

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR CLIMATE PREPAREDNESS IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

Final Report

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Land Acknowledgement

As people of African descent, we offer this land recognition in solidarity with the Indigenous peoples as we gather today on the land which is part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples inhabited and cared for this land, and continue to do so today. In particular we acknowledge the territory of the Anishinabek, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Ojibway/Chippewa peoples; the land that is home to the Metis; and most recently, the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation who are direct descendants of the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Many of us, have come here as settlers, immigrants, newcomers in this generation, or generations past. We are mindful of broken covenants and we strive to make this right, with the land and with each other. We would also like to acknowledge those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. And so, we honor and pay tribute to the ancestors of African Origin and Descent.

We are grateful to have the opportunity to live and work on this land, and by doing so, give our utmost respect to its first inhabitants.

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Executive Summary

Black, Indigenous, racialized, and other marginalized communities in Canada are experiencing the worst effects of climate change in a country that is warming at more than twice the global rate (Canadian Medical Association, 2024). Despite being among the most affected, Black Canadians often face barriers to equitable and meaningful participation in mainstream climate conversations and decision-making processes. Using a climate justice framework, the project detailed in this report sought to challenge deficit-oriented narratives about Black engagement in climate action and to support interventions that are community-led, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of Black communities.

Through six community workshops, this project engaged 120 Black residents of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) to hear their perspectives on climate change preparedness and climate justice. The participants reflected a diversity of ages, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, and neighbourhoods, ensuring a wide range of lived experiences were represented. They shared how climate change is currently impacting their lives and communities, discussed barriers that limit Black community involvement in climate action, and co-developed ideas for future initiatives that they want to see. The workshops provided a platform for dialogue between community members and climate experts, fostering mutual learning and empowerment. This report documents the project approach, the rich input from participants across the six workshop sites, and the themes and proposals that emerged. Key findings include a widespread concern about climate impacts on

health, housing, and food security; feelings of exclusion from climate policymaking; and a strong desire for Black-led solutions and local resilience networks. Participants articulated that climate justice for Black communities must address intersecting issues like economic inequality, housing instability, and systemic racism alongside environmental threats.

The report offers several recommendations for climate change policymaking in the GTHA, grounded in participants' insights. These include practical steps to support community-led preparedness (such as establishing local hubs, culturally relevant education, and mental health supports) and policy changes to ensure Black communities are centered in climate adaptation planning (such as dedicated funding, inclusive decision-making processes, and infrastructure investments in underserved areas). Participants across all workshops highlighted the toll of climate anxiety and emotional stress, emphasizing the need for mental health supports as part of climate preparedness.

By presenting community-driven knowledge and solutions, the project aims to contribute to the development of a more inclusive climate preparedness strategy that acknowledges and builds upon the resilience and expertise within Black communities.

Introduction

Project Objective

The aim of the “Building Capacity for Climate Change Preparedness in Black Communities” project was to build on the expertise and lived experiences of Black communities in order to increase awareness about the unique impacts of climate change on Black Canadians and to identify how to support specific community needs and priorities in the face of the climate crisis. The project’s primary objective was to support capacity-building and collective resilience through hands-on workshops in five areas of the GTHA. By engaging Black residents in interactive climate preparedness sessions, the project sought to increase the involvement of Black communities in discussions around climate and environmental action and to challenge the marginalization of Black voices in climate decision-making.

The project aimed to increase awareness and preparedness for climate impacts within Black communities across the GTHA. The core objectives were:

1. Facilitate Knowledge-Sharing Workshops – Create spaces that value lived experience and explore how climate change uniquely affects Black communities.
2. Center Black Participation – Promote equitable engagement by reducing barriers to participation in environmental planning and preparedness.
3. Identify Community-Specific Needs – Capture local vulnerabilities, assets, and priorities to guide tailored climate responses.
4. Build Lasting Networks – Connect participants with Black-led organizations and local climate justice groups to continue action beyond the workshops.

Background

This project is grounded in critical environmental justice and climate justice scholarship, which highlights the realities of racialized exposure to environmental harm and exclusion from environmental policymaking. Prior research and advocacy have shown that Black communities, along with Indigenous and other marginalized groups, disproportionately reside in areas with heightened environmental and health risks, including zones of poor air quality and proximity to pollution sources (Clark et al., 2014; Tessum et al., 2021; EPA, 2018; Climate Institute, 2023). This disproportionate exposure is the result of deliberate policy and regulatory decisions which have systematically concentrated risk in and around these communities. Structural inequities – such as poverty, lower-quality housing, and limited access to services – exacerbate the climate vulnerabilities of these communities, increasing their risks from extreme weather events. Municipal climate resilience plans have often failed to prioritize equity, leaving Black neighbourhoods more vulnerable to flooding, heat waves, and other climate hazards. There is also a well-documented gap between Black communities and policymakers, stemming from a history of insufficient community engagement in policy decision-making and underrepresentation of Black professionals in climate-related fields. This gap contributes to mainstream climate solutions that inadequately reflect the needs and knowledge of Black Canadians.

This project builds on lessons from previous community-based climate adaptation work. In 2021, community consultations conducted by Dr. Ingrid Waldron and the ENRICH Project with African Nova Scotian communities highlighted barriers such as low awareness of climate risks, historical injustices, and limited access to resources (Waldron, 2021). These findings have helped inform this project. Those findings underlined that Black communities are at greater risk from climate change due to systemic inequities in housing, income, and infrastructure (ENRICH Project, 2021). With

Canada warming at an accelerated rate, the vulnerabilities created by these inequities are becoming more pronounced (Bush & Lemmen, 2019). Climate justice, as a guiding concept, links the climate crisis to civil rights and social justice, asserting that those who are disproportionately affected—often because of historical and structural factors—must be front and center in developing and benefiting from solutions (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Whyte, 2017). This project’s background research affirmed that addressing climate change in Black communities requires acknowledging how racism and marginalization intersect with environmental issues (Taylor, 2014; Pulido, 2016). It also highlighted that Black communities possess rich traditions of resilience and mutual aid that can inform climate adaptation strategies (Nelson, 2011).

Rationale

The Climate Justice Framework: The project is framed by climate justice, which recognizes that social, economic, and environmental injustices are interconnected. Climate change does not impact all communities equally – it amplifies pre-existing inequities and injustices experienced by marginalized groups. A climate justice approach insists that efforts to combat climate change must prioritize the needs and rights of communities disproportionately impacted, including Black communities. Intersectionality is a key principle: different aspects of identity (race, class, gender, immigration status, etc.) overlap to shape individuals’ and communities’ experiences of climate change. For Black communities, this means climate vulnerabilities often compound on top of socioeconomic disadvantages and racial discrimination.

Climate justice is both a concept and a movement, emphasizing how climate change is experienced unequally across social groups due to intersecting structures of inequality, such as race, gender, class, disability, and geography. For Black and Indigenous communities in particular, disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards and systemic barriers to recovery are products

of colonialism, environmental racism, and socio-economic exclusion (Agyeman et al., 2003; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). The climate justice framework emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, articulated by grassroots environmental justice activists and scholars who linked civil rights struggles to environmental harms (Bullard, 2000; Roberts & Parks, 2007). This framework:

- Recognizes climate change as a civil rights issue.
- Connects environmental harm with racial and social injustices.
- Demands that those most affected—particularly racialized communities—be central to the design, implementation, and governance of climate solutions.

It exposes the deep links between environmental racism and climate vulnerability: polluting industries and inadequate infrastructure are often located in racialized communities, making them more vulnerable to both chronic and acute climate events. Moreover, these communities face limited access to health services, insurance, disaster preparedness, and political representation—conditions that compound their climate risk.

The climate justice lens also insists on a gender-responsive approach. Women, especially racialized women, are often primary caregivers and community leaders yet are underrepresented in decision-making spaces. Feminist and ecofeminist analyses call for inclusive participation, reproductive justice, and recognition of how gendered and racialized power structures shape climate vulnerability and resilience. By embedding intersectionality into the climate discourse, the climate justice framework helps articulate tailored, community-specific responses that go beyond one-size-fits-all approaches.

The rationale for our project is that without intentional inclusion of Black perspectives, climate action will likely perpetuate and possibly exacerbate existing inequalities. By centering Black voices, the project aims to generate more equitable and effective climate preparedness strategies.

Challenging Deficit Narratives: A related rationale is to challenge deficit-oriented narratives that portray Black people as disinterested in or incapable of engaging with climate issues. By actively reaching out to Black community members and creating a dedicated space for dialogue, the project sought to validate and amplify Black Canadians' concerns and ideas about climate change. This approach reframes Black communities not as passive victims of climate change, but as active agents and knowledge-holders in resilience building. It builds on a long history of Black activism and community organizing for environmental justice—ranging from struggles against toxic siting and pollution to advocacy for urban health equity—whose contributions are often marginalized in formal climate policy and planning scholarship (Bullard, 2000; Taylor, 2014; Pulido, 2016).

Urgency and Opportunity: Lastly, the project's rationale stems from the urgency of building climate resilience as extreme weather events become more frequent, and the opportunity to do so in a way that addresses systemic inequities. Involving Black communities in resilience planning is crucial to ensure that adaptation efforts leave no one behind. True resilience requires equity and inclusion; policies developed without the input of those most affected are likely to fail or even worsen disparities. Conversely, solutions co-created with communities can leverage local knowledge and be more appropriately tailored. This project viewed the workshops as a starting point for sustained engagement – planting seeds for community-led climate initiatives and for relationships between Black communities and institutions (like city governments) that need to support them. The rationale is that by empowering Black residents through education, dialogue, and connection, we lay the groundwork for more just climate action that benefits the whole community.

Project Approach

The project organized six workshops in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), held between spring and summer 2024, in the following locations: Hamilton (two workshops), Brampton (one), Mississauga (one), Central Toronto (one), and Scarborough (one). Each workshop was designed as a three-hour session focused on climate change awareness, leadership skills, and preparedness planning. The workshops aimed to increase the participation of Black community members in conversations and actions on climate and environmental injustices, and to build on community members' knowledge of the complex and disproportionate impacts of climate change on Black communities. Our community partners assisted with recruiting participants from various backgrounds and neighbourhoods, helping to assemble groups that reflected the diversity of Black experiences in the region. By partnering with established organizations and Black community networks, the project was able to engage residents who might not typically attend environmental consultations, thus bringing new voices into the climate conversation.

Each workshop provided a structured yet collaborative environment for participants and experts to connect and learn from each other. Sessions typically began with welcomes and a Land Acknowledgement, followed by an introduction to set the stage and establish group norms. Participants were invited to share their motivations for attending and their baseline understanding of climate change. Workshops incorporated an educational component – a presentation to participants on climate change concepts and climate justice principles – to provide common ground for discussion. A significant portion of each workshop was devoted to interactive activities: participants discussed personal and community experiences with climate impacts, identified local vulnerabilities, and took part in a scenario-based exercise (the “Resilientville” simulation) to plan community responses to a climate emergency. This approach of combining knowledge-sharing with

hands-on problem-solving was intended to both inform and empower participants. By the end of each workshop, participants engaged in reflection on what they learned and were encouraged to identify at least one action or next step they would take after the session. Pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaires were used to capture changes in knowledge or attitudes and to gather feedback, ensuring the workshops were also a learning process for the research team.

