ABSTRACT

Over the past nine years I have worked with First Nation communities on education and economic projects. Through this work I have developed an interest in the strategies that are utilized to promote development. I have realized that the context that the community is situated in has a great deal of influence upon the success or failure of a project. For these reasons, I have chosen to conduct a literature review of materials pertaining to Aboriginal community development, governance practices, sustainable development, social policy and colonialism. There does not appear to be a great deal of material regarding best practices in Aboriginal community development in Canada. As the Indigenous people of Australia, New Zealand and the United States face similar challenges, research will be reviewed from these countries as well. In reviewing material there was a great deal of cross referencing of articles even at an international level. There is evidence that good governance which is grounded in culture and consensual vision is key to successful Aboriginal community development. By applying a colonial lens to the issues facing the communities, it becomes apparent that the larger issues of social policy and the ingrained effects of colonialism need to be addressed in order to implement permanent change.
Introduction

In Canada, awareness is growing regarding the historical issues that the Aboriginal people have endured and the barriers that continue to prevent many from moving forward to a better quality of life. This paper will explore the current status of Aboriginal people, as well as examine some of the processes required for change.

Community development for the purpose of this paper is viewed as the collective actions of a group or network of people coming together to develop and enact options and strategies that will promote community engagement, develop social, human capital, create opportunities for physical, environmental and economic improvements or development. Community development is difficult to measure in a precise manner simply because of the variable nature of the people, situations, tools and processes utilized to create options for change. In most instances the common practice for reviewing the impact of community development is through the utilization and analysis of case studies. In applying an integrated approach, the paper will examine relevant documents on Aboriginal policy, key issues and community development within a postcolonial framework. The research will explore best practices, meaning processes that are determined to be most effective for creating change in Aboriginal communities. Through completing this process it is hoped that commonalities will emerge as well as gaps for further exploration.
Background

Since the dawn of Confederation, the government of Canada has been developing strategies to assist Aboriginal people in obtaining and maintaining equality in Canadian society. Many of these strategies have proven to be unsuccessful and in the case of the forced assimilation into residential schools, damaging to generations of Aboriginal people. The Canadian government has had numerous studies and reports completed to guide policy development. In the early 1960’s:

the Minister of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration asked that a study be undertaken of the contemporary situation of the Indians of Canada with a view to understanding the difficulties they faced in overcoming some pressing problems and their many ramifications…The problems that called for detailed and objective study were concerned with the inadequate fulfilment of the proper and just aspirations of the Indians of Canada to material well-being, to health and to the knowledge that they live in equality and in dignity within the greater Canadian society. The Indians do not have what they need in some of these matters and they cannot at present get what they want in others. (Northern and Indian Affairs, 1966, p. 5)

In the resulting report A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political Needs and Policies (Hawthorn Report) the authors highlighted the failures of previous government’s policies and made recommendations that focused not on integration or assimilation, rather a just society where the inherent rights of the Indian were respected and the necessary resources were provided for obtaining their goals, particularly those that focused upon economic, education and legal rights. The report also
recommended the revision of the role of the Indian Affairs Branch to act as a “national conscience to see that social and economic equality is obtained…the persistent advocacy of Indian needs, the persistent exposure of government shortcomings in the governmental treatment that Indians receive and persistent removal of ethnic tensions between Indians and Whites” (Northern and Indian Affairs, 1967, p.13).

The Hawthorn report lead to consultation in 1969 regarding amendments to the Indian Act. The final parliament policy paper (White Paper) titled The Statement of the Government on Indian Policy which recommended the abolishment of the Indian Act was rejected by the Aboriginal communities as not recognizing sovereignty and preserving their legal rights.

In 1996, one of the most comprehensive reports completed to date, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP), five volumes totaling over four thousand pages, was released. Not surprising, many of the issues identified during the research were similar to the Hawthorn report. The RCAP recommendations centred on a vision of a new relationship, founded on the recognition of Aboriginal peoples as self-governing nations with a unique place in Canada. It set out a 20-year agenda for change, recommending new legislation and institutions, additional resources, a redistribution of land and the rebuilding of Aboriginal nations, governments and communities. Recognizing that autonomy is not realistic without significant community development, RCAP called for early action in four areas: healing, economic development, human resources development, and the building of Aboriginal institutions. (Library of Parliament, 1999, P.1.)
In 2016, fifty years will have passed since the Hawthorn report was released and twenty years since the RCAP report was finalized. In the past decade, “beneficial change has been spurred from several sides: favorable court decisions, a new willingness in Canadian governments to negotiate power sharing, final settlement of some outstanding land claims, and sophisticated participation by Aboriginal people in local, regional, and national affairs” (Elias, 1995, p.3). Despite these positive steps forward, the majority of the Aboriginal communities are continuing to exist in standards substantially lower than the rest of Canada.

