

REDEVELOPING DEVELOPMENT

Negotiating Relationships for Advancing an Indigenous Women's Agenda

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INTRODUCTION

Drawing on our experience working locally, nationally, and internationally, developing respectful protocols, and building relationships with Indigenous women, this paper's gendered and indigenized perspectives explore the transformative potential of the women's community development endeavours. We will first discuss how Indigenous women's narratives and stories (in contrast to edicts, plans, and templates) express and implement cultural alternatives to neo-liberal versions of development. Then we will describe how a specific planning process for transnational research activities and workshops involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, academics and non-academics from diverse north-south regions fostered new connections and capacities through a variety of multi-faceted and

reciprocal relationships developed in multiple sites. The final section of the paper critiques and confronts the organizational issues and setbacks implicated in these processes of "contestation, negotiation and appropriation in a transnational social sphere" (Thayer, 2001, p. 246) in addition to offering a number of practical strategies and tools to promote women's perspectives and interests in development.

These collaborative planning activities built on the foundation of a very successful Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)-funded national conference "Value(s) Added: Sharing Voices on Aboriginal Community Economic Development," hosted by the College of Commerce at the University of Saskatchewan in May 2002. These proceedings were published in the *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, volume 4, number 1,

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edited by Isobel Findlay, Warren Weir, and Louise Clarke. That conference aimed to probe what happens when you bring together those who are not normally encouraged to talk to and learn from one another, when you resist the wasteful practices of modernity, when diverse knowledge unmask the taken-for-granted, and when theory and practice meet and act in unpredictable ways. Although the conference was in many ways a great success, it had its blind spots. What it failed to do was foreground and recognize the work of Aboriginal women despite the overwhelmingly female makeup of the organizing committee. It was that failure that galvanized women in the community and in the academy to organize and act, to support and celebrate the work of community-based women.

Since that time, a core group of people at the University of Saskatchewan (guided by community-based Aboriginal women) has been developing collaborative relations first with Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED), San Jose, Costa Rica, on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding, and now with Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, Heredia, San Jose. This collaboration also aimed to include another north-south dimension by working with Maori and Pakeha (white) women from New Zealand. We worked for two years to plan a 2006 international conference *Indigenous Women Building Alliances for Community Development: From the Hearts of Our Peoples* in Costa Rica. Focusing on community-based women from diverse settings, the primary objective was to provide an inclusive and accessible venue for the promotion and exploration of a broad, participatory set of narratives of Aboriginal community development practices that put at the heart of things the many different forms of proactive and reactive responses, reactions and resistances of Indigenous women. In doing so, the political agency of Indigenous women is mobilized to explicitly and implicitly influence the ways that development strategies are constructed, thought, planned and implemented (Crush, 1995, p. 8). What was achieved and what was not in the process has much to tell us about the capacities of Aboriginal women and the forces that continue to frustrate them — and to foster new alliances and new strategies to create healthy and sustainable communities.

WOMEN'S NARRATIVES: RESISTING GLOBALIZATION/ REDEVELOPING DEVELOPMENT

Indigenous peoples around the world have survived “globalization” for millennia. For most, the long, hard struggle to retain and reclaim rights over their lives, lands, labour, and knowledge is still going on, while others have successfully redefined and implemented new visions of sufficiency and success for themselves and their communities. Around the world, Indigenous people are challenging the inevitabilities of the ways things are, finding hope in the proposition that current realities are not natural. Thus, humans can change what humans devised in the first place and can reinvigorate community in the process. If they “cannot erase the history of colonialism,” they can and “must, as an imperative, undo it in a contemporary context” (Lafond, 1994, p. 208). And that means breaking silences and speaking truth to power inside and outside Indigenous communities, redefining identities far too long defined by government edict and legal classification, and developing and re-developing narratives to explain and situate ourselves within postcolonial frameworks and contexts.

