WOMEN'S PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN THE KAYAHNA TRIBAL AREA: COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

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ABSTRACT/RESUME

The author describes the need for women's participation in community research and development in the Kayahna Area Tribal Council region of northern Ontario. She proposes a new research project and outlines possible procedures.

L'auteur évoque le besoin urgent de la participation des femmes dans les activités de recherche et de développement communautaires dans la région du nord ontarien administrée par le Dayahna Area Tribal Council. Elle propose un nouveau projet d'étude et suggère des méthodes de travail à adopter.
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to present some of the background and current status of a woman's participatory research project now in progress in northern Ontario, Canada. This research project has been initiated by the Kayahna Area Tribal Council.

THE KAYAHNA AREA TRIBAL COUNCIL

In January 1977, the Indian Bands of Angling Lake, Big Trout Lake, Fort Severn, Kasabonika, Kingfisher Lake, Long Dog Lake and Wunnimin Lake joined together as the Kayahna Area Tribal Council to achieve the following objectives:

a. To promote the economic and community development of Indian people of the Kayahna area.

b. To develop and provide cultural and educational programs for the communities.

c. To work together to develop mechanisms for the co-operative administration of programs for the benefit of the Indian people of the area.

d. To carry on any enterprises which will assist in the attainment of the above objectives.

All member communities of the Kayahna Area Tribal Council are small, remote settlements north of the 50th parallel in Ontario. The people are Cree-speaking and still retain many of their traditional ways, including hunting, trapping and fishing as well as major spiritual beliefs and practices.

Even though isolation has enabled the people to keep many of their traditions, they have for many years been dominated by the southern, Euro-Canadian economy and culture through schools, stores, churches and the police force. The major mechanism of domination, however, has been the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development which is responsible, under Canada's Indian Act, for Indians on reserves. Government welfare and social programs have never been adequate to raise their standard of living to that of southern Canadians. The native people have, since European contact, lived in conditions of poverty and powerlessness.

At present there is an even greater threat to the Nishnawbe-Aski people. Large scale resource development by American multi-national corporations is planned for traditional lands which are rich in minerals, wood and water. The southern governments - both federal and provincial - are ready and willing to support these companies.

The communities of the Kayahna Area Tribal Council have joined together to work towards the common goals of political self-determination and economic self-sufficiency. They are making many initiatives on a wide variety of fronts to achieve these goals.

THE CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: REQUIREMENTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Too often, over the years, representatives of government agencies charged
with delivery of facilities and services have tended to view their mandate as clearly coming down from above. The recipients of this top to bottom decision-making process find themselves in a take it or leave it situation with "take it" being more often than not the real alternative. Certainly, now there is a widespread agreement that there must be a better way. That effective problem solving only results when solutions are generated from within the individuals or the communities concerned. If the experience of the future is to be better than the past, then each community must have the capacity to define its own needs, have access to its own resources and generate solutions to its own problems.

Community residents are convinced that substantial improvement on reserves will never be attained as long as government officials continue to believe that Indian communities require only those services which conventional wisdom dictates to be necessary for the resolution of social and economic problems.

The key to changing this unsatisfactory situation is for government to recognize that Indian communities have the capacity and the desire to provide for their own needs, and must make available the necessary responsibility and resources, so that Indian people are free to develop and provide the services that they themselves choose.

Innovative, creative and practical problem solving which builds on cultural, social and spiritual values can only come from within the community itself. It begins where the people and problems are. It permits the people to experiment (find out what works and what doesn't work) in achieving desired goals. It encourages them to develop motivation, technical skills and experience in developmental activity. Because the lives of individuals and communities are directly affected by decisions made on socio-economic development, the people must decide the priorities, the rate they can adapt to change, and the improvements they wish to attain - as judged by their own standards.

The resources and time required for communities to prepare themselves for the acceptance of new responsibilities have never been recognized or understood. Many programs have floundered because of this deficiency. (Much less the view points of women). This cannot be achieved from outside.