In designing the workshops, we recognized the value of meeting people where they are. The content and facilitation were tailored to be accessible and relevant to community members, avoiding overly technical jargon and instead focusing on lived experience and practical information. The project's community-centric approach meant creating a welcoming space (with food, honoraria, and culturally safe facilitation) so that participants felt comfortable contributing. It also meant valuing all forms of knowledge shared – personal anecdotes, local observations, and feelings were all acknowledged as important data alongside scientific facts. This approach is rooted in the understanding that effective climate preparedness must be community-led and context-specific. The workshops were not envisioned as one-off events, but as the start of longer-term conversations and network-building. By the end of each session, facilitators provided participants with information about local resources and ways to stay involved (for example, through follow-up meetings or connections to partner organizations). In summary, the project approach centered on capacity-building – enhancing participants' understanding of climate issues and their confidence to engage – and network-building – linking individuals and groups for continued collaboration on climate action in Black communities.

Workshop Facilitators

In recognition of the importance of Black leadership and representation in the environmental sector, the project prioritized hiring Black climate experts and community leaders to facilitate the

workshops. Each workshop (or set of workshops) was led by facilitators with local knowledge and expertise in climate change or related fields, ensuring that participants could engage with role models who shared cultural or community backgrounds.

- **Hamilton (Workshop 1 and 2):** *Chúk Odenigbo* and *Sharmalene Mendis-Millard* facilitated the two Hamilton sessions. Chúk Odenigbo, Ph.D., is a Black Franco-Albertan from Calgary and holds a doctorate in Medical Geography, focusing on the intersections of culture, well-being, and the environment. His PhD thesis focused on galvanizing Black knowledges to produce public health policy. He has been recognized as one of the top 30 sustainability leaders under 30 by Corporate Knights and among the top 25 environmentalists under 25 in Canada by The Starfish. For his climate justice activism and work, Chúk was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal by the Governor General, Mary Simons. Sharmalene Mendis-Millard, Ph.D., is the Director of Partners for Action at the University of Waterloo (one of the project's community partners). She brings extensive experience in community engagement and in promoting equitable approaches to flood risk reduction and multi-hazard resilience. In the Hamilton workshops, Sharmalene also introduced participants to a web-based climate risk mapping tool (HealthyPlan.City) and guided the climate emergency scenario exercise. Together, Chuk and Sharmalene provided a mix of academic insight, practical expertise, and community-based perspective, setting an inclusive and informative tone for the discussions in Hamilton.
- **Downtown Toronto (Central Toronto) and Scarborough:** *Emmay Mah*, *How-Sen Chong*, and *Sarah Buchanan* facilitated the workshops in Central Toronto and Scarborough. All three are staff members of the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), a project partner known for its community-based advocacy on municipal environmental issues. Emmay Mah has served as Executive Director of TEA since 2019, How-Sen Chong is TEA's lead Climate Campaigner, and

Sarah Buchanan is TEA's Campaigns Director. Collectively, they have deep experience with community engagement processes and capacity-building for local climate action. Their involvement ensured that the Toronto and Scarborough sessions were grounded in current municipal climate initiatives and knowledge of on-the-ground environmental challenges in those neighbourhoods. The TEA facilitators emphasized interactive dialogue and helped participants draw connections between their personal experiences and broader policy contexts.

- **Brampton:** The Brampton workshop was supported and facilitated by *Alicia Richins*, *Janice Gairey*, and *Christopher Wilson*. Alicia Richins is a sustainability consultant and climate justice advocate with over a decade of experience working with nonprofits, social enterprises, and community organizations. She is an advocate for the UN Sustainable Development Goals and has worked extensively on sustainable development and international cooperation projects. Janice Gairey and Christopher Wilson are leading members of the Ontario Chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), another project partner. Janice Gairey is President Emeritus of CBTU and brings over forty years of experience in labour organizing and human rights advocacy. Christopher Wilson is a long-time labour and community advocate who retired from a leadership role at the Public Service Alliance of Canada after more than two decades of service. The combination of Alicia's climate expertise and Janice and Christopher's community organizing backgrounds provided a rich facilitation team for Brampton. They were able to connect climate change to issues of workers' rights, jobs, and social justice – themes particularly relevant in Brampton's discussions.
- **Mississauga:** The Mississauga workshop was co-facilitated by *Alicia Richins* (who also led the Brampton session) and *Chaz Garraway*. Chaz Garraway is a young climate scientist and

engineer, and co-founder of the Caribbean Tree Planting Project. He has worked on coastal climate adaptation and nature-based solutions, bringing a perspective that bridges technical knowledge and grassroots action. Chaz's involvement added a youth and diaspora lens to the conversation, highlighting connections between local climate issues and global impacts (such as those in the Caribbean). Together, Alicia and Chaz guided participants in Mississauga through the climate justice curriculum and scenario planning, fostering dialogue that was both scientifically informed and community centered.

Each facilitation team was briefed on the project's goals and equipped with a detailed facilitation guide and agenda tailored to their workshop location. Having Black facilitators at the helm of each session helped create a culturally responsive space where participants saw themselves reflected in the leadership. It also allowed facilitators to share personal anecdotes and examples that resonated with the audience, thereby enriching the discussions. The facilitators not only led activities but also acted as listeners and learners, often incorporating participants' insights on the fly and validating their lived experiences. This dynamic, peer-to-peer energy between facilitators and participants was a cornerstone of the project's approach, aligning with the overall goal of empowering Black communities in climate preparedness discussions.

Methodology

Participants

A total of 120 individuals participated across six workshops. Participants were Black residents of the GTHA, recruited to represent a range of ages, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, and neighbourhoods (Table#1). With the help of community partners, outreach efforts targeted Black

community members who had an interest in, or curiosity about, environmental and climate issues, regardless of prior knowledge. We sought participation from those who might not typically be involved in environmental groups—for example, elders involved in community gardening, youth leaders, faith community members, labour and social justice advocates, newcomers to Canada, and others concerned about community well-being. The result was a diverse participant pool: some were already environmentally active, while many others were engaging in a focused climate discussion for the first time. Turnout at each workshop ranged from approximately 15 to 30 people. All participants received a modest honorarium in appreciation of their time and contributions, as well as food and refreshments during the sessions. To reduce barriers to attendance childcare and transit support were offered as needed. Reflecting the differing local contexts and outreach channels, each workshop’s group dynamic was slightly different. For instance, one of the Hamilton workshops had a notable number of recent immigrants, while the Brampton session included several members of local labour unions. Participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential in the report; thus, only generalized attributions (e.g., “a participant noted...”) are used when presenting qualitative findings.

Table#1: Workshop Participation by Location

Location	Number of Participants	Key Demographics Noted
Hamilton #1	~20	Mix of ages, families
Hamilton #2	~22	Adults & youth leaders
Mississauga	~18	Strong women’s voices
Brampton	~20	Youth emphasized
Scarborough	~20	Food security stories
Toronto	~20	Housing & health focus

Project Design

The project employed a narrative and participatory workshop design to collect qualitative data on Black communities' perspectives of climate change. Each workshop was approximately three hours long and followed a structured agenda (see Appendix A for detailed agendas). The design combined educational components with interactive discussions and a scenario-based activity:

- **Introduction and Icebreakers:** Workshops opened with a welcome from facilitators, a formal Land Acknowledgement, and an overview of the workshop purpose and agenda. Ground rules were established collaboratively (e.g., respectful listening, confidentiality of personal stories). Participants introduced themselves, sharing their names, what brought them to the workshop, and their self-assessed level of climate change knowledge (often on a 1–10 scale). This segment helped build rapport and allowed facilitators to gauge the group's initial familiarity with climate issues.
- **Pre-Workshop Survey:** Before diving into content, participants filled out a short pre-workshop questionnaire. This survey collected baseline information such as their concerns about climate change, any prior involvement in climate or emergency preparedness activities, and what they hoped to gain from the session. The same survey would be administered at the end (post-workshop) to identify any shifts in understanding or attitudes.
- **Climate Justice Presentation and Dialogue:** Facilitators gave an interactive presentation on climate change and climate justice, tailored to each community's context. The presentation covered basic climate change concepts (e.g., the difference between weather and climate, examples of impacts like extreme heat, flooding, etc.), but focused on equity issues: who is

most vulnerable and why, and the idea that climate change is not “the great equalizer” but rather a threat multiplier for marginalized communities. Visual aids such as slides or maps (for instance, using the HealthyPlan.City mapping tool to show local climate risk factors) were used to illustrate points. Throughout the presentation, facilitators paused to invite input. Participants were asked questions like “What changes have you noticed in your community’s environment over time?” or “Does this information reflect what you’ve experienced in your neighbourhood?” This prompted group discussion interwoven with the presentation. In some workshops, participants shared personal anecdotes of how unusual weather had affected their health or livelihoods, making the learning more experiential. The dialogue also touched on the concept of **climate justice** – facilitators asked how Black communities might experience climate change differently and gathered participants’ thoughts on examples of injustice (such as neighbourhoods lacking green space or cooling centers).

- **Focused Discussion – Local Impacts and Vulnerabilities:** After establishing a common understanding, the group engaged in a facilitated discussion about how climate change is impacting their community and what factors influence their ability to respond. Using guiding questions, participants explored intersections of race, gender, income, immigrant status, age, and disability in shaping vulnerability to climate impacts. For example, they considered scenarios like: *Who in our community might struggle the most during a heat wave or flood?* This brought out intersectional examples (an older person living alone, a young person with asthma, a single parent, etc.). The purpose of this discussion was to identify locally relevant concerns and to shift thinking from general climate knowledge to specific community realities.
- **Scenario Activity – “Resilientville” Climate Emergency Exercise:** A central interactive element of the design was a role-playing scenario about a climate emergency in a fictional

community (“Resilientville Canada”). Participants were split into small groups and given a scenario (either a severe flood or a combined flood and power outage, depending on the workshop). Each group received a brief description of the scenario’s situation and a set of roles/goals – for instance, one group might represent community emergency volunteers with goals to shelter a number of families, while another group might represent a local health clinic trying to secure medications and services (see Appendix A for an example scenario description). Over ~15 minutes, groups worked together to devise an emergency response plan to meet their goals, discussing what resources, people, and places in their role-play scenario. After the small-group planning, everyone reconvened for a debrief. Each group shared what they discussed and how they would address needs in a real-life version of the scenario. Facilitators then led a large-group reflection, connecting the exercise to real-world preparedness: *How would we actually respond in our community if this happened? What did the exercise reveal about our community’s strengths and gaps?* Participants documented “assets” (e.g., churches that could serve as shelters, neighbours with useful skills, etc.) and needs (e.g., lack of backup power for high-rise apartments) that emerged from the scenario. This activity was very engaging and often a turning point in the workshops – it prompted participants to move from identifying problems to thinking proactively about solutions and resources.

- **Wrap-Up and Reflection:** In the final segment, participants reconvened (if they had broken into groups) and took time to reflect on the workshop. Facilitators posed questions like: *What is one thing you learned that surprised you?* and *What is one action you will take after today?* This encouraged individuals to articulate takeaways and commitments. Common responses included intentions to talk to family or friends about what they learned, to start an emergency kit at home, or to join a local environmental initiative. Participants then completed the post-

workshop questionnaire, which repeated some pre-workshop questions (to capture any changes in awareness or attitudes) and gathered feedback on the session's effectiveness and what could be improved. The workshops closed with thanks to participants, reminders to submit surveys and consent forms (required to receive the honorarium), and distribution of any take-home materials (brochures, contact lists for community resources, etc.). Facilitators also provided their contact information or that of local partners for anyone interested in follow-up. The atmosphere at the end of each workshop was typically energized and collegial, with many participants staying afterward to continue conversations or network with each other and the organizers.