The most recent version of globalization is creating new threats to Indigenous communities (e.g., Bauman, 1998; Bourdieu & Coleman, 1991), building rather than bridging economic and other gaps between and among groups, proving especially damaging to Indigenous women (and children). In the context of “Global Apartheid” — the growing gap between rich and poor from 2:1 in 1800 to the current situation whereby the richest 20 per cent own 82.7 per cent of global income and the poorest 20 per cent earn only 1.6 per cent (Banerjee, 2003) — poor women represent two-thirds of the world’s poorest, yet in parts produce 70 per cent of agricultural labour and over 90 per cent of food (World Economic Forum, 2005). In the face of neo-liberal cutbacks to public services, women in Peru, for example, endanger their health through unusual commitments to “income-generation, household production, and community management activities” as well as the development of microenterprises to challenge and cope with economic restructuring. In the process, they invest in local labour, local products, and family and community welfare, and create credit

co-operatives that in turn produce opportunities to raise gender consciousness, educate one another, and increase women's control over their public and private lives (Hays-Mitchell, 2003, pp. 94–107). Even 10 years after the Beijing World Conference on Women, the gap between women and men remains undiminished (World Economic Forum, 2005). Despite experiencing the violence of such inequities, Indigenous women prove important stewards of the world's linguistic and bio diversity (Lertzman & Vredenburg, 2005) and active promoters of social change (Sen, 1999).

Although local resources and relationships rebuilt around common experiences are a critical part of the story we tell here, the local is not imagined as separate from the global, free from power inequalities, or beyond the destructive reach of negative strategies of difference whether on the basis of race, class, gender, age, sexualities, religion, or abilities. Nor can people effectively negotiate global complexities without larger and international linkages (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). Still, we remain unconvinced by claims of globalization's obliteration of boundaries of nation, state, etc. Democratic participation and the power of sovereignty remain key tools in efforts to resist and reject neo-colonial infractions. To think otherwise is to submit to the ideology of globalism and advance globalization (Halperin & Laxer, 2003).

If the complexities and contradictions of economic globalization and communications technology have added to the many global divides, they also offer the possibility of new spaces where Indigenous peoples can come together to share their experiences—their successes as well as their challenges—to give public record to their histories and to build alliances for mutual assistance. Working within and against dominant theories and structures of authority, Indigenous women unpack willful acts of forgetting “with a view to rewriting and rerighting [Indigenous women's] position in history” (Smith, 1999, pp. 28–34).

This work takes place within an extensive network of allies and coalitions. Indigenous women recognize the importance of joining in solidarity with complementary networks of anti-oppression advocates. At the same time, they recognize firsthand the difficulties and dangers inherent in relationships between people experi-

encing different histories and forms of oppression. Building these relationships reflects the challenges in negotiating north-south, institutional, cultural, and other differences in an environment of scarce resources, sharing theoretical and practical tools among intellectuals from community and university, stretching and strengthening concepts, categories, and connections in order to respect all partners and support equitable participation in this unique collaboration (Cottrell & Parpart, 2006; Silver, Ghorayshi, Hay & Klyne, 2006). These challenges must be situated, in turn, within the continuing colonial legacy of polarized mistrust and miscommunication affecting Indigenous / non-Indigenous relations. It has been hard but necessary work involving the sort of pedagogy of hope and critical vigilance that bell hooks (2003) commends, probing the nature of knowledges and representation (including who gets to speak and define, whose truths and stories count), individual and institutional roles and responsibilities, and the largely quantitative measures of success on which so much policy and other decision-making depends.

Anyone who has lived or worked closely with any Aboriginal community knows that Aboriginal community development policy and other decision-making depends on a different set of indicators to measure policy and program success. Financial practices and procedures are important, but should not be the sole (myopic) lens guiding program evaluation. For most Aboriginal communities, cultural sustainability is not something to be taken for granted—especially in the current era of technological globalization. Accordingly, indicators of cultural sustainability, such as inter-generational language transmission and other forms of traditional knowledge, are an important consideration in community development programs and policies.