Indian communities cover a wide range of cultures which place different values on such things as experimentation, innovation and learning from other peoples' experiences. An essential action for any community to take would seem to be to examine their situation critically, identifying issues and learning from each other how to achieve social change.

Experience has shown that to get people to work together, the emerging issues have to be symbolized into some single concept which means something to everyone. Such a unifying project should be within the ability of each community to carry out and should strengthen the community. A need is, therefore, to identify a unifying concept which brings together emerging issues and provides a focal point for future planning.

Most Indian communities are confronted by high population growths. It is important to forecast the needs for education at different ages and for employment. Need for health and other services can also be forecast. In turn, these forecasts can provide the basis for future plans which will enable budgetary
allocations to be made.

The need to help each community go at its own speed toward its own goals cannot be over-emphasized. The worst thing that can happen is that the resources required by a community are not available when needed. Second to this is the danger that over-enthusiasm on the part of government officials will swamp the community leaders, setting back their efforts toward self-determination.

The Indian communities of the Kayahna Area cover a wide range of development situations. Degree of isolation, size of community, complexity of economic activity, quality of leadership, vitality of the culture, cohesiveness of the community, existence of resources, nature of social problems and intensity of the divisions within the community are important factors in determining the present state of each community.

If one had to settle for a single most important need at the community level, it would undoubtedly be the engagement of suitable people to be human catalysts to help communities determine present needs and help them initiate action and carry it through to a successful conclusion.

RECOGNITION OF THE NEGLECT OF WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

The collective experience of women in the Kayahna Area has been that employment and training programs have, historically, severely neglected women's needs. Documentation of this neglect came through a recent survey of women's employment needs in the largest Kayahna community, Big Trout Lake.

The survey was carried out by a women from Big Trout Lake in 1978-1979. She interviewed sixty local Indian women with respect to levels of employment; existing services designed to enhance employment; services, projects and businesses required to develop job opportunities; and desired training courses leading to long term employment.

The study reported that "only fourteen women have a long term job... Overall, only thirty-three women (which includes the fourteen women presently employed) had one to three job experiences at one point or another during the period from 1965-1978 inclusive". The accompanying Table shows past and present employment for women in the community. With regard to training courses, the study reported the following:

Of the sixty women interviewed only thirteen have taken some form of training or interest course and all mentioned that the training or interest course they did take did not benefit them in terms of a long term job. As you will notice from the previous chart, there really have not been very many training opportunities offered to these women. When asked why they had not asked for more training opportunities, the main comment was that they had preferred to stay home and let the 'head of the household' bring in the income. But, now, as you will notice in the following pages
TABLE 1

PAST AND PRESENT EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN IN BIG TROUT LAKE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYER</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>'60-'70</th>
<th>'71-'75</th>
<th>'76-'78</th>
<th>'78+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol/Drug Abuse Program</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band</td>
<td>Freezer Mgmt.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Office</td>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer Programs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-op Store</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Environment</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Homes</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson Bay Company</td>
<td>Clerk/Cashier</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post Mistress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Natural</td>
<td>Fur Stamping</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Station</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Health Aide</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comm. Health Worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Teacher Aide</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trout Lake Taxi</td>
<td>Driver</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of this report, these women stress that they want and need training courses that will give them the skills they need in whatever area of employment they are interested in individually. Most of the following-mentioned training courses they want/need lead to long term employment for them and needed and wanted businesses will hopefully enhance from these training programs.

Ninety-nine percent of the women interviewed felt that a training centre should be established in Big Trout Lake and that this centre should serve the surrounding communities of Kasabonika, Wunnimun, Kingfisher, Angling Lake, Long Dog and Fort Severn. Table 2 indicates the various types of courses or training the women would like to have offered to them in the near future. "They feel that through these types of training they are ensured of at least being employed", the report observed.