Overall, the project design was qualitative, participatory, and iterative. While each workshop followed a similar structure and set of questions, the discussions were open-ended and allowed new themes to surface. This narrative methodology (Polkinghorne, 1995) enabled the research team to collect personal stories and community narratives about climate change, rather than just yes/no answers or quantitative metrics. It was well-suited to exploring the nuanced ways climate change is understood and felt in everyday life, and how community members envision solutions. The consistency in design across all sites also allows for comparative analysis – we could observe what issues were common across multiple communities versus which were unique to a particular locale.

Data Collection

In line with the project's climate justice framework, community knowledge was prioritized and respected throughout the data collection process, both during and after the workshops. The aim was not only to document participants' perspectives, but also to center their lived experiences, ideas, and expertise as essential to understanding climate preparedness.

- **Audio Recordings and Transcripts:** With participants' consent, each workshop's discussions (both full-group and, where feasible, small-group reporting) were audio recorded. These recordings captured the rich dialogue: participants' stories, their concerns, the ideas they brainstormed, and direct quotes of their perspectives. Immediately after each workshop, the audio was reviewed and then manually transcribed verbatim by project staff. These transcripts formed the core dataset for analysis, providing a detailed account of what was said at each session. Transcription was completed by project research staff, ensuring accuracy and contextual understanding of participant narratives.
- **Participant Worksheets and Notes:** During the scenario exercise and discussions, participants often wrote on worksheets or flipcharts (for example, noting community assets in an emergency, or listing vulnerable groups in their neighbourhood). These written artifacts were collected at the end of each workshop. They provided insight into group deliberations and were used to complement the verbal transcripts. For instance, a flipchart from one table might list "church kitchen – can provide meals" or "neighbour has a generator" as identified resources, which underscores points made in the discussion. All such materials were digitized (typed up) to be included in the analysis.
- **Surveys (Pre- and Post-Workshop):** The short questionnaires administered before and after each workshop included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The pre-workshop survey asked about participants' prior knowledge of climate change, their level of concern, any personal experiences with extreme weather, and what they hoped to learn. The post-workshop survey repeated a few questions (to gauge changes in self-rated knowledge or concern) and asked for feedback on the workshop (what was most useful, suggestions for improvement) as well as intentions to take any specific actions. The surveys also optionally collected demographic information. Survey data were summarized to get a basic sense of

outcomes – for example, in most workshops, participants’ self-rated knowledge of climate change showed an increase on the 1–10 scale by the end of the session, and many indicated they intended to discuss what they learned with friends/family. While these surveys provided some quantitative and evaluative data, the primary analysis for this report focuses on the qualitative outputs (since the project’s main goal was exploratory and descriptive).

- **Field Observations:** Project team members took observational notes during workshops to record contextual information (e.g., group dynamics, which topics sparked the most energy, non-verbal reactions, etc.). These notes helped interpret the discussions (for example, noting if a silence followed a particular sensitive question, or if there was visible consensus in the room on an issue). They were not formally analyzed but informed the writing of the findings section by providing context that might not be obvious from transcripts alone.

All collected data were handled with strict confidentiality. Participants’ names were separated from their responses, and audio files and transcripts were stored securely with access limited to the research team. The consent process informed participants that their de-identified quotes or ideas might be used in the final report and related publications. The study received approval from the McMaster Research Ethics Board. In this report, participants’ quotes are presented anonymously and, at most, identified by workshop location. Each workshop was treated as a distinct case, while the analysis also examined patterns across cases.

To ensure accuracy and community validation, preliminary findings from the workshops were presented back to the project’s core team and community partners (including some workshop facilitators and organizers) in a debrief meeting. This allowed those who were involved on the ground to correct any misinterpretations and add nuance to the emerging themes. In some cases, additional

input from community partners helped clarify local context (for example, providing background on a particular issue that came up in one city).

Through these methods, the project gathered a rich repository of narratives and ideas about climate preparedness in Black communities. The blending of recorded dialogue, written group outputs, and survey impressions provided both depth and breadth to our understanding. This triangulation of data sources increases confidence in the findings – for instance, a theme that appears in transcripts, on a flipchart, and in multiple post-workshop comments can be considered strongly evidenced.

Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, supported by NVivo qualitative analysis software. After transcription, all six workshop transcripts were imported into NVivo for coding and analysis. The coding framework was developed by the project lead with input from the research team, based on both the workshop guide topics and themes that emerged upon an initial reading of the transcripts.

Coding was done in two stages for rigor and comparative insight. First, manual coding: project staff read through each transcript line by line and applied codes to segments of text corresponding to predefined categories (e.g., “climate impacts – health,” “barriers – economic,” “solutions – community networks”) as well as inductively derived themes (new ideas emphasized by participants, e.g., “youth engagement”). Each transcript was coded by at least one researcher, and a second researcher reviewed the coding to ensure consistency. Second, software-assisted analysis: We used NVivo’s query and visualization tools to look for patterns across the coded data. For example, we queried which themes were most referenced in each location’s data to see if any topics were unique to one workshop or common to all. NVivo allowed the team to efficiently cross-reference themes and

identify co-occurring ideas, such as when discussions about “housing” co-occurred with discussions about “heat waves” or “energy costs.”

Throughout this process, the goal was to categorize the data according to both our initial interests and what participants themselves emphasized. The combined manual and software analysis yielded a set of key themes and narratives that capture participants’ perspectives. For instance, we noted that food security came up in multiple workshops as both a climate impact (e.g., difficulty accessing culturally important foods due to changing agriculture) and a site of community response (community gardens, food sharing). Similarly, exclusion from decision-making was a recurring narrative – participants frequently expressed feelings of being left out of policy processes, which we coded under “governance/policy” and “representation.” The analysis process attended to differences as well: for example, concerns about public transit and its linkage to emissions and mobility came up strongly in Brampton but less so elsewhere, which indicated a location-specific priority.

After coding and identifying themes, the research team compiled summaries of each major theme with supporting quotes. We looked at how each theme manifested in each workshop to understand context. To illustrate, under a broad theme like “climate impacts,” sub-themes such as health issues (e.g., asthma) were particularly salient in Brampton and Hamilton, whereas in Scarborough, personal safety during extreme weather (related to infrastructure issues) was more emphasized. The analysis was iterative – we went back and forth between the raw data and our theme summaries to ensure we were accurately representing participants’ voices. We also deliberately searched for counter-narratives or unique insights that might otherwise be lost. For example, participants in one of the Hamilton workshops expressed a notably optimistic view about community innovation, and we wanted to ensure that perspective was captured alongside more common concerns like anxiety or frustration.

The research team then convened to discuss the synthesized findings. In this meeting, we cross-checked whether the evidence supported each of the conclusions we were drawing. The preliminary findings were also shared with the broader project team, including community partners, for feedback before writing the final report. This collaborative verification step is akin to member-checking in qualitative research – it helped to validate that our interpretations resonated with those who have on-the-ground knowledge of the communities.

In summary, the data analysis process was systematic and collaborative. By coding transcripts and using NVivo for thematic queries, we were able to categorize the wealth of qualitative data into coherent findings. We identified both community-specific stories and shared experiences across workshops, which are reported in the next section. The analysis highlights unique challenges and ideas from each locale, as well as common threads that run throughout Black communities in the GTHA regarding climate preparedness. All findings presented were derived from what participants shared, ensuring that community voices remain at the forefront of the results.

What We Found

This section presents the findings from the six community workshops, organized by each workshop location. For each workshop, we summarize key themes that emerged from participants' input, including their level of climate change awareness, perceived impacts on their lives, barriers to taking action, and ideas for solutions. Direct quotes from participants are included to illustrate these points (attributed anonymously). Following the individual workshop summaries, we provide an overall discussion of common themes and unique insights.

Hamilton Workshop 1

Awareness of Climate Change in Hamilton: Participants in the first Hamilton workshop had varied levels of awareness about climate change and its effects on their city. Some attendees demonstrated a broad understanding of environmental shifts and could cite examples of local issues (such as increased flooding or industrial air pollution). Others admitted they felt less confident discussing climate change. For instance, one participant noted that climate topics are often framed in highly technical terms that “make it less accessible and personally relevant” to everyday people. There was a sense that while many knew climate change was happening in a general sense, they were uncertain about how it directly affects them or what exactly to do about it. A few participants connected climate awareness to recent experiences, like observing unusual weather patterns or hearing about climate events elsewhere, but not everyone had made the link to local impacts in Hamilton prior to the workshop.

When discussing why climate change might not be a top-of-mind issue, Hamilton participants identified multiple barriers. As one person put it, *“It’s very hard to prepare for that when you’re trying to keep above water right now.”* This sentiment captures how pressing daily concerns – such as paying bills, finding stable housing, or securing employment – often take precedence over climate issues even though these everyday issues are often impacted by, if not exacerbated by, climate change. The group acknowledged that Black communities in Hamilton face disproportionate socio-economic challenges, which limit the bandwidth to focus on abstract or long-term problems like climate change. They also pointed out structural factors: climate information and discussions tend to occur in policy or academic arenas that do not reach Black residents. Participants mentioned a lack of culturally relevant outreach and materials in languages other than English, which can exclude Francophone and immigrant members of the community. One participant commented on

representation, noting that *“Black communities are often left out of climate conversations and policymaking while facing greater vulnerabilities.”* Overall, the discussion highlighted that low engagement was not due to lack of interest, but due to systemic exclusion and more immediate competing priorities in people’s lives.

Climate Change Impacts in Hamilton: The Hamilton 1 participants identified a range of climate change impacts already affecting their community. Economic and social consequences were a prominent theme. They talked about the rising cost of living – especially housing and food prices – and how extreme weather could threaten jobs (for example, jobs in seasonal sectors like landscaping or snow removal that are impacted by weather changes). One participant noted that women in the community could be particularly affected because *“women tend to do a lot of the jobs that are taken away by climate change, so they’re the first to sort of lose economic independence.”* Flooding was widely recognized as a recurring issue in Hamilton; several people described heavy rains that have become more frequent and sometimes cause basements to flood, particularly in older low-income housing areas with outdated infrastructure. Heat waves and poor air quality from wildfire smoke (drifting into the city from fires elsewhere in Canada) were also mentioned as recent experiences that raised concern. Participants discussed how those with certain identities or circumstances – such as elderly residents, low-income families, or recent immigrants living in high-rise apartments with no air conditioning – are more exposed to these impacts. This led to expressions of fear about the future. As one person shared, *“I’m scared... I see what’s happening in the next thirty, forty years... for my children. So, what are we doing to make sure that they have somewhere to live?”* This quote reflected a broader anxiety about long-term climate impacts on their families and neighbourhoods, though some participants also struck an optimistic note about the potential for innovation and resilience.

Addressing Climate Inequities: When it came to solutions, participants in Hamilton Workshop 1 emphasized improving local involvement and preparedness. Many felt that the community itself

needed to organize rather than waiting for outside help. *“I think that [it] would be great for the city of Hamilton to have something for climate change preparedness, to list all the places that people can go to,”* one participant said, suggesting the idea of a centralized resource list for emergency shelters and services. Others agreed that having accessible, community-specific resources was important. For example, they wanted to know where cooling centres are during heat waves, how to get help if a flood displaces them, and even practical training on protecting their homes from climate risks. Several participants mentioned they would take personal steps like talking to their families about preparedness after what they learned (*“I’m going to talk to my family about what I’ve seen today”*). The group strongly supported grassroots, community-driven efforts. They envisioned local organizations, churches, schools, and businesses working together on neighbourhood climate preparedness plans. While they acknowledged the role of government, they did not want to rely solely on it. Instead, they argued for building up their own community networks. Faith-based groups and cultural community centers were seen as particularly trusted institutions that could lead preparedness initiatives or serve as hubs in an emergency. In sum, Hamilton Workshop 1 participants expressed a desire for empowerment: they wanted knowledge, tools, and networks to protect themselves, but also recognized the need for city support in terms of providing information and ensuring resources are in place for when disasters strike.