**Present Situation**

In 2014, Canada ranked eighth on the United Nations Human Development Index, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations “Mr. Bellegrade said that if indicators used for the Human Development Index were applied to Aboriginal Canadians, they would place 63rd on the list”. (McLeans, 2015) “The Community Well-Being (CB) scale for First Nations, developed by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, which measures education, labour force participation, income and housing, indicates that Aboriginal communities represent 65 of the 100 unhealthiest Canadian communities” (Health Inequalities). According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives “50 percent of status First Nation Children in Canada live in poverty as measured by the Low Income Measure (LIM). In Manitoba the situation is particularly dire with 62 percent living in poverty”. Child welfare also presents a dismal picture of the state of Aboriginal families:

there are now far more aboriginal children in the care of the state than there were students in the residential schools at any one time in their deplorable history. At the residential school system’s peak in 1953, it had just over 11,000 students. The
number of Aboriginal children in government care across Canada is roughly triple that figure. An extremely high proportion of children being cared for by the state are native. In Manitoba, for example, upwards of 80 per cent of children under the charge of government, and not biological or adoptive parents, are Aboriginal (The Globe and Mail, 2014).

Aboriginal “incarceration rates are ten times the national average” (McLean’s, 2015). In addition, there is a high rate of victimization “40% of Aboriginal Canadians reported having been a victim of crime in the year leading up to the survey compared to 28% of non-Aboriginal Canadians. With respect to violent crime, Aboriginal people were three times more likely to have been victimized compared to non-Aboriginal people” (Department of Justice, 2009).

In regards to education attainment there has been limited movement in narrowing the gap in some areas: “The working-age Aboriginal population with a university degree has increased since 2006 (from 8% to 10%). However, they still lag far behind the non-Aboriginal population at 26%” (Statistic Canada, 2012). High school attainment for Aboriginal people increased as well but remains lower than the non-Aboriginal population at “29% having less than high school compared with 12% for non-Aboriginal individuals of the same age” (Statistic Canada, 2012). The unemployment rate remains high for Aboriginal people. According to the Aboriginal Labour Market Bulletin Spring 2014, in 2013 for the Aboriginal population, the unemployment rate was 11.6%, with a participation rate of 64.7% and an employment rate of 57.2% compared to 7.1%, 66.6% and 61.9% for the non-Aboriginal population (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014).
This situation is not unique to Canada, the Indigenous populations of the United States, New Zealand and Australia face similar circumstances, and it is easy to surmise that the common factor is the aftereffects of decades of colonization and forced assimilation. Many Canadians are not aware of the far reaching consequences of the effects of colonization, such as: resource depletion, emotional and mental health trauma, loss of identity, imposed political systems, disjointed families, poor physical health due to substandard living conditions, racism, limited educational opportunities, fragmented communities and a parliamentary defined identity.

**Aboriginal Community Development**

Aboriginal community development is very complex, as the issues that often need to be addressed are so numerous and closely intertwined that it is often difficult to find a starting point or overwhelming if one tries to address them all:

Aboriginal spokespersons have long argued that development cannot be approached as though their communities were vulnerable to the same problems, and amenable to the same solutions, as communities anywhere else in Canada. They have argued for a comprehensive approach that explores the political and cultural consequences of any initiative, as well as the economic consequences. There are few examples of successful comprehensive development plans. Comprehensive planning is rare, in part, because it is extraordinarily difficult to achieve. (Elias, 1995, p.3-4)

Aboriginal populations are not homogenous since there is a great deal of difference in locations, languages, culture, resources, infrastructure and capacity for change. The
uniqueness of each community influences how and when they choose to engage in community development. There is usually a sense of discontent with the status quo which creates a desire for change.