The women interviewed in the survey suggested nine major projects, together with relevant training programs, which would provide them with

### TABLE 2

**TRAINING COURSES DESIRED BY WOMEN OF BIG TROUT LAKE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAINING COURSES</th>
<th>Would like to see Course Offered</th>
<th>Would Participate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Adult Education: Primary/Diploma</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Business Management</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chef or Baking Course</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. First Aide</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Hair Dressing</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Handicraft</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Health Course</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Meteorological Training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Languages- Cree syllabics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- English</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Nursing and Aide</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Secretarial</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Sewing</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Social Services</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Teaching and Aide</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
possible employment opportunities:

1. Day Care Centre
2. Bakery Shop
3. Handicraft Shop
4. Hairdressing Shop
5. Parka Business
6. Restaurant and/or Coffee Shop
7. Motel
8. Gardening
9. Social and Health Services Agency (locally controlled)

In addition, the women listed many other needs including a fabric shop, summer camps which would teach their children traditional skills, a laundromat, a library with reading material in Cree Syllabics, a gymnasium, a snow shoe factory, a small appliances shop and a park or playground.

The study concluded:

Although the need of dignity is not expressed directly by these women, it is due to the fact that the male is still dominant in this part of the country. However, the desire to maintain tradition and culture is a common need felt by both male and female, as is the desire to give their children a wide range of skills to enable them to live either off the land and/or to be able to survive without depending on the land since this way of life is slowly diminishing.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION PROMOTES THE TOTAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COMMUNITIES

The Kayahna Chiefs are very clear that increased participation by women in the social, economic, educational and cultural life of the Area will promote the total development of the communities.

Already the benefits of the women's employment survey are emerging. Since the completion of the survey, a day care centre has been started by the women of Big Trout Lake, with the support of the Band Council. A Coffee Shop has been open for several months as well as have a number of other coffee shops in the Kayahna Area. Progress is being made on many other projects as well.

That women are particularly expert in matters of community development was brought home in another recent example in Big Trout Lake. This case, which occurred in early 1979, involved an intensive dialogue among fifteen Big Trout Lake women, who gathered to evaluate a complex variety of technical options for water supply and excreta disposal in their community.

The women analyzed the various technical options and generated their own assessment and technical modifications based on their years of experience. In some cases they also developed ideas about who from the community could
do the actual work of installing the new systems and where funds might be obtained to support this work.

Another important point about this meeting was its uniqueness as a collective research process. Out of the dialogue came new solutions. And some of the liveliest and most creative discussion occurred after the women had drawn diagrams of their homes (including their existing water and waste systems) as they are and then as they would like them to be, labelling these drawings in Cree syllabics. This visual analysis seemed very appropriate as a method of generating information from the group, by the group.

PROPOSAL FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN THE KAYAHNA AREA

The recent activities involving the women of Big Trout Lake have demonstrated only a small part of what is possible. A much more comprehensive and integrated approach to the development needs of women is urgently required for the entire Kayahna Area.

Our response, fully endorsed by all the Chiefs of the Kayahna Council, has been to propose an intensive women's participatory research project for our communities. We are now seeking funds to support the project from governmental and non-governmental sources.

We would like to describe the basic elements of our project.

Aims

There are two major aims of the study:

1. To develop a consolidated picture of the affairs of each community in the Kayahna area from the women's point of view. In particular, information will be gathered on the following critical issues as they relate to women:
   a) Levels of education and training
   b) Mobility patterns
   c) Sources of income
   d) Employment information systems
   e) Attitudes to economic development (their needs and aspirations)
   f) Political view points
2. To enable Bands to identify and develop appropriate economic and social programs and projects through which women can become involved in solving their own problems and promoting the unique interests of women.

Uses of the Data

A detailed report will be produced. This report will have the following functions:

1. To provide a factual information base emphasizing community needs and resources for use by Band Councils and for reference to external agencies.
2. To develop skills and understanding for further planning and community development to aid in a more effective approach to the allocation of available resources with the object of increasing female employment opportunities in each community.

3. To provide native women with a better understanding of their own potential and future alternatives, enhancing their abilities to promote and execute economic development projects thus improving their economic positions.

