. One of the most practical tips towards the start-up of any idea is to always have a clear goal and an objective of exactly what it is that you want to do. For instance, there may be a challenge that a young person has identified within their community that they want to provide a solution for, and they should always remain true to what they want to achieve.
2. Feel inspired and be supported. Another practical tip for me was having a role model, getting a mentor and having a driving force towards implementing an initial idea. The late professor Wangari Maathai has always been my role model. I also had mentors along the way who guided me through the implementation of my project, such as lecturers in the university and the support from my mum.
3. Start small and scale up. One also needs to identify the needed resources based on the activities involved in the implementation of the idea. It is always good to start with existing assets, especially if there are no readily available funds. I always believe in starting small and working towards scaling up your idea as you move. After all of this, go out there and focus on the implementation of your idea without allowing anyone or anything to hold you back.



Image credit: Twitter @lizwathuti



Elizabeth is now the Head of Campaigns at the [Wangari Maathai Foundation](#), whose aim is to “work to build social and emotional competencies, empower self development and engender collective action in the next generation.”

Born
1995

More info:

- [Open letter to world leaders](#)



Activity: Beach Clean

Inspired by the work of Leah Namugerwa & Fridays for Future Uganda, here is a guide to organising your own beach clean and attacking that plastic waste! If you don't live near a beach, a litter pick around your school or local park is a good alternative!

Things to think about:

In advance of the beach clean, there is good opportunity to think about what type and quantity of rubbish you expect to find on the beach.

Try designing your own beach litter survey sheet, so that you can tally up the types of litter that you find and hold the brands responsible accountable.

For example, tally up how many plastic Coca-Cola bottles you find and consider contacting the company about it to tell them afterwards! You can do this using Twitter or by contacting the companies directly by email.

Another thing to be sure of is carefully choosing your beach location and checking tide times before planning your trip. Some beaches still have sufficient space to clean while the tide is high.

Will you do this activity with friends or will you make it a public event that lots of people can join? There are benefits to both options, but it is worth checking out the guidance from [Surfers Against Sewage](#) as a framework to plan your own event!

Kit List

- Bin bags
- Gloves
- Hand sanitiser
- Survey forms
- Litter Pickers
- Risk assessment



Image credit: beachcleans.org.uk

The local council can provide a lot of support for beach cleans. They are often able to provide litter pickers and collect rubbish post-clean to save you having to dispose of it!