In many Aboriginal communities there is a dissatisfaction with the current situation of inadequate housing, poverty, poor health and lack of employment. There is often limited social or human capacity to engage in the process necessary to stimulate community development. Possible explanations for this is the context in which Aboriginal people are situated and the impact of neo colonialism where the government still has control over funding for social, health and educational institutions. Since the 1990’s the federal government has capped transfer payments at a 2% (Institute on Governance,2015) increase which does not match the rate of inflation nor the rapid growth of the Aboriginal population which results in people residing in the despair of poverty. Many of the First Nations have made arrangements for transfer payment agreements similar to those utilized between the federal and provincial governments., “Historically, First Nations have depended on Canada to provide core funding for programs and services working within the narrow scope of the Indian Act and similar limited legislation. First Nations must reduce their dependency on any one funding source and work towards generating their own revenue” (Centre for First Nation Governance). This allows the Aboriginal community to have a greater role in how the funding is utilized to create financial capacity for growth. For these reasons, it is understandable that Aboriginal community development is often focused upon creating economic development strategies with the belief that improved income to the community would alleviate other issues such a poverty and unemployment. The Harvard Project on
American Indian Economic Development (HPAIED) has found that “when Native nations make their own decisions about what development approaches to take, they consistently out-perform external decision makers on matters as diverse as governmental form, natural resource management, economic development, health care, and social service provision” (The Harvard Project, 2015). It is important for Aboriginal communities to engage in the processes necessary to establish a framework for governance at the community and national level. It is difficult to envision change if you do not have the authority and resources to do so. This point is stressed in literature regarding child welfare policy, social assistance, economic development and the social determinants of health. Aboriginal communities need to have well-developed processes and capacity to create sustainable development.

**Governance**

Governance was a fundamental recommendation of the RCAP report. In a 2015 progress review of the RCAP findings, community leaders spoke about the processes required for developing governance in their community “Such development has taken a long time—it took nearly a decade to figure out where they want to go, and how they believe they could get there—however members believe that self-governance is key to reducing the gap between their community and non-Aboriginal communities” (Institute on Governance, 2009). Over the past five decades, Aboriginal people have stressed the importance of self-government and strove to receive recognition:

For many Aboriginal peoples, self-government is seen as a way to regain control over the management of matters that directly affect them and to preserve their cultural identities. Self-government is referred to as an "inherent" right, a pre-
existing right rooted in Aboriginal peoples’ long occupation and government of the land before European settlement. Many Aboriginal peoples speak of sovereignty and self-government as responsibilities given to them by the Creator and of a spiritual connection to the land. Aboriginal peoples do not seek to be granted self-government by Canadian governments, but rather to have Canadians recognize that Aboriginal governments existed long before the arrival of Europeans and to establish the conditions that would permit the revival of their governments. Treaty Indians often point to treaties with the Crown as acknowledging the self-governing status of Indian nations at the time of treaty signing. (Library of Parliament, 1999)

In the simplest terms governance is how decisions are made and implemented. Governance is common practice in corporations, non-profits and all levels of government. It is a model that can result in ethical, productive, strategic management. “The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, reflects a growing consensus when he states that good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development” (Institute on Governance, 2003). There has been extensive discussion and research on governance from which a general understanding of the key factors that underlie the characteristics of good governance has emerged. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) "enunciates a set of principles that, with slight variations appear in much of the literature" (Institute on Governance, 2003).

In 2005, the newly formed National Centre for First Nations Governance (NCFNG) began building upon the work of UNDP, the Harvard project and the National Institute for Indians, to develop research and resources to assist First Nations in developing their own
governance model. The NCFNG worked with academic and legal experts, First Nation leadership and community members to develop research and resources that would provide the necessary support for First Nations to develop governance strategies. In the following table the Governance Components indicate the different context that the governance model is being developed within.

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<td>Direction</td>
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<td>The Land</td>
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<td>Fairness</td>
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The table highlights the fact that different “governance forms are possible with the caveat that the form that evolves or is chosen should fit the society that it governs” (Institute on Governance, 2009). In the model above developed by the NCFNG, the five components listed “blend traditional values of our respective Nations with the modern realities of self governance...All First Nations wrestle with significant constraints such as lack of funding, the restrictions of the Indian Act, and poverty, yet effective governance is the foundation upon which our development aspirations must be built” (Centre for First Nation Governance, 2013). The RCAP and the HPAIED “have argued that the ravages of colonialism will abate only when First Peoples can, as far as possible, create, implement and enforce the rules and institutions that govern them” (Institute on Governance, 2009).

There is a hierarchy to the governance components listed in the NCFNG model. The starting point is with the People. The reasoning behind this is that the People need to be involved at the very beginning of the process to “shape the strategic vision that serves as the signpost for the work that those communities and their organizations engage in” (Centre for First Nation Governance, 2013). Once there is informed consensus of a vision, the next step is to secure their right to the land “Aboriginal title is an exclusive interest in the Land and the right to choose how that Land can be used” (Centre for First Nation Governance, 2013).