Hamilton Workshop 2

Awareness of Climate Change in Hamilton: The second Hamilton workshop had some participants with relatively high climate knowledge – notably those working in environmental or public sector roles – as well as others who were newer to the topic. A participant who was well-informed remarked on the need to delve deeper into how climate change specifically affects Black people, saying, *“I don’t think I have heard enough about how climate change is affecting... Black people.”* This highlighted a

gap in public discourse that the workshops aimed to fill. Others described tangible observations as their primary source of knowledge: for example, a newcomer to Canada mentioned noticing that since moving to Hamilton in 2012, winters have had “*barely any snow*” compared to the past, signaling to them that the climate is changing. Many in this session connected climate awareness with personal or familial experiences across borders. Some participants drew parallels between climate issues in Hamilton and those in their countries of origin (such as Zimbabwe or Jamaica), reflecting a “global-local” awareness – they had heard from relatives abroad about droughts or floods and were now seeing changes in Canada as part of the same global phenomenon. Overall, while baseline awareness varied, there was an eagerness to learn more about local impacts and a recognition that understanding climate change required considering both local and international contexts.

As in the first Hamilton session, structural barriers to climate engagement were a major topic. Participants talked about how Black and other racialized communities are frequently excluded from the conversations where climate adaptation decisions are made – whether those are city planning meetings or provincial policy forums. One group spent time discussing the challenges newcomers face in accessing information and resources before crises hit. Because some immigrants in Hamilton might not be familiar with local emergency systems or lack trust in institutions, they might not know how to get help during a climate disaster. Language barriers and the absence of outreach in culturally appropriate ways were noted. Additionally, daily life challenges again came up: immigrants, for example, might be more focused on securing housing or employment and thus have less opportunity to engage with climate programs unless these are made very accessible. The consensus was that *structural exclusion* – from decision-making, from targeted communication, and from resource access – was a key barrier that needed to be addressed to improve climate preparedness in Black communities.

Climate Change Impacts in Hamilton: The second Hamilton workshop’s discussion of impacts reiterated many concerns from the first, with additional themes. Participants spoke about health and body-related effects as a significant way they experience climate change. For instance, some mentioned that extreme weather exacerbates health issues: one person shared that a family member in landscaping had a very difficult year due to the lack of snow (meaning lost income and disrupted work patterns), and another noted hearing “*extreme heat in the summer...they have no way to cool themselves down*” from tenants in rental housing. There was also discussion of how climate changes were literally felt in people’s bodies – examples included increased respiratory issues like asthma on bad air quality days, more frequent migraines triggered by weather swings, or joint problems aggravated by dampness or extreme humidity. Participants connected these health problems to inadequate housing (like apartments without air conditioning or poor ventilation) and to broader inequities (like not being able to afford adaptive measures such as home cooling or air purifiers). Anxiety and emotional stress were mentioned again, with participants describing a feeling of being worn down by constantly “having to fight for justice on multiple fronts – climate, racial, economic, gender” simultaneously. The specter of future disasters loomed in people’s minds, contributing to a sense of uncertainty and worry about what the next decades would bring for their children. Infrastructure issues were noted too: the city’s stormwater systems and aging apartment buildings were seen as vulnerable points. People worried about whether Hamilton’s infrastructure could withstand more frequent heavy rains or heat waves and noted that those vulnerabilities were greater in lower-income or predominantly Black neighbourhoods (for example, areas with fewer green spaces or older high-rises). The cumulative picture painted was that climate change is not a distant threat for these residents – it is already affecting livelihoods, health, and local environments in noticeable ways, and these impacts intersect with existing social inequities.

Addressing Climate Inequities: In Hamilton Workshop 2, participants voiced a strong commitment to community-based action and mutual aid as key strategies for climate resilience. *“You know, it is basically about care,”* one participant said, emphasizing that caring for each other was at the heart of climate preparedness. They proposed concrete local solutions: for example, using familiar community hubs like schools, libraries, or churches as emergency centers in the event of extreme weather. The idea was that these places could store supplies or provide shelter, and community members could organize themselves to run them if external help was delayed. This was informed by a recognition that in a major disaster, official responders might take time to reach certain communities – so neighbourhoods should be ready to support themselves at least for an initial 72 hours. Participants identified existing faith-based and cultural organizations in Hamilton’s Black communities as critical networks to leverage. These groups already provide social support and could extend that role into climate emergencies (e.g., churches disseminating heat warnings and checking on seniors during heat waves). The historical perspective was also raised: one attendee noted that even when the state has neglected Black communities, those communities have a history of creating their own “survival systems,” from informal savings clubs to extended family care structures. They saw climate action as a continuation of that tradition of self-reliance and solidarity. At the same time, participants did not absolve government of responsibility. They called for greater institutional support and a shift in how governments address climate justice. Specifically, they wanted city and provincial governments to prioritize vulnerable communities in climate planning – meaning that investments and protections should first go to those most at risk (like retrofit programs for older buildings in flood-prone areas, or community cooling centers in low-income blocks). They also stressed that climate solutions must be intersectional, addressing linked issues such as housing, food security, and economic justice. One participant added that integrating Indigenous perspectives could be enlightening for climate justice, suggesting that learning from Indigenous ways of understanding the

land and community care would benefit everyone. In summary, Hamilton Workshop 2 participants converged on a dual approach: build power and preparedness from within the community and simultaneously advocate for systemic changes that acknowledge and correct climate injustices.

Brampton Workshop

Awareness of Climate Change in Brampton: Participants in the Brampton workshop generally reported having only a limited awareness of climate change prior to the session, but a strong interest in learning more. Many attendees were younger community members, and a common sentiment was that aside from hearing about climate change in school or on the news, they had not engaged deeply with the topic. *“I do not know a lot about climate change and what a great place to start,”* one participant admitted at the outset, highlighting that the workshop was their first opportunity to really dive into the issue. Another echoed that climate change was mentioned in school curricula, *“but you don’t really see how you can make policies... and also the Black perspective”* – indicating that traditional education hadn’t connected climate change to actionable steps or to their identity and community context. This gap in climate education tailored to Black experiences was in fact a driver for many to attend; a significant number of Brampton participants said they came specifically to increase their knowledge. As discussions began, participants started connecting climate change to familiar reference points. For example, some talked about noticing changes in gardening and seasonal patterns. One elder mentioned, *“I used to plant my garden on May 24th, now people are planting weeks earlier because the frost comes later,”* and worried about the future of local agriculture saying, *“I don’t know if Ontario apples will be around much longer.”* These personal observations of shifting seasons and growing conditions provided tangible context for climate change. In general, the Brampton group’s awareness evolved quickly during the workshop: initially

many felt unsure about the topic, but through storytelling and the facilitators' input, they began to see clear links between climate phenomena and their daily lives.

In exploring why, they hadn't engaged more with climate issues before, Brampton participants identified both societal and personal barriers. A key issue raised was the lack of representation and inclusivity in climate action spaces. As one participant put it, *"We don't have the certain credentials or the affluence... the people who need to be [at the table] don't have what they want to be there."*

This comment pointed to the feeling that important climate discussions are often elitist or gatekept, happening in rooms where Black community members are not present. Another added, *"I think the ones that can be heard are the ones that aren't really going through it,"* suggesting that those suffering the worst impacts (often marginalized groups) are not the ones being listened to by decision-makers.

The group discussed how climate change conversations in their city tend to occur in policy or environmental NGO circles that are predominantly white or not rooted in the community, making it hard for Black residents to connect or feel invited. On a personal level, many Brampton participants talked about economic and life pressures as a major barrier. Brampton is a diverse city with many immigrant and working-class families, and participants reflected that for someone juggling two jobs, dealing with high rent, or supporting relatives abroad, climate change can seem abstract or a "luxury issue" to worry about. *"Our focus is on urgent, material concerns like employment, housing, cost of living,"* one participant explained, *"which leaves little capacity for engaging in climate activism."* This doesn't mean the concern isn't there, but rather that bandwidth is limited. Additionally, some noted a lack of targeted information – they rarely see climate outreach that speaks to Black communities' realities in Brampton (for example, communications that address renters or multi-generational households). Together, these barriers paint a picture of why awareness and engagement have been limited: systemic exclusion from climate discourse, and the immediate demands of daily life taking priority.

Climate Change Impacts in Brampton: When asked about climate impacts, they observe or worry about, Brampton participants brought up several concrete examples that resonated with their community experience. Weather and seasonal changes were immediately cited. Many noted that winters in Brampton have become milder and with less snow over the years, whereas summers are hotter and more humid. These changes had practical implications: people mentioned higher electricity bills from running AC in hotter summers, or concerns about water supply during dry spells. Food came up as a central theme. Participants were very attuned to how climate change could affect food security and cultural foods. They talked about rising food prices (something they had experienced directly in recent years, partially attributed to climate-related supply issues) and the reduced availability of certain produce. For the Black community, access to culturally important foods (such as specific fruits or vegetables often imported from the Caribbean or Africa) was a concern, as climate change threatens agriculture globally. One participant worried that local apple varieties might decline, but others broadened this to concerns about staple foods and what would be affordable for their families in the future. Health was another significant impact area discussed. People shared anecdotes about increasing respiratory issues; for instance, a participant mentioned they had to start using an inhaler for asthma recently and had never needed one before. They wondered if worsening air quality (from pollution and wildfire smoke in summer) was a trigger. There was mention of noticing more mosquitoes as well, presumably due to warmer, wetter conditions – a nuisance that could also carry disease risks. Extreme weather events on participants' minds included the tornado that had struck near Brampton in the past and the wildfires whose smoke blanketed the region in 2023; these events made climate change feel very immediate. The group collectively felt that Brampton's rapid urban growth and development might be exacerbating some impacts (for example, loss of trees and greenspace intensifying heat and flooding runoff). Overall,

Brampton participants linked climate change to everyday disruptions – higher costs, health niggles, and uncertainty about the environment their children will inherit.