Indigenous women generally approach community development strategies from a further step of difference. Many Indigenous women stand on the front lines of the battleground of impoverished communities and families. For many of them, maintenance of families is their priority, but it is not their sole responsibility. When their ability to fulfill their roles within the family is threatened, Indigenous women have pursued a variety of political actions to bring these issues to the public domain for redress (Miller, 1991). Drawing on a long history of

carrying an undue burden of responsibility for families and communities, they recognize that “social ills within our communities are not because of who we are but because of what has been done to us” (Muise, 2003, p. 36). As a result, the women have routinely challenged governments and their institutions to accept their share of the responsibility for impoverishing Indigenous peoples and producing an inter-generational legacy of violence and dysfunction.

All in all, Indigenous participants tend to approach things differently but with some fundamental roots of commonality to non-Indigenous participants. Like Harris (1990), all participants act on the understanding that “wholeness and commonality are acts of will and creativity, rather than passive discovery” (p. 581). Like Muise, they understand that “Nothing will change the condition of our lives until we educate ourselves, change our attitudes, and continue to heal ourselves.” As a result they too are “reclaim[ing] their authority and rightful place in the community” (2003, pp. 30–35). Each participant, in effect, engages in bringing about the positive and progressive changes they want to see. Such changes as they aim to effect need spaces and venues for dialogue and voice: what one participant called “ethical spaces” where Indigenous women can be and know who they are, where they can value their differences, celebrate the beauty of powerful women, find spiritual authority, renew culture, offer mutual support, build relationships, learn together, and motivate and mobilize in the interests of healthy, sustainable communities.

PLANNING AND ORGANIZING FOR REWRITING/RIGHTING

In this section of the paper we recount the planning and organizing process for an international conference and reflect on the learning about relationships that we derived from that process. As mentioned, we have tried in that process to encompass multiple strategies in multiple sites with multiple voices and stories, reflecting the commitment to an on-going process of interaction and mutual learning rather than simply planning for one product or a specific event. No single event is likely to prove transformative unless it is embedded within such an on-going

process. Indeed, it is in the ongoing acts of organizing that the learning becomes transformative, that the knowledge sharing becomes a source of strength.

The process has unfolded in three main sites: western Canada, Costa Rica, and New Zealand, each with its own multiplicity of sites and constituencies. While academics have been the initiators, we have tried to organize so that grassroots Indigenous women who do the day-to-day community development are in the foreground, unlearning our own privileges while learning actively from their experience and expertise. Despite this commitment, we encountered some interesting differences at the international level with respect to planning, all of which required negotiation. The Costa Rican organizers initially envisaged a relatively formal program of keynote speakers and multiple thematic sessions focused primarily on basic community development: health, education, environmental and cultural sustainability. In New Zealand, there are many academics, both Maori and Pakeha, who have experience working together, often with a focus on community economic development. The Canadian vision was of a less structured conference with a lot of time for cultural sharing and informal discussion of themes arising rather organically, as people gave them voice and importance. The compromise we adopted was to give each region a block of time to present and discuss as they saw fit, then to develop together an action agenda for future collaborative efforts, and to end with a conference that would allow for the participants to come together.

Similarly, while the New Zealand participants were eager to share stories of their economic development initiatives, the women in Costa Rica remained deeply suspicious of a term (economic) that had proven such an exclusive and damaging preoccupation among development agencies. Thus, the term found no place in the title for the projected conference, a title that engaged “the Hearts of Our Peoples” in re-evaluating priorities. Already then, Costa Rica was a site for action where we might rethink knowledge and practice in many spheres from curriculum to trade relations, with concern for process as well as outcomes.

Simultaneously, we in Saskatoon continued networking with others in western Canada with shared interests in community development.