The confirmation of land title is important to the overall health of the community. According to Gerald Taiaiake Alfred, PhD, “It is the use and occupation of lands within traditional territories, economic uses, re-establishing residences, seasonal/cyclical ceremonial use, and occupancy by families and larger clan groups that will allow First Nations to rebuild their communities and reorient their culture” (Alfred, 2009, p.54-55).
Laws and Jurisdictions confirm and clarify the rights which provides the basis for the development of institutions, while the development of the necessary resources ensures that the strategic vision continues to be achieved.

Despite the research and numerous reports, emphasizing the need for First Nations communities to develop models of good governance, the federal government made the decision to stop funding the NCFNG after seven years of operation. It was however, recognized by First Nations and other organizations that there continued to be a need for the type of service they provided. The program was restructured into the Governance Centre.

**Sustainable Development**

“The principle of sustainable development is now seen to rest on three interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars; namely economic development, social development, and environmental protection at national, regional and global levels” (Center for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2013).

In Aboriginal communities, economic development is often utilized as an approach that will assist in elevating issues in the community such as poverty, high rates of unemployment and lack of secondary education. There are numerous examples at the community, national and international level of failed economic development. Some of the reasons for failure is the type of projects that have been pursued and other reasons include:

- Starting up a never ending variety of new business projects that are uninformed by wider whole community needs and realities
• Responding to externally driven development proposals ad other people’s economic agendas
• Chasing transitory opportunities, usually single major development projects
• Chasing transitory grant funding, and tying their scarce local expertise to whatever repackaged programs are on offer from government and private sector
• Focusing on short term outcomes where success is usually measured by immediate economic impacts such as money and jobs (neither of which seem to last). (Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2013)

When one looks at the funding offered by the provincial and federal governments of Canada for employment and training, the programs contain some of the characteristics outlined above. For instance, the Ontario Government Youth Skills-Gap funding is directed at matching industry labour shortages with vulnerable youth with multiple barriers and who have had difficulty accessing labour market opportunities. “The industry stream brings together industry, educational institutions and not-for-profits to better connect skills-training with industry needs” and “helping young people gain skills that meet business needs” (Ontario Government, 2015).

The priority of the program is to meet the needs of industry rather than working with the youth to develop them to their full potential. The program is also based upon collaborative funding with the Ministry contributing up to 50% of the eligible funding, with the rest coming from the proponent. This means that many of the smaller Aboriginal communities would not be able to participate due to lack of capital. As well, the proponents are being asked to contribute training dollars for multi barrier participants who
are at higher risk for non completion and given the high unemployment rates on in First Nation communities limited job opportunities.

The Harvard Project on American Indians Economic Development lists the following as key components of sound economic development: sovereignty, institutions, culture and leadership. Sovereignty is in reference to Aboriginal communities having the final say on how matters, such as resource development are handled at the community, national and international level. Over the past 3 decades there has been a great deal of court cases that have ended successfully for the Aboriginal people which has assisted in developing their sovereign rights. Inclusion under section 35(1) of the Constitution Act of 1982 provided the ground work for recognition of self government. The duty to consult when accessing crown and traditional lands has opened the door for Aboriginal communities to have negotiating powers regarding land use.

HPAIED uses the term institutions in reference to the structures that form the governance process for the community. Healthy structures are stable and include positive methods for dispute resolution. In regards to economic development, it is important to keep the political influences out of the daily operation and management of business.

As previously discussed, culture is very diverse in the Aboriginal populations in Canada. The structures, policies and procedures utilized are most effective if they are reflective of the beliefs and values of the community. This holds true not only for economic development but in social programs such as social assistance and child welfare. In the HPAIED culture is referring to “the cultural match between each First Nation institution of
governance and economic development as opposed to the cultural appropriateness of economic development” (Robson, 2014, p.68).

Lastly, leadership is identified by HPAIED as a key component in developing and implementing governance. Leaders must have the vision, skills and ability to bring forth new ideas and implement change. Leaders do not necessarily have to be the person with the position of highest authority. Leaders can be found in all different aspects of community life.

The second component of sustainable development is social capital or vitality. “Research suggests that the difference between successful and unsuccessful economic and political development is attributable to the social capital of that system” (Chataway, 2002, p.77). Social capital refers to the “generalized trust embedded in informal networks and associations through which decision making and policy formations occur” (Chataway, 2002, p.77). In addition, social vitality was seen as a key factor in creating a healthy community.