Addressing Climate Inequities: The Brampton workshop’s discussion on solutions was energetic and rooted in a sense of self-determination. Participants strongly believed that Black communities in Brampton need to lead their own climate solutions. There was a bit of skepticism towards government-driven programs; as one participant asserted, *“We need better leadership. We can’t keep letting other groups decide for us.”* There was an insistence that Black residents should be in positions of leadership when planning for local climate adaptation, with support from the city but not direction over them. Some expressed that they do not necessarily need government to organize them: *“We as the community can accomplish a lot without having to pay people to organize that,”* one person said, highlighting existing community capacity for mutual aid. However, they did want the city to recognize and resource their efforts. Practical recommendations included the city creating policies specifically tailored to Black communities’ climate vulnerabilities – for instance, programs to assist low-income households with retrofitting homes for energy efficiency or flood proofing, targeted to neighbourhoods with high Black populations. Participants suggested that municipalities should offer training and funding to develop local Black youth as climate leaders, perhaps through scholarships or leadership programs in schools. This idea emerged from a dual concern: engaging youth (who showed interest in climate activism) and ensuring sustainability of community leadership into the future. The concept of community-led resilience was championed; participants gave examples of how, during past emergencies or hardships, Black community members in Brampton had organized informally to share food, provide temporary housing, or distribute information. They cited these mutual aid efforts as models to build on. For climate preparedness, they envisioned formalizing such networks – maybe a community emergency response team composed of church groups, sports clubs, and other community associations, ready to act if disaster strikes. Another set

of solutions revolved around communication and education. Participants felt that public education campaigns about climate change should be tailored to Black communities, using relatable entry points such as the cost of living, housing conditions, and health risks. The idea was to frame climate action not as something separate, but as directly tied to daily concerns. They wanted materials in accessible language (and multiple languages spoken in the community, given Brampton's diversity) and delivered through trusted channels like community centers or local radio. In terms of infrastructure and services, Brampton participants highlighted a need for the city to invest in things that would both reduce emissions and improve quality of life – notably public transit. The group was vocal that Brampton's current public transit was unreliable and overcrowded, which discourages people from using it, thus keeping more cars on the road and more emissions. Improving transit was seen as a climate solution that also addressed equity, since many Black and low-income residents rely on buses. Finally, an important theme in their solutions was self-reliance coupled with partnership. They did not dismiss the government's role – in fact, they had clear asks for municipal government like funding community plans, creating emergency preparedness networks, and cracking down on local polluters (the Emerald Energy-from-Waste incinerator in nearby Mississauga was mentioned as a pollution source affecting Brampton and area. But they wanted these actions to be in support of, and in consultation with, the community's own initiatives. The Brampton workshop ended on a note of empowerment: participants felt that through collective organization, raising their voices to city officials, and leveraging the strength of community bonds, they could start to address the climate inequities affecting them.

Mississauga Workshop

Awareness of Climate Change in Mississauga: In Mississauga, participants generally entered the workshop with a moderate level of climate change awareness. Compared to some other locations,

Mississauga attendees – which included students, professionals, and community volunteers – had relatively high exposure to climate information. Many were aware of climate change from school, work, or media and understood basic concepts like global warming and extreme weather increasing. However, they expressed that knowing something is happening globally is different from understanding what it means locally. The workshop allowed them to discuss specific concerns in Mississauga. A prominent topic was air quality. Participants noted that air pollution has been a longstanding issue in the region (with traffic and industry contributing), and climate change could worsen it through more smog and wildfire smoke events. They also discussed the urban heat island effect in Mississauga’s built-up areas. Food security and supply was another focus; some had read or heard about climate impacts on agriculture and were concerned about how stable food prices and availability would be in the future. Overall, Mississauga participants were not starting from scratch – they had a higher baseline knowledge of climate issues – but they appreciated focusing that knowledge through a lens of racial and social equity, which was new for many. As one facilitator observed, the Mississauga group tended to quickly grasp the links between climate science and lived experience once prompted.

Socioeconomic and Racial Inequities: A recurring theme in the Mississauga discussion was how climate risks in the city are intertwined with socioeconomic and racial inequities. Mississauga is a large, diverse city, and participants pointed out that not all communities within it have the same capacity to cope with climate stressors. They noted that lower-income neighbourhoods, which often have higher concentrations of racialized families (including Black Canadians), might have less green space and older infrastructure, making them hotter in summer and more prone to flooding in heavy rains. High-rise apartment buildings – where many newcomers and people of color reside – were given as an example of structures that can become very dangerous in heat waves (if AC is not available or affordable) or during power outages. Participants also brought up that access to

information and services can vary. Those who are well-off or in certain networks find it easier to get information about, say, city cooling centers or government rebate programs for home retrofits, whereas marginalized groups might not even know these exist. *“The awareness of what help is out there is itself unequal,”* one person commented, highlighting that climate adaptation resources often don’t reach the people who need them most. The Mississauga group explored these inequities not just in terms of problems but also as motivation: they felt addressing climate change could be a pathway to also address poverty, housing quality, and transit – issues that have long needed fixing. This reflects the emerging theme that climate action in Mississauga must be coupled with social justice initiatives (improving affordable housing, public health access, etc.), otherwise it won’t be effective or fair.

Focus on Air Quality and Health: A distinctive concern for Mississauga participants was air quality. The city’s proximity to major highways and Pearson airport, as well as industrial areas, means air pollution is a daily reality for many residents. Participants discussed how climate change could compound air quality issues; for example, hotter temperatures can lead to more smog, and wildfires in Ontario or elsewhere can send smoke that lingers over the city (as experienced in summer 2023). They connected this to health, noting rising cases of asthma and allergies. Some participants either personally had respiratory issues or knew family members who did, and they wondered if climate change was partly to blame. There was also mention of extreme heat and its health impacts – for instance, the danger to seniors living alone in apartment towers without air conditioning was highlighted, aligning with what was heard in other workshops. What stood out in Mississauga was a strong interest in data and monitoring: a few participants suggested that the community should push for more localized air quality monitoring and public disclosure of climate-related health indicators (like heat illness cases), as a way to raise awareness and drive action. This perhaps reflects the slightly more technical or policy-engaged background of some attendees.

Emerging Ideas and Solutions: Given their higher baseline knowledge, Mississauga participants were keen to talk about solutions and strategies. They frequently circled back to the importance of raising community awareness in an inclusive way. One actionable recommendation that emerged was to organize neighbourhood-level info sessions or “climate preparedness fairs” in Mississauga’s community centers, targeting Black and other racialized communities, to disseminate information on issues like emergency kit preparation, accessing city services, and reducing household energy costs. Participants believed that if information were made accessible and directly tied to concerns people have (e.g., “come learn how to keep your home cool affordably in summer” rather than a generic climate meeting), more community members would engage. They also talked about policy engagement: Mississauga attendees showed interest in understanding and influencing municipal policies. Some were surprised to learn about existing city climate plans and expressed that they would want to see an equity lens explicitly applied there. They recommended that the City of Mississauga set up an advisory group or consultation mechanism specifically for Black and other marginalized community members to input on climate adaptation plans – effectively, institutionalizing inclusive decision-making. Another theme was addressing participation barriers. The group noted that it is one thing to invite people to participate, but structural barriers (like meeting times that don’t accommodate workers, or lack of childcare) often exclude people. They suggested practical fixes like holding meetings in the evenings or weekends, providing childminding, and using venues within the community (churches, cultural centers) rather than expecting residents to come to City Hall. In terms of resilience measures, Mississauga participants echoed ideas from other workshops: developing local emergency response networks, improving public transit (with the dual goal of lowering emissions and helping those without cars), and ensuring resources (like grants or incentives for home improvements) are accessible to those renting or in multi-family housing, not just homeowners. They stressed that climate initiatives should not just focus on “awareness” in the

abstract but also empower people with tools and pathways to act. The overall takeaway from Mississauga was that the community had an appetite for both learning and leading – they wanted more knowledge and communication, but they also wanted to be part of shaping solutions through equitable adaptation strategies.

Scarborough Workshop

Personal Stories and Vulnerabilities: The Scarborough workshop was one of the most storytelling-rich sessions, as participants frequently shared personal anecdotes to illustrate their points. Scarborough, being a part of Toronto with significant Black populations and many newcomer communities, brought forward stories of both local and international experience. One participant recounted a memory of a severe storm in Scarborough that had knocked out power in their neighbourhood for days, describing how isolated and unprepared they felt at that time – this highlighted a preparedness gap that became a central theme. Another discussed how their grandparents in the Caribbean were dealing with more intense hurricanes back home, connecting that with worries about relatives abroad and drawing a line between those events and extreme weather potential in Canada. These narratives made clear that climate change was not an abstract concept; vulnerabilities were felt in very human terms. Participants in Scarborough often used these stories to emphasize points about who is most at risk. For example, one woman described how during a heat wave she checked on an elderly neighbour who had no one else – a story that underlined the vulnerability of seniors living alone and the importance of community care. The sharing of stories also fostered a sense of community in the room; as they realized many had gone through similar experiences (like basement flooding, or struggling in a sweltering apartment), it built solidarity and urgency around addressing these issues.

Preparedness Gaps: A focal point of Scarborough’s discussion was how unprepared they felt the community (and city) currently is for climate-related emergencies. Several participants admitted they themselves did not have emergency kits or a plan for what to do if, say, a big flood or ice storm hit. They identified gaps such as: lack of awareness of where warming/cooling centers are, uncertainty about how to get information during a crisis (especially for those without internet or if power is out) and not knowing any organized community response teams in their area. One participant said frankly, *“We talk about these things, but if something happened tomorrow, I don’t know who I’m supposed to call or where to go.”* That sentiment resonated in the room. There was concern that city emergency services plans did not effectively reach Scarborough’s vulnerable residents – some cited the example of previous emergencies where help was slow to arrive in the outer boroughs compared to downtown. The discussion on preparedness also touched on knowledge gaps: for instance, a few participants mentioned they weren’t aware of the extent of resources available, like the fact the city might have an alert system or volunteer emergency training, implying that outreach about these is lacking in their communities.

Food Security and Community Engagement: Scarborough participants placed a notable emphasis on food security and community engagement as both an impact and a solution area. Many in Scarborough live in “food deserts” or low-income neighbourhoods where access to fresh, affordable food is already a challenge. The group discussed how climate change could worsen this by disrupting food supply chains or causing price spikes for staples – something they had observed during recent global events. They also linked it to local issues: Scarborough has many community gardens and urban farming initiatives, and participants were proud of those as resilience strategies. They shared experiences of community gardening and how it not only provided produce but strengthened community ties. One emerging idea was to expand community gardens as a climate adaptation measure, effectively turning them into hubs for sharing food during emergencies and teaching people

how to grow food. This shows how food security was seen not just as a vulnerable point but also as an opportunity for building resilience. Community engagement came up as both a necessity (they noted that without engaged residents, even the best plans won't work) and a strength (pointing out examples of how Scarborough's community groups have mobilized in the past for other issues). Participants in Scarborough seemed very keen on the notion of resource sharing – whether it was food, information, or support. The scenario exercise had likely reinforced this, as groups may have had to figure out how to pool resources. Collaboration was a word that kept surfacing; they believed that preparing for climate impacts would require collaboration not just top-down (with government) but horizontally across community organizations and neighbours.

Mental Health and Climate Anxiety: A unique aspect of the Scarborough discussion was the attention to mental health. A few participants candidly shared that the topic of climate change makes them anxious or that they have felt stress after extreme weather events. The facilitator had likely created a safe space for this, and participants used it to highlight the psychological toll of dealing with climate uncertainty on top of other stressors. They spoke about experiences of isolation – for example, someone mentioned how during a past extreme weather event they felt very alone and scared, which ties back to the preparedness gap. The theme of mental health here was twofold: first, climate change and severe events can cause trauma, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness; second, building community connections and having a plan can alleviate some of that anxiety by providing a sense of agency and support. As one of the emerging themes, mental health was recognized as part of climate resilience. Participants recommended incorporating mental health support into climate preparedness – such as having community check-ins after a disaster or including information on coping strategies in workshops. This also translated into one of their actionable ideas: developing preparedness checklists that included not just material items but also community contacts (whom to call), and tips for staying calm and safe. By discussing mental health openly, Scarborough

participants broadened the definition of climate preparedness to include emotional and psychological readiness.

