Global Indigenous Data Sovereignty Conference 2025 Communique

31 March – 3 April 2025, Canberra, ACT, Australia

This Communique is addressed to individuals and entities involved in the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination, and reuse of data and data infrastructure globally.

The Communique reports the outcomes of the Global Indigenous Data Sovereignty Conference (GIDSov 2025) convened by Maiam nayri Wingara and Yardhura Walani, the National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Research at the Australian National University on Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country from 31 March to 3 April 2025. More than 250 Indigenous peoples from Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Pacific islands (diaspora), Canada, Kenya, Mexico, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Sweden, United States, and Vanuatu met 1-2 April. On 3 April representatives from nation state government agencies joined the discussions.

GIDSov 2025 provided an opportunity to collectively reflect on IDSov and IDGov progress made and barriers to implementation experienced by Indigenous Peoples around the world since the first gathering in 2015, where IDSov was conceptualised and the seminal text *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an agenda* (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016) was compiled.

In the decade since, Indigenous peoples, communities, and entities have developed Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDSov) principles and are actively implementing Indigenous Data Governance (IDGov) to assert ownership and control over their data. Globally, IDSov and IDGov have gained momentum as essential to developing effective approaches to addressing significant threats to Indigenous peoples, lands and cultures, values, and ways of being.

The gathering reinforced the following key points:
- IDSov is fundamental to self-determination as Indigenous data in Indigenous hands is power.
- IDGov frameworks are emerging globally and are shaped by the enactment of IDSov in local contexts.
- Non-Indigenous nation-states, institutions, and data-related entities continue to maintain control over most Indigenous data and are struggling with effective IDGov implementation.
- Investment in Indigenous data infrastructures and workforce development remains a pressing challenge, now and into the future.
- While IDSov networks are expanding worldwide, the movement is not yet truly global.
- Indigenous protocols are essential for governing emerging technologies and optimising Indigenous benefits, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, genomics, big data, and digital identities.

Indigenous Peoples' rich history as data-knowers forms the foundation for asserting data sovereignty today. IDSov continues the knowledge practices that Indigenous Peoples have upheld since time immemorial. The concept is neither new nor foreign. IDSov represents another chapter in the long history of Indigenous resistance and resurgence, connecting to broader struggles for self-determination and nation (re)building.

Founded on these ambitions, the presentations and discussions at the Indigenous GIDSov 2025 identified three foundation actions for effective IDSOV and IDGOV at the nation state, First Nation and local levels for the future.

1. Advancing Indigenous Data Priorities

Indigenous-led data initiatives produce relevant and distinct priorities, data types, and outcomes grounded in millennia of lived knowledge. Unlike nation-state-driven approaches, it generates needed, nuanced, place-based data that reflects Indigenous realities. GIDSov 2025 highlighted how state government data systems, shaped by administrative boundaries, often misalign with Indigenous geographies, prompting a need to (re)design data infrastructures that reflect Indigenous priorities.

Indigenous communities use IDGov to reshape relationships with research institutions, prioritising data that serves their needs over academic interests. In this context, IDSov becomes a framework for self-determination, supporting Indigenous control over data throughout the data lifecycle.

Around the world, Indigenous Peoples are developing IDGov structures that reflect their values and aspirations. A growing international IDSov network is fostering solidarity and knowledge-sharing. Communities are at different stages of their data journeys, with many creating practical tools to guide others. The strength of IDSov lies in balancing local action with global connection. Effective IDGov must be community-led and rooted in Indigenous histories, relationships to land, and cultural protocols, not imposed from outside.

2. Addressing Systemic Barriers to Indigenous Data Governance

Non-Indigenous control over Indigenous data remains a significant barrier to meaningful IDGov. Although some repatriation efforts are underway, most Indigenous data continues to be held by colonial government agencies, institutions, and archives, often managed through opaque systems that make access difficult. True repatriation requires transparency—institutions must clearly communicate what Indigenous data they hold and enable its return. While governments increasingly adopt the language of IDSov, few are willing to transfer actual authority to Indigenous Peoples. This growing interest from state actors and non-Indigenous sectors raises concerns about the co-option and dilution of IDSov principles. Protecting their integrity a critical priority.

Government institutions continue to frame IDGov through a deficit lens, portraying Indigenous Peoples as problems to solve rather than partners in progress. This outdated approach overlooks the substantial health, social, economic, and environmental benefits of Indigenous control over data. Superficial inclusion—such as placing Indigenous representatives on advisory boards without decision-making power—does little more than improve optics, while extracting unpaid labour from Indigenous experts. Structural change is urgently needed. Without it, Indigenous Peoples will remain subject to the same institutional barriers for generations to come.

3. Building Indigenous data capability: Investing in Indigenous Data Governance

Realising IDGov requires significant investment of time, energy, and resources to build the skills, infrastructure, and support systems Indigenous communities need to govern their data effectively. Indigenous organisations are best placed to lead culturally relevant education and training initiatives. Capability building should be integrated into the data repatriation process and funded by governments and non-Indigenous institutions that have collected and continue to hold Indigenous data. Importantly, Indigenous data must inform the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies that affect Indigenous Peoples.

There is also a growing need to develop Indigenous protocols for emerging technologies—particularly artificial intelligence—to ensure they uphold the principles of IDSov. Non-Indigenous allyship is vital in supporting Indigenous leadership and amplifying Indigenous voices. As marginalised communities confront systemic barriers and entrenched power structures, collaborative efforts are essential to shift the status quo and build a just data future.

Walking backwards into the future

GIDSov 2025 provided an opportunity to reflect on the decades of work by Indigenous Peoples that have supported the development of the IDSov movement. While the definitions of IDSov and IDGov are set, a challenging implementation stage lies ahead. There will undoubtedly be resistance as the implementation of IDSov and IDGov continues to challenge existing colonial power structures. It is vital to keep building from the ground up, prioritising the development of community expertise in IDSov and IDGov - with or without support from imposed nation-states.

There is also tremendous cause for hope. The innovation, creativity, and determination evident at GIDSov 2025 demonstrate that Indigenous Peoples are leading the way in reimagining ethical data ecosystems that are generative and beneficial for communities and the world. As Jonathan Dewar (Huron-Wendat Nation) said in his keynote:

> "*The future is uncertain. However, we know we will walk tall into that future. We will carry values, teachings, worldviews, ways of being, tools from time immemorial, and newer technologies that we develop or pick up along the way. We are certain we will be carrying these things.*"

As the global movement for IDSov grows, the collective wisdom, determination, and vision shared at GIDSov 2025 will guide our journey toward data ecosystems that honour Indigenous rights and knowledge systems. To continue the momentum and conversations shared at GIDSov 2025, the next GIDSov will be held in Canada in 2027.