4. To provide a means through which native women can make a contribution to the social, cultural and economic development of their society, thus encouraging native women to assume a more positive and active part in developing skills to support their people in the area of economic development.

Team of Women Researchers

A team of women researchers will collect and analyze the data. Overall direction of the project will be facilitated by a woman coordinator. One researcher will be selected from, and work primarily in, each of the Kayahna communities. The woman researcher is directly responsible to the Band Council and residents of her community. Her duties will include:

a) Conducting a major investigation of the special educational, cultural needs and aspirations of the female indigenous population in each community belonging in the Kayahna Area with the goal of ultimately contributing to the overall development of the people.

b) Maintaining liaison with native women to develop plans which will meet their needs, be it plans designed to meet native self-determination encompassing education, economic development, local government and social development, and translating these needs into advice and recommendations to the Band Councils of each community.

c) Providing supplementary services such as interpretative and liaison work between native women and institutions and/or agencies.

d) Being available upon request and where necessary acting as mediator between groups of women in communities with differing approaches to mutual problems.

e) Providing information, resources, referrals and assistance in setting up and developing local women's chapters to enable Band Councils to formulate dynamic, contemporary and relevant programs to fulfill these needs.

f) Working for the general achievement of economic emancipation within Canadian Society.

g) Performing other related duties, keeping in mind that each woman researcher be centered in the community and directed by community representatives and/or Band Councils.

Gathering and Analyzing the Data

Too often in the past, researchers or other outside persons have come in
to our communities and used methods of data gathering, like the household survey, which focuses on individual responses. However, our focus will be the use of collective data gathering methods. A wide variety of these are available, including group meetings, community dialogues, workshops, the use of music, stories, drawings and photos with different groups of women, such as Elders or youth.

In terms of the analysis and interpretation of the data, we will place greatest emphasis on collective analysis and interpretation by those most closely involved with the problem - the women of the Kayahna Area. We have seen for years the kind of limited feedback to "clients" when a professional, outside researcher has done his own analysis on what should really be our data.

Furthermore, we want the results of this collective analysis interpretation to be used directly by and for the women of the Kayahna communities.

Training Workshops for Researchers

To begin the data gathering and analysis process, we will need initial training workshops for the women researchers. The agenda for the first of these workshops might look like this:
1. Introduction of participants.
2. Explanation of project (organizational structure, concept of development).
3. Questions from people themselves raising issues about project.
4. Bullshitting. This is the best way to enhance conversation. Native women are very shy, but willing to bullshit when the opportunity arises. Shyness is due to the fact that, in this northern culture, men are still predominant. This is especially so in smaller villages where there is an extremely low rate of employment for women.
5. Questions from coordinator. A view of the perceptions of the workshop participants. The coordinator will pose 4-5 closely linked questions which tie in with the bullshitting conversation as well. Care will be taken not to bombard the participants.
6. Confession that coordinator (and probably the researchers) don't know what they will end up with after the data collecting process. It will be stressed that collective support of each other as women is essential in order to clarify and act on the needs which are named and illustrated in the data.
7. Breaks - Lunch, tea and so on can become sources of good discussion, especially in the home environment.

It is important in these workshops that people describe their past and present experiences through words, images, and other forms of popular expression. In the process of describing these experiences in their own ways, people develop themselves.

For the group to act more coherently and more humanely in the future, they must re-picture reality and reflect on the images they have created. Such images and pictures are bound to draw heavily on the traditions and history of the cultural, spiritual, social and economic life of local people.

The workshops will discuss the important distinctions among different
sources of responses, such as Elders vis a vis youth. We will discuss the principle of linking our study to action and the need for recommendations on followup studies. We do not want to treat the symptoms of oppression but rather to develop our own economic and political capacity. Future development can only be planned well on the basis of past knowledge and skills and present resources.

It may be that these training workshops will themselves become data gathering models, the basic design of which could be applied to group meetings with the women of individual communities.

NOTES