Collaboration and Resource Sharing: Collaboration was practically a mantra in the Scarborough workshop. Participants repeatedly stressed that no single individual or group can handle climate impacts alone. They believed Scarborough's strength lay in its community spirit and diversity of organizations – from youth groups to faith congregations. The findings highlight that participant prioritized collaborative networks as a solution. One participant spoke about starting a neighbourhood group after realizing during a storm that neighbours didn't have a way to contact each other – a small example of grassroots organizing for resilience. Such stories fed into the recommendation that more formalized networks or committees be formed at the community level. Also, resource sharing was seen as essential: ideas like tool libraries (for equipment to deal with home repairs after events) or shared community spaces that could store emergency supplies were proposed. Scarborough's discussion painted a vision of a community prepping together: e.g., holding workshops on first aid or emergency cooking, exchanging knowledge like which local grocery stays open longest in a power outage, etc. This high level of community-oriented thinking suggests that participants see their collective efficacy as a major asset. They were not waiting passively for city officials; they were brainstorming what they could start doing among themselves. However, they did want official support in the form of checklists, training, and integration with broader city emergency plans. One concrete recommendation was to develop simple preparedness checklists tailored to households (especially for those in apartments) and to distribute them through community networks; such checklists could be a product of their workshop outcomes. By focusing on personal stories, acknowledging preparedness and mental health gaps, and zeroing in on community-driven solutions, the Scarborough workshop underscored the importance of ground-up resilience building in Black communities.

Central Toronto Workshop

Local Impacts on Housing and Health: The Central Toronto workshop (covering the inner-city area of Toronto) centered many discussions on housing conditions and health, reflecting the urban context in which participants live. Attendees from central Toronto neighbourhoods spoke extensively about how extreme heat and cold affect those in inadequate housing. For instance, residents of older apartment buildings without air conditioning recounted suffering through heat waves and noted that many buildings also lack proper heating in winter – problems that climate change could intensify with more temperature extremes. They pointed out that a significant number of Black community members in Toronto live in social housing or rental units where they do not have the power to make improvements (like installing better insulation or cooling systems). One participant shared that during the 2021 heat dome, they had to seek relief in a mall because their apartment was unbearably hot, highlighting how housing and health intersect. Health-wise, participants in Toronto mentioned concerns about urban air pollution (similar to Mississauga and Scarborough), and about mental health under chronic stressors. The density and fast pace of city life came up – a couple of participants noted that dealing with everyday urban stress (crowded transit, high rents) combined with climate worries was taxing. There were references to public health issues like the spread of illnesses (for example, the possibility of West Nile virus with more mosquitoes, or new allergies due to changing plants), tying health to environmental changes.

Intersectionality and Systemic Inequities: Central Toronto participants strongly emphasized how intersectional factors shape climate vulnerability in the city. Being a public-facing workshop possibly drawing activists and informed residents, they articulated that climate justice in Toronto must consider race, income, and other identities together. One core theme was that Black communities in Toronto often face systemic inequities – such as lower average incomes, higher unemployment, and

instances of racism in services – which make them more exposed to harm and less able to recover from events like floods or heat waves. They gave an example: a wealthy neighbourhood might have a power outage during a storm, but residents can afford to go to a hotel; in contrast, if the same happens in a lower-income high-rise, those residents have fewer options and might endure dangerous conditions. The group discussed how certain policies have historically neglected inner-city low-income areas (e.g., slower infrastructure repairs or less green investment in those areas) and how that trend must be reversed in the face of climate change. A call for inclusive decision-making was loud and clear. Participants felt that Black voices (as well as other marginalized voices) need to be included in urban planning and policymaking. Some noted that the City of Toronto was starting to talk about equity in climate plans but wanted to ensure this wasn't just lip service. They demanded concrete steps, like seats for community representatives on climate task forces, or holding consultations in accessible community venues. There was also mention of indigenous-settler dynamics – Toronto activists often include Indigenous rights in discussions of environmental justice, and a participant or two referenced learning from Indigenous stewardship practices as part of climate solutions, although the main focus remained on Black community needs.

Calls for Actionable Policies: The Toronto workshop tended to steer toward policy solutions more quickly than some others. Participants enumerated a variety of policy and program ideas they want to see implemented. For example, they talked about closing resource gaps by pushing the city to allocate more funding to climate adaptation in low-income areas: things like grants for community projects (urban gardens, tree planting, rainwater harvesting systems for apartment complexes), or establishing permanently funded cooling and warming centers in neighbourhoods with high need. They also advocated for enhancing socio-economic policies as climate policy. This means they see measures like improving affordable housing, strengthening public healthcare, and raising income supports as part of climate resilience – because those reduce underlying vulnerabilities. One

participant argued that rent control and preventing evictions should be considered climate adaptation strategies, reasoning that stable housing is critical for any preparedness plan (people can't prepare if they're constantly moving or worrying about eviction). The notion of fostering urban resilience in a holistic way was discussed: not just building seawalls or flood infrastructure, but ensuring communities have strong social safety nets and economic opportunities, which in turn makes them more resilient to climate shocks. Additionally, participants called for more aggressive mitigation and adaptation policies at the municipal level, knowing that Toronto has a climate action plan but wanting it to be more ambitious. Some actionable recommendations included: integrating green infrastructure (like more parks and green roofs in Black neighbourhoods to combat heat and flooding), expanding public transit and subsidizing transit passes for low-income residents (to reduce emissions and inequality), and implementing emergency preparedness training programs via community organizations. There was a sense of impatience – participants felt the need for tangible policy changes and programs that they could see in their communities, rather than just more studies or high-level strategies.

Inclusive Decision-Making: A consistent refrain in the central Toronto conversation was the demand for inclusive decision-making. Participants provided ideas on how to make climate governance more inclusive. For example, creating a city advisory board composed of residents from underrepresented communities to review climate and sustainability initiatives. They also suggested that public meetings on climate issues should be held in multiple languages and in community hubs (not just downtown), with proper facilitation to hear from those communities directly. One suggestion was “climate change town halls” specifically in Black community spaces, co-hosted by city officials and community leaders, to gather input on local priorities. The belief is that such inclusion will lead to better outcomes – policies that actually address on-the-ground needs and have community buy-in. There was also conversation about accountability: making sure the inclusive processes aren't

tokenistic. Participants wanted commitments that the ideas surfaced by communities would be taken seriously and integrated, not just listened to and shelved. In essence, central Toronto participants were pushing for a democratization of climate policy – ensuring that those who live the issues have a real hand in crafting the solutions. This strongly connects to climate justice principles where procedural justice (fair processes) is as important as distributive justice (fair outcomes).

In summary, the Central Toronto workshop findings highlight that participants see climate change as deeply entwined with urban equity issues. They are calling for concrete policy actions on housing, infrastructure, and social programs, and insisting that Black and marginalized communities have a seat at the table in shaping these actions. Their focus on housing and health impacts shows an acute awareness of urban climate vulnerabilities, and their emphasis on intersectionality and inclusive governance indicates a sophisticated understanding of how to pursue climate justice at the city level.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

Across all six workshops in the GTHA, participants demonstrated a complex and nuanced understanding of climate change that interweaves general awareness with lived experiences and systemic challenges (Table#2). A clear pattern emerged: while most participants had a basic or moderate grasp of climate change as a global issue, many had not previously connected it to the specific vulnerabilities and day-to-day realities of Black communities. Climate change discussions often felt inaccessible or irrelevant to them in the past, largely because those discussions did not reflect their experiences or priorities. The workshops helped bridge this gap, and participants eagerly linked climate change to tangible aspects of their lives once given the opportunity.

Overall, many participants initially had only a general understanding of climate change, and few had considered its implications for Black experiences prior to the workshops. By the end of the sessions, however, the majority conveyed a strong sense of having been *left out* of climate decision-making spaces historically, and they voiced a desire to be included. Common associations made with climate change included observable shifts in seasonal weather patterns (e.g., milder winters, unpredictable snowfall, hotter summers), rising costs of living (especially food prices influenced by climate-related supply issues), and health vulnerabilities (like increased asthma or heat stress). There was near-universal concern about extreme weather events. Flooding was top-of-mind in many communities – Hamilton and Toronto participants frequently mentioned flood experiences, and even those in less flood-prone areas acknowledged it as a worry. Air pollution and heatwaves were also prominent concerns, given recent wildfire smoke episodes and heat events, and participants connected these to direct health impacts. Wildfires were not experienced locally by most, but the smoke and the news of fires resonated as a sign of climate volatility that could reach them.

Another key finding is that participants identified competing priorities and systemic barriers as significant factors affecting their climate engagement. Throughout the workshops, people noted that economic precarity, housing instability, employment challenges, and family care responsibilities often take precedence over sustained engagement with climate change (Table#2). This was voiced powerfully in comments like (paraphrasing) “how can we worry about climate when we’re trying to survive day-to-day?” However, this does not mean participants were apathetic – rather, they expressed frustration with *feeling excluded* from climate action and decision-making processes. Many felt that mainstream climate initiatives in their cities were not designed with them in mind. Indeed, a strong sentiment was that Black communities have largely been excluded or overlooked in official climate planning. This exclusion has led to a gap in trust and communication: participants were sometimes unaware of existing resources or plans because those were never communicated

through channels accessible to them, and conversely, policymakers were not hearing the insights and needs of Black residents.

Table#2: Top Climate Concerns by Frequency of Mention

Concern	% of Workshops Mentioning	Example Quotes / Notes
Flooding	6/6 (100%)	“Basement floods every heavy rain”
Extreme Heat	6/6 (100%)	“Elders without AC are most vulnerable”
Air Quality	5/6 (83%)	“Wildfire smoke worsened asthma”
Food Insecurity	5/6 (83%)	“Groceries keep getting more expensive”
Housing Instability	4/6 (67%)	“We need safe cooling centers”

Despite these challenges, the workshops revealed a wealth of knowledge and ideas within the community. Participants across all locations frequently linked climate change to issues of social and economic justice. For instance, discussions about climate impacts naturally flowed into discussions about the high cost of housing, food insecurity, precarious work, or inadequate public transit. In the participants’ view, these are not separate issues; climate change is layered on top of and exacerbating existing injustices. This perspective led them to articulate climate change in holistic terms: not just as an environmental problem of emissions or weather, but as a force multiplier acting on inequalities in health, income, and infrastructure. It’s notable that *flooding, air pollution, heatwaves, and wildfires* – the major environmental concerns cited – were consistently framed in terms of how they would impact people’s livelihoods, homes, and health, especially among the most vulnerable in their communities.

Another common thread was climate anxiety and uncertainty about the future. Many participants expressed fear for future generations. They worried about what the next 20-30 years would hold – whether their children and grandchildren would have safe places to live, clean air to breathe, or stable food supplies. This uncertainty was often a source of emotional distress yet discussing it in a group setting seemed to also galvanize the desire to act collectively. Participants did not want to remain in fear; they wanted to channel their concern into preparedness and advocacy.

At the same time, there were moments of optimism and recognition of community strengths. Many participants recounted instances of neighbourliness and mutual aid in past emergencies (like sharing generators during power outages or checking on elders during heat waves). These stories highlight that while formal systems may have gaps, informal community support networks are a resilience asset. Indeed, one of the cross-cutting conclusions from the workshops is that Black communities in the GTHA have a strong foundation of solidarity and resourcefulness that any climate preparedness strategy should build upon. Participants repeatedly stressed that they are not passive victims; they have been adapting and supporting each other through hardships for a long time (be it through extended family networks, church groups, or cultural associations).