Drawing on the fundamental Indigenous teachings and understandings of balance and the medicine wheel, our work was designed to reflect a balanced approach to the four directions of everyday tribal life: social and cultural (i.e., kinship, community networks); spiritual and ceremonial; economic (including sustainable land and resource use); and justice, governance and leadership. Wanda Wuttunee's description of the First Nations Development Institute's "Elements of Development Model" provided additional indicators and dimensions, which furthered our understandings of holistic Aboriginal community development (Wuttunee, 2004, pp. 21–26). In addition to this multi-dimensional approach to development, we were also committed to Indigenous teachings and protocols of our traditional territory, with a particular emphasis given to respecting *Miyo-wichetowin*, the principle of getting along well with others and expanding the circle (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000). Thus, the women would work to reclaim healthy communities and ecologies and renew ceremonies and teachings in the most inclusive and accessible manner possible.

To put these ideas into practice, a committee was organized that included a broad range of university and community members. The planning committee actively sought representation of Indigenous women (urban, rural, and remote, young and old) in all levels and capacities, from the co-chair to student recorders. Accessibility for all members to contribute to the conference planning was arranged through lunch hour meetings, tele-conference meetings, and email communication. In addition, the co-chairs travelled to meet with Indigenous groups to get their input and support for the conference, while a number walked with organizers and participants in marches across Saskatchewan to remember our missing or stolen sisters.

A key part of the planning committee's work was to organize a regional Roundtable on Indigenous Women's Community Development in Western Canada to celebrate the struggles and achievements of women in western Canada and to pursue the possibilities and benefits of solidarity with Indigenous women around the globe. Committed to sharing effective practices in local and regional settings and building the agenda and an action plan for Costa Rica, Roundtable participants focused on four specific themes:

- Elimination of violence against women and children;
- Education, health and other capacity-building;
- Economic and business development for well-being and sustainability;
- Justice and governance.

Each of these themes was (and remains) timely and urgent in celebrating Indigenous women's achievements and aspirations in what was the Year of First Nations and Métis Women in Saskatchewan (2005) and the first year of the United Nations Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, a decade designed to strengthen "international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by Indigenous people in such areas as culture, education, health, human rights, the environment, and social and economic development." The proposed research and social action likewise remain urgent in the context of Amnesty International's *Stolen Sisters Report* testifying to violence against Indigenous women and children that has resulted from government failures to fulfill responsibilities to protect the rights of Indigenous women (2004, p. 3). That violence, according to the United Nations Declaration on Violence against Women, is "a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women" as well as "a means by which this inequality is maintained" (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 11).

In doing this work, we achieved tremendous successes. Over 70 participants from Manitoba to British Columbia attended the Saskatoon Roundtable session in October 2005. The process began with traditional ceremonies and panel discussions by Aboriginal women leaders and Elders. Then we broke into theme groups for open sharing with a facilitator and Aboriginal student recorders. Although there was not enough time, new relationships were encouraged, old relationships renewed. We listened and we talked. We laughed and we cried. Sometimes we disagreed with each other, but always within a circle of respect for each other and the knowledge that we all brought to the session — and were eager to take to an international forum.

The following sections paraphrase the stories the women told at the Roundtable, powerful stories that ranged from suspicion of the oppressors to calls for hope and inclusiveness, stories that added to some critical reminders of effec-

tive strategies in the past. At a time when the Indian Act still proscribed women chiefs, for instance, women recalled how they made the most of “womanly” activities available to them to show leadership and politicize one another. If sewing circles were widely associated with the inconsequence of womanly activities, the women ensured otherwise, using them as sites of political education and mobilization. Similarly, others recounted the kitchen table dreaming that radicalized women from the heart and led to the grandmothers fasting and then walking to Oka.

Violence against Women

Participants told many stories of women and children being beaten, becoming depressed, turning to drugs, prostitution and sometimes suicide or being killed. Some storytellers conveyed the idea that people chose a life of drugs and violence while others insisted that this dark path was forced on many people. They likened the effects of residential schools to the symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome, but over a period of several generations. In any case, most participants thought that it was essential that the stories be told to help the healing, to get more resources to address the problems. Gatherings like the Roundtable are very important for women to be able to tell their stories, but the stories also need to be made public with the media being held accountable for not covering these stories because the silence is a form of control. And when the media is not silent, they tend to put all Aboriginal women in one box — categorized as prostitutes and drug addicts becoming, in the view of many, unworthy of assistance. Even if a woman follows a darker path and turns up dead, that does not mean that she does not deserve a fair investigation. Each life should be treated the same; each one is worth saving.