“Social vitality refers to the extent to which the community has a commonly acceptable process for mobilizing power and distributing resources so that decisions can be made and initiatives can be collectively launched” (Chataway, 2002, p.78). In many of the Aboriginal communities there has been division or factionalism created by colonial practices. The election system that was developed by Indian Affairs is not reflective of the traditional consensus model that many of the communities had historically. “Within the first past the post electoral system, the candidate from the largest family can be consistently elected, giving that family the power to control resources, and make
decisions over time” (Chataway, 2002, p.78). In addition, First Nation status is defined by the *Indian Act* and in the past there were certain circumstances where people would surrender or have their status revoked such as; marriage, through blood lines or attending post-secondary education. People moving from one Aboriginal community to another are in some circumstances seen as outsiders. There also divisions in some communities between the employed vs unemployed. “When trust is restricted to immediate family or ethnic attachments, members can be discouraged from advancing economically, moving geographically, and engaging in amicable dispute resolution with others outside the group” (Chataway, 2002, p.78). Getting past these distinctions and labels requires developing social capital. Chataway outlines three process principles for doing so:

1) consistent with cultural values which means being grounded in a set of values with which all can Identify, and to which all have committed, provides clarity and safety, within limits acceptable to all.

2) prioritize working relationships refers to a process designed to arrive at substantive agreements ideally takes place after or at least concurrent with a facilitated process to develop working relationships.

3) Active Inclusivity suggests that the ideal situation is in which all stakeholders are committed to reaching consensus within a situation in which all have equal, respectful and complete opportunities to participate. (Chataway, 2002, p.79-81)

Cooke and Hill build upon Chataway’s work and proposes five tenets for community development. The first tenet is strategic planning, which is shown on a medicine wheel, is necessary to better guarantee that the actions of community
organizations will focus on the production of sustainable and observable outcomes (Cooke & Hill, p. 426). Vision is located on the eastern side of the wheel, as east is usually the starting point in ceremonies. The creation of a vision is a lengthy, foundational piece that must be built on consensus, respect and honesty (Cooke & Hill, p.426). Relationships are located in the southern quadrant and represent the fabric of the community and its political, personal and spiritual connections. Knowledge is located in the western quadrant. Knowledge is socially embedded in so far as it is part of the human capital of the community and can be accessed through networks and relationships. The last quadrant is acting/ doing which is enacting the vision (Cooke & Hill, 2013, p.426-428).

The other tenets are the inclusion of elders and children in the processes, utilization of prayers and medicines as part of community development, taking responsibility and ownership and mentoring and role modelling. The model is designed to create a culturally inclusive space for community development.

**Summary**

There are many factors that affect community well being. The media, researchers, politicians, and community leaders speak about the high unemployment, substandard housing, low education attainment, substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual assaults, high suicide rates, child welfare issues, fetal alcohol syndrome, social assistance dependency, infra structure problems and mind numbing poverty. The root cause of these problems is colonization and assimilation which unfortunately, in Canada is still ongoing. The policies that the government has in place are keeping Aboriginal people stuck in all of these issues. “It is necessary to understand that oppression experienced over a long period of time effects people’s minds and souls in seriously negative ways” (Alfred, 2009,
p.43). Good governance, economic and community development is a starting point. These however are not enough to heal individuals and communities. “Although economic engagement is an important element of community wellness, it currently occurs without addressing the existing social crisis, inadequate community infrastructure, significant mental health needs, and cultural renewal aspirations of Aboriginal communities” (Mitchell & MacLeod, 2014, p. 119). According to Alfred:

> despite some celebrated successes in court cases and economic development venture, neither of these strategies generates real transformation in the quality of the lived experience of Indigenous people’s lives or expands the opportunities they have for living in ways that are not harmful to themselves or their communities. There is in fact not a shred of empirical evidence that increasing the material wealth of Indigenous people or increasing the economic development of First Nation communities, in any way improves the mental or physical health or overall well being of people in First Nation communities. (Alfred, 2009, p. 44)

Based upon the review conducted, the next steps forward would be looking at development models or frameworks that are more holistic and include strategies to address the mental health effects of colonialism.


Chataway, C. (2002). Successful Development in Aboriginal Communities: Does it Depend upon a particular process? The Journal of Aboriginal economic Development, p76