In summary, the workshops uncovered lots of concerns and insights. Black residents across Hamilton, Toronto, Brampton, Mississauga, and Scarborough are keenly aware of climate change when it is framed in relation to their lived experiences. They identify significant challenges – from lack of representation to socioeconomic barriers – that hinder their full participation in climate action. Yet, they also propose a range of solutions and demonstrate readiness to engage. There is a clear message that *climate preparedness must be community-centered and equity-focused* to be effective. The shared experiences across workshops (low levels of preparedness, economic instability, health and wellness impacts, infrastructure gaps, intersectional disparities, and even global connections via family abroad) reinforce the need for targeted strategies. Meanwhile, the

unique context of each community – whether it’s a particular concern about an incinerator in Brampton or the role of community gardens in Scarborough – highlights that one-size-fits-all solutions won’t work; localized approaches are essential.

Contributions to Knowledge

The findings from this project contribute to knowledge in the field of climate justice and community resilience in several important ways. Firstly, these workshops provide one of the few in-depth qualitative examinations of Black Canadians’ perspectives on climate change. There is a noted gap in climate research regarding the experiences of Black communities. By filling this gap, the project adds to our understanding of how race, socioeconomic status, immigration history, and language intersect to shape experiences of climate vulnerability and capacity. Participants’ perspectives underscore that climate vulnerability is not just about geography or physical exposure, but also about social position. For example, even within the same city facing the same weather event, outcomes can differ dramatically between a wealthy neighbourhood, and a lower-income, predominantly Black one. The workshops thus highlight the need for climate research and policy to incorporate a more intersectional analysis—one that considers how multiple axes of identity and inequality (race, class, gender, etc.) compound to affect climate risk and resilience.

A key contribution is the insight into entry points for climate literacy and engagement among marginalized communities. Traditional climate change communication often leans on scientific data or abstract future scenarios. However, participants in our workshops showed that their “entry ways” into understanding climate change were through tangible, everyday experiences. Many participants described how things like tending a garden, shopping for groceries, or noticing changes in seasonal weather were their first cues about climate shifts. By documenting these entry points, our project suggests that climate education can be more effective when it starts from familiar touchpoints—

such as food, weather, or health—rather than purely technical information. Furthermore, the data indicate that framing climate conversations around concrete local issues—such as flooding in one’s neighbourhood or the rising price of certain foods—resonates strongly and can make discussions more relevant to those who might not initially see climate change as a personal issue (Scannell & Gifford, 2013).

Another contribution to knowledge is the expanded definition of climate justice articulated by participants. In the dialogues, participants consistently moved the conversation beyond carbon emissions to talk about economic justice, housing security, food sovereignty, and public health as integral to climate justice. This reflects a shift in how climate justice is understood at the community level: it’s not only about mitigating climate change or distributing climate impacts fairly, but also about addressing the root social inequities that exacerbate those impacts. The workshops revealed that for Black communities, climate action divorced from issues like housing affordability or healthcare access is incomplete. Participants effectively argue for a holistic approach to climate justice that could be termed “*community justice*”—one that simultaneously tackles environmental threats and long-standing social inequities. This perspective contributes to academic and policy debates by emphasizing that adaptive capacity in communities’ hinges on factors like housing stability and social cohesion. For instance, a community with strong mutual aid networks and secure housing will likely fare better in a crisis than one without, even if both face the same physical hazard. Thus, integrating social policy improvements (e.g., anti-poverty measures, tenant protections) into climate adaptation plans is an innovative takeaway from these discussions.

The project also adds to knowledge on effective community engagement strategies for climate resilience. The success of these workshops in eliciting rich information suggests that collaborative, narrative-based approaches can yield deeper insights than standard surveys or top-down consultations. Many participants remarked that they had never been asked these kinds of questions

before, which indicates that traditional engagement processes may have been insufficient. Our methodology demonstrates the value of safe, culturally affirming spaces where people feel their input is genuinely valued. The findings show that when given the forum, Black community members are ready to move past being “consulted” to being co-creators of solutions. This informs best practices for participatory planning: for example, future climate initiatives could use workshop methods, scenario planning, and facilitated storytelling as tools to involve marginalized communities meaningfully. By documenting this process, we contribute a case study of empowering engagement that can be replicated or adapted elsewhere.

Moreover, the data shed light on perceptions of government and institutions from the viewpoint of Black residents in climate contexts. Participants in our study distrust processes that exclude them or policies that are made for them without them, but they are eager for institutions to step up in ways that enable community leadership (for example, funding Black-led initiatives, or mandating representation in decision-making). This aligns with procedural justice scholarship, which shows that people are more likely to trust and accept policies that they have a hand in shaping, because fair and inclusive processes enhance legitimacy and compliance (Tyler, 1990; Dietz & Stern, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2016). It also provides a cautionary note that climate policies imposed without community buy-in may fail or face resistance, a dynamic widely documented in climate adaptation and environmental governance research (Adger et al., 2005; Few et al., 2007).

Finally, the cross-community analysis in this project contributes a comparative lens to the understanding of urban climate justice. While much environmental justice research is site-specific, our multi-site approach shows patterns across a metropolitan region. It highlights which climate justice issues are systemic (e.g., feelings of exclusion, concern for future generations, the interplay of housing and heat) versus which are locality-specific (e.g., particular industrial polluters like the Emerald incinerator mentioned in Brampton). This kind of comparative insight is valuable for regional

policymaking; it suggests that some interventions, such as improving multi-lingual climate communications or incorporating equity assessments in all city climate projects, would have broad benefits, while others need tailoring to community conditions.

Table#3: Barriers to Climate Preparedness

Barrier	Description	Example Participant Input
Exclusion from Decision-Making	Black voices often missing in climate policy spaces	“Decisions are made for us, not with us.”
Economic Challenges	Low income, job insecurity, housing instability	“I can’t focus on climate when I am worried about rent.”
Information Gaps	Lack of tailored resources, inaccessible formats	“We don’t get info in our languages.”
Low Trust in Institutions	Rooted in histories of neglect and discrimination	“Why would we trust policies that never include us?”

In sum, this project’s findings enrich the knowledge base by centering Black community voices in climate discourse. They affirm much of what climate justice theory posits – that those on the frontlines have important knowledge to share – and provide empirical evidence from a Canadian context to back it up. They also push the envelope by detailing a vision of climate preparedness that is deeply integrated with community empowerment and systemic change. Researchers and

policymakers can draw on these insights to design more equitable climate adaptation strategies that truly leave no one behind.

Recommendations

Based on the workshop findings, we propose a set of recommendations to improve climate change preparedness and resilience in Black communities in the GTHA (Table#4). These recommendations are divided into two categories – practical community-level actions and broader policy measures – although there is overlap between the two. The guiding principle behind all recommendations is to center the needs, knowledge, and leadership of Black communities in climate action. Implementing these suggestions will require collaboration among community organizations, municipalities, and other stakeholders, and should be pursued in ways that empower local residents.

Table#4: Community-Driven Solutions

Solution Area	Description	Example Workshop Idea
Black-led Networks	Community hubs as resilience centers	Use churches/libraries as emergency shelters
Culturally Relevant Education	Climate info tailored to Black communities	Flyers, social media in multiple languages
Housing & Economic Supports	Infrastructure and financial resilience	Community gardens, retrofits, cooling centers
Mental Health Supports	Addressing climate anxiety & stress	Peer support circles

Youth Engagement	Fostering next-gen climate leaders	Training programs, youth ambassadors
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Practical Recommendations

1. Establish Community-Led Climate Resilience Networks: One of the clearest calls from participants was for community-driven organization around emergency preparedness. A practical step is to establish local climate resilience or emergency response networks in each community (e.g., a Hamilton East Climate Resilience Network, a Brampton West Preparedness Team, etc.). These networks would consist of residents, community leaders, churches/faith groups, and local NGOs who come together to plan for climate emergencies. They could organize regular meetings or workshops to develop neighbourhood-specific preparedness plans. For example, networks can identify community volunteers who will check on vulnerable neighbours during heat waves or storms, create phone trees or groups for urgent communications, and designate community spaces (like libraries or places of worship) as emergency gathering hubs. These networks should be Black-led or co-led by those from the community, ensuring cultural relevance and trust. Municipalities and emergency management offices can support by providing training (in first aid, basic disaster response, etc.) and resources (like printed guides or modest funding) to these networks. By formalizing what might otherwise be informal mutual aid, communities strengthen their capacity to respond quickly when official services might be overwhelmed or delayed.

2. Develop Culturally Relevant Climate Education and Communication: Participants made it clear that typical climate change messaging doesn't adequately reach or resonate with Black communities. Therefore, we recommend launching culturally relevant public education campaigns and programs. These should frame climate change in terms of issues people care about in their daily

lives – for example, workshops or pamphlets on “Climate Change and Your Health” or “Preparing Your Home for Extreme Weather” that explicitly address concerns like asthma, food costs, or home insurance. Materials must be available in multiple languages spoken by Black immigrant communities (French, Somali, Arabic, Haitian Creole, etc., depending on the locale). Using diverse channels is crucial: community radio, ethnic media, social media groups, and outreach through community centers can complement mainstream outlets. The content should highlight Black experiences and contributions (for instance, featuring stories of Black residents making their communities greener or safer). Partnering with local influencers – such as pastors, hair salon owners, or youth mentors – can help tailor and disseminate messages effectively. Another aspect is to incorporate climate topics into existing community programs. For example, a health fair can include a booth about extreme heat safety, or a financial literacy class can cover the importance of renters’ insurance in flood-prone areas. By embedding climate education within familiar contexts, we normalize the conversation and improve awareness. Additionally, establishing a feedback loop is important: communities should have a way to ask questions and get information (like a dedicated helpline or community liaison officer for climate issues). Overall, the aim is to meet people where they are with climate communication.

3. Strengthen Economic and Housing Resilience: At a practical level, improving economic and housing resilience will directly boost climate resilience for Black communities. Specific recommendations include: (a) Support community gardens and local food programs. Many participants saw community gardening and food sharing as a solution to food insecurity worsened by climate change. Municipalities and community organizations should expand allotment garden programs, provide resources like seeds and tools, and possibly create community kitchens that can be activated during emergencies to provide meals. (b) Promote household and tenant preparedness. Develop a campaign for creating “climate-ready homes.” This can involve distributing or subsidizing

emergency kits (with flashlights, batteries, first aid, etc.) to low-income households, running how-to sessions on preparing for power outages or evacuations, and ensuring tenants know their rights and resources (for instance, that landlords are obligated to maintain safe temperature levels). Materials like fridge magnets or checklists in apartment lobbies with steps to take during extreme weather would be simple but useful. (c) Facilitate access to cooling and heating resources. Prior to summer, run a “Keep Cool” initiative: donate or discount fans and air conditioning units to vulnerable residents, set up air-conditioned public areas (community centers or libraries with extended hours) and widely publicize them. Similarly, in winter, ensure coat and heater drives reach those in need. Some community centers could be equipped as resilience hubs with backup generators to provide charging stations and climate refuge during outages. (d) Financial resilience workshops. Offer community workshops on financial preparedness for climate impacts – for example, information on insurance (what is covered in renters’ insurance, how to file claims after damage), government assistance programs after disasters, or tips on saving for emergencies. By improving economic stability and housing conditions, these steps reduce the immediate burdens that make engaging with climate action difficult, and they equip individuals and families to better weather the shocks that may come.