A few participants stated that, at gatherings like the Roundtable, it is important to move beyond the stories to talk more about some of the solutions. Some of the solutions must come from agencies, but they need to change their way of thinking and acting. They want statistics, but when one group set up a system for tracking Aboriginal children born with addictions, it was soon dropped. Another participant said that when a white colleague was willing to verify and

support her claims with management, they were able to make some progress; when the white colleague moved on, management turned a deaf ear again. Much of the emphasis in the discussion about solutions was on what Aboriginal people themselves could and must do in their communities. There has to be more education for women about the roots of violence and about proper parenting; if the women choose not to come to meetings, then the meetings must somehow go to them. We also need more programs to help our men to change, to overcome their histories of violence, abandonment, and neglect. We need the flexibility to develop programs to fit the community and to prevent the violence; we must be more proactive rather than just reactive. If people come together in unity, then maybe women will have a stronger voice to break down the barriers for our sisters.

Education, Health, and Other Capacity Building

While there are many specific problems facing our people, the general message is: the way we look at things is not the same as the way non-Aboriginal people do. As such we need to return to our values and focus on building upon the strengths in our communities as opposed to lamenting what we do not have. We as Aboriginal women are strong; we are the carriers and shakers on Indigenous knowledge and we need to pass the teachings to our children. In one community we are having a banquet called “Returning to the Teachings”. We must also ensure that Aboriginal people keep copyright to our knowledge. We need to build support groups within our communities. Some of the specific areas mentioned where support, including preventative work, is needed to treat our people as human beings are: HIV, chronic kidney disease, transition from school and training to jobs, transition from prison back into the community, and literacy.

Economic and Business Development for Well-being and Sustainability

While success stories were highlighted, much discussion focused on challenges faced by women in the North and the special barriers faced by those in arts and crafts marketing (underpaid for

work and far from markets); on the possibilities of e-bay and German markets that value First Nations art; on environmental issues, government bureaucracy, and culturally insensitive studies and decision making; on maintenance of traditional lifestyles, traditional knowledge, and treaties and the incursions of mining (one study showed that for every dollar spent in the community, resource companies extracted \$7); on impact and benefit agreements undermining the treaties, creating forms of privatization in a legal process to steal the land; on the need to maintain balance; and on fears, conflicts, and jealousies among urban and reserve community members, fears that benefits for the one will take from the other.

Major problems in economic development derive from colonial thinking that still keeps many in "their place": the idea that Indians are not supposed to be rich and industrious and take advantage of opportunities. Or the 1999 Supreme Court of Canada Marshall decision's restrictive position on "moderate livelihood" with its presumption that Indians are not to get rich. Many are afraid to break out of their roles and be entrepreneurial. Numbers of Aboriginal women and youth are double those of the mainstream. Instead of seeing strength and opportunity, some fear success and being taken from their roles in the family. Others see they are not alone — "it is not an individual walk but a family walk. I am not alone so therefore I am not as scared" — and that the family is their strength.

The challenge is one of leadership, of a business model that is flexible enough for all communities, and a sense of collective ownership, of community development with families at the core. That is what is going to make community grow. Building relationships and seeing the big picture — in both of which women have special skills — are key. Community plans, cultural values, and effective communications are likewise critical elements. So we need to challenge leadership and to discuss environmental change, intellectual rights, and inherent rights. We need to make money without exploiting our lands, we need to explore renewable energy sources, we need to bridge persistent gaps in prosperity, we need to support funds for youth, we need social venture networks, and we need to speak out and campaign. If we want to change mindsets, then we must change ours too.