4. Mental Health and Climate Anxiety Support: An often-under-recognized practical need is addressing the mental health aspects of climate change. Given the climate-related anxieties and trauma expressed, communities should integrate mental well-being into preparedness efforts. This can involve training community leaders or volunteers in psychological first aid, so they know how to support neighbours emotionally during and after crises. Creating spaces for dialogue (support groups or healing circles) about eco-anxiety and grief can help validate feelings and share coping strategies. Culturally competent counselors or faith leaders could facilitate these, acknowledging both the emotional and spiritual dimensions of coping. Additionally, public health units could

collaborate with community organizations to disseminate materials on managing stress and anxiety related to extreme weather events (e.g., how to talk to children about scary weather news, signs of trauma and where to get help). By normalizing conversation about climate fears and stress, communities can build emotional resilience. People who feel supported and less alone in their worries are more likely to participate in action. One actionable idea is to incorporate a short session on coping with stress in every climate workshop or training – ensuring that “preparedness” is understood to include mental preparedness. This recommendation recognizes that resilience is not just physical or infrastructural, but also psychological.

5. Youth Engagement and Leadership Programs: To sustain climate preparedness efforts, engaging Black youth is crucial. Practically, we recommend establishing youth-focused climate leadership programs in these communities. This could take the form of after-school clubs, summer internships, or volunteer brigades that focus on climate and environment. For example, a “Youth Climate Ambassadors” program could train high school and college students in climate science basics, community outreach skills, and project management, then support them in executing neighbourhood projects (like tree planting, energy audits for elders, or awareness campaigns on recycling). Such programs would not only build skills and resume experience for youth but also leverage their creativity and passion. Participants specifically mentioned scholarships and incentives for youth – partnerships with local colleges or foundations could provide scholarships for students who contribute to community climate initiatives or study environmental fields. There’s also an intergenerational benefit: youth can help bridge technology and information gaps (for instance, helping seniors sign up for emergency alert systems on smartphones, or creating social media content to share information in emergencies). Ensuring that Black youth see role models in this space is important; the facilitators we hired served that purpose during workshops, and we can extend that by involving those facilitators or other Black professionals as mentors in youth programs.

Over time, this investment in youth will cultivate a new generation of Black environmental leaders who carry forward the work of climate justice in their communities.

In sum, these practical recommendations focus on community empowerment, resource accessibility, and skill-building. They are actionable steps that communities and local governments can begin implementing immediately, many of which build on existing structures (like community centers, churches, and schools). Importantly, each recommendation should be implemented *with* the community, not imposed *on* the community. Black community members should be in decision-making roles in designing these programs to ensure they meet actual needs and build on local strengths. By following these practical steps, the GTHA can make significant progress in closing the climate preparedness gap identified by participants, fostering resilience that is socially inclusive and locally driven.

Policy Recommendations

1. Integrate Black Communities' Leadership into Climate Governance: At the policy level, a top recommendation is to formalize mechanisms for Black community leadership and input in climate planning processes. Cities (Toronto, Hamilton, Brampton, Mississauga, etc.) should establish advisory committees or working groups specifically focused on climate justice, composed of representatives from Black and other marginalized communities. For instance, a Climate Equity Advisory Board at the City of Toronto could review and influence the city's climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, ensuring policies are filtered through an equity lens. These bodies must have real power – such as the mandate to make recommendations directly to council and have responses within a set period. Additionally, municipalities should consider hiring dedicated Climate Justice Liaisons or Officers whose role is to engage with Black communities, advocate for their concerns internally, and ensure follow-through of recommended actions. This recommendation aligns with

participants' calls for inclusive decision-making and will help rebuild trust in institutions. On a provincial level, given that climate and emergency management often involve provincial agencies, the Ontario government could establish a task force on climate preparedness in vulnerable communities to drive a province-wide strategy, again with strong Black community representation. Ultimately, policies should mandate that any climate-related program (be it a green infrastructure project, a public awareness campaign, or disaster response plan) involve consultation and co-design with the communities most affected, shifting from tokenistic consultation to collaborative governance.

2. Provide Funding for Black-Led Climate Initiatives: A critical policy recommendation is to allocate dedicated funding and resources to Black-led organizations for climate action. This addresses the participant insight that Black communities often lack access to funding to implement their own solutions. Municipal and provincial governments, as well as philanthropic foundations, should create grant programs earmarked for community-based climate resilience projects in Black neighbourhoods. For example, a city could have a “Community Climate Resilience Fund” that annually supports projects like creating cooling centers in churches, expanding urban agriculture in food-insecure areas, running local emergency preparedness training, or launching youth green job programs – all led by local community organizations. By trusting and funding these organizations directly, policy shifts the dynamic to enable self-determination. In addition, policy could include multi-year core funding for capacity building: not just one-off project grants, but sustained support to grow the infrastructure of Black environmental organizations (staff, training, etc.). In practice, this might look like: the City of Hamilton partnering with a Black community hub to turn it into a resilience hub with a multi-year funding agreement for operations; or the province funding CBTU or TEA to scale up their outreach in Black communities specifically around climate adaptation. Also, consider establishing micro-grant programs that are low barrier (simple application, available to informal

groups) so that even small neighbourhood initiatives (like a tenant association wanting to set up rain barrels or a youth group doing a tree-planting drive) can access resources. By investing financially in Black communities' climate capacity, governments would be acting on the principle that those closest to the issues are best positioned to lead solutions – a principle voiced by participants and echoed in environmental justice literature.

3. Targeted Climate Adaptation Policies for Vulnerable Neighbourhoods: City planners and provincial policymakers should refine climate adaptation plans to explicitly target and prioritize the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, many of which are home to large Black populations. This means performing equity mapping as part of adaptation planning – overlaying climate hazard maps with socio-demographic data to identify hotspots of risk. Then, direct disproportionate investment and interventions to those areas. Concretely, policies could include: (a) Accelerating infrastructure upgrades in at-risk communities (e.g., stormwater system improvements in areas known for basement flooding, more green space and tree canopy in heat-vulnerable urban pockets). (b) Enforcing stricter building standards and property maintenance in low-income rental housing – for instance, mandating landlords to provide cooling spaces or backup power for elevators in high-rises, with government subsidies or incentives to help them comply if needed. (c) Expanding affordable housing and decentralizing services as a climate strategy: as participants noted, stable housing and access to local services are key to resilience, so policies that support public housing retrofits (to be energy-efficient and climate-resilient) and build new affordable housing in climate-safe locations are crucial. (d) Developing neighbourhood emergency management plans in partnership with community leaders and publicizing them. The policy should be that no neighbourhood is left without a documented plan known to residents. As part of this, cities can create registries for residents who might need special assistance during emergencies (like those with medical conditions or mobility issues) – done sensitively with community trust. These targeted adaptation efforts require that

climate and emergency management agencies change their approach from universal policies to equity-focused policies, which ensure that those with greater needs get greater attention and resources. Such an approach helps rectify the current situation participants described, where wealthier areas effectively enjoy better protection and recovery due to more resources.

4. Strengthen Public Transit and Sustainable Mobility in Underserved Areas: One policy lever with multiple co-benefits (climate mitigation, adaptation, and social equity) is improving public transit and mobility options in Black communities. Participants highlighted public transit improvements as both a climate solution and a way to reduce everyday burdens. Cities and the province (which often funds transit) should adopt policies to dramatically enhance transit service frequency, reliability, and accessibility in areas with high transit-dependent populations. This might mean adding bus routes or increasing service in certain suburban areas of Brampton, Scarborough, or North Etobicoke where many Black residents live, so that people have viable alternatives to cars (reducing emissions) and can evacuate or travel to cooling centers in emergencies even if they don't own vehicles. Policies could also support electrification of bus fleets and installation of bus shelters with cooling features (like misting or fans) in extreme heat, focusing first on stops in neighbourhoods with many vulnerable transit users. Additionally, incorporating *resilience routes* – designated transportation routes that are cleared or prioritized during emergencies – into city planning would ensure communities aren't cut off. Another aspect is funding safe active transportation infrastructure (bike lanes, well-lit walking paths) in these neighbourhoods, making it safer and easier for those who choose to bike or walk (which some may need to do if transit is disrupted during disasters). By viewing public transit as a lifeline service (akin to healthcare or utilities) especially in extreme weather, policy can enshrine support that, for instance, during a declared emergency, public transit is free to enable people to get to safety. In everyday terms, reducing the cost burden (through discounted transit passes for low-income riders or youth) is also an equity move that came up in workshops. Efficient, affordable transit

strengthens community connectivity and reduces one aspect of vulnerability (lack of mobility), making this a key policy recommendation with wide-reaching impact.

5. Enforce and Enhance Environmental Health Protections: Many participants raised concerns about local environmental health hazards (e.g., incinerators, air pollution, flooding of polluted sites) that disproportionately affect Black neighbourhoods. Policy responses should include stronger environmental health regulations and targeted enforcement in these areas. For example, the province could tighten emission standards for facilities like the Emerald Energy-from-Waste incinerator and increase monitoring of air and water quality in adjacent communities. There should be a mandate for transparency: public reporting of pollutant levels in simple terms, and accessible forums for residents to voice concerns. Municipal zoning and land-use policy should prevent the clustering of noxious facilities in low-income or racialized areas (a classic environmental justice issue), and gradually, cities should work to remediate and green buffer zones around existing ones. Another piece is focusing on health services: ensure that health agencies track and address climate-related health inequities (for instance, if asthma ER visits spike in certain neighbourhoods during smoke events, that should trigger targeted interventions like air purifier distributions or clinics on asthma management). At the policy level, integrating climate considerations into public health planning is crucial – the health sector should have specific strategies for heatwaves, poor air quality days, vector-borne disease, etc., that prioritize outreach to vulnerable communities with culturally appropriate methods. Additionally, policies could explore support for households to adapt – e.g., rebates for air filtration devices or flood-proofing basements, with higher rebates or fully subsidized options for lower-income brackets. Lastly, including climate risk in infrastructure planning means not building new projects that would increase exposure; for instance, don't permit new residential developments on floodplains that house vulnerable communities without massive mitigation.

6. Research and Data Equity: A subtle but important policy recommendation is to improve data collection and research on climate impacts with an equity lens. Governments should invest in research that disaggregates data by race, income, and neighbourhood to better understand how, for example, heat-related illness or property damage from extreme weather is distributed. This recommendation stems from participants noting that their experiences often feel invisible in official narratives. By collecting and publicly sharing data on which communities are hardest hit, and which are underserved in preparedness, policymakers can be held accountable. Perhaps establishing a Climate Justice Index for cities – a metric that rates and tracks progress on addressing climate vulnerability in marginalized communities – could be a policy tool. This could feed into budget decisions (e.g., more funding to departments or initiatives that show improvements in the index). Moreover, supporting community-based participatory research (as this project did) can ensure policies are informed by lived experience. Policymakers might fund community groups to do their own local climate risk assessments or storytelling projects, then use those findings to guide policy adjustments. By valuing qualitative data (stories, testimonials) alongside quantitative, policy development can be more responsive. In short, more equitable data practices will lead to more equitable policies because they illuminate the specific gaps that need addressing.

In implementing these policy recommendations, it's crucial to adopt a lens of “nothing about us without us.” Black communities should be involved not just as consultees but as shapers and implementers of policies, possibly through co-management of certain programs. The policy changes suggested – from governance structures and funding allocations to targeted adaptation and stricter environmental protections – collectively aim to remove systemic barriers and prioritize those who have been marginalized. When policies center those typically pushed to the margins, the overall resilience of cities improves, because the solutions tend to be holistic and inclusive. Moreover, these policy shifts have the potential to serve as models for other municipalities in Canada and beyond,

demonstrating what climate justice can look like in practice at the local government level. By heeding the insights of the community, the GTHA can take leadership in forging a climate-resilient future that is equitable and just.

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