Justice and Governance

In discussing justice and governance, restoration and reconciliation, we need to find and maintain the space for Aboriginal women's voices — often the lone voices on issues. If governments want to define these terms and impose their views, we need to determine our own identity and community responsibilities. We need to find space within our communities and in Natural Law, know the power of our own voices, and build networks that create strength. It is women's responsibility to share and address the injustices (including the economic and social); everybody has a responsibility to the Treaties and the treaty relationship.

Women need to be recognized as the backbone of society if we are to address violence and missing women. We need to honour our differences (between genders and between those who share this land), recognize our gifts, share our commonalities, and return to our traditional practices as healing. In making just laws, we need to ensure leadership listens and commits to working partnerships that create meaningful change. We need to use the media to our advantage to help uncover the silences that keep injustices alive and active, and framing and reframing issues to encourage people to see issues anew and to avoid backlash. We might frame issues as matters of nationhood and not women's issues, for example.

It is imperative to expand plans to include all women while focusing on Indigenous women. We must draw on resources such as the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Women's Commission and review jurisdictional devices that keep our women from being heard. We need to access funds, information, and the Minister of Justice; improved relationships with existing Aboriginal institutions; recognition and respect as Aboriginal women; and lawsuits to redress issues of residential school, racism, sexism. We need to decolonize and restructure the images and stereotypes of the "Indian woman", eliminate racism in our communities, use video to enhance emotional impacts, form partnerships, and build inclusive and supportive networks within and across regions. Another roundtable would help fine-tune our ideas for more sharing and concerted action in Costa Rica.

SETBACKS AND MOVING FORWARD AGAIN

While we were all energized by the experience of the Roundtable, we were not able to translate that energy into sufficient support to proceed with the conference in Costa Rica which was extremely disappointing for all concerned. The challenges in finding support came from many directions—and were compounded when the New Zealand contingent had to withdraw and delay their participation for a number of reasons (including human and financial resources). Lack of financial support to send the grassroots women to Costa Rica was the central reason, but what are the underlying reasons for that? As we have argued both theoretically and from the perspective of the women at the Roundtable, there is certainly a need for such gatherings. One reason that we were given was that, with limited resources, Aboriginal groups placed priority on local work and funding. This is clearly valid, but the Roundtable participants also understood the need for multiple levels of action, including transnational networks. Indigenous women from around the globe are affected by the four themes of the Roundtable and there is a clear need to share strategies and best practices in addressing each area.

While the reluctance of representatives of Aboriginal groups to give financial support is understandable, we were more perplexed by their reluctance to take a key role in the planning or to write letters of support. There are a few possibilities. Practical reasons include internal organizational issues, lack of direct benefit or interest, fear of impacting their own funding applications, or perhaps simply a lack of time. A more systemic reason is the deep-seated distrust of academics and universities in general. In order to try to overcome the distrust born of historical relations of privilege and marginalization, the co-chairs offered one influential leader an effective veto over any action the committee might take that her organization would not be comfortable with, but to no avail. We also recognize that some Aboriginal people and groups simply prefer to build their own initiatives. In any event, we must be ever-vigilant to acknowledge the fundamental importance of taking the time to build ethical relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

Of course, our funding challenges are also part of a systemic or structural resource problem. Funds for marginalized groups such as grassroots Aboriginal women are extremely limited and those that do exist certainly re-inscribe power differences. Academic sources are elitist, giving primacy to formal (“real”) research and to the academic as “principal investigator” (Cottrell & Parpart, 2006). Knowledge held by community people is devalued, and, therefore, the very important task of building respectful relationships between academics and these community people is rarely recognized, certainly not in tangible ways reflected in budgets. We were told, for instance, that we might be able to access certain pools of funds, but travel costs for conference participants would not be a legitimate expense!

Most international funding sources are for already formulated development projects, not for partnerships to develop the plans in a participative fashion. Funds from large agencies at national and supra-national levels, if available, were viewed with some suspicion by people on the organizing committees since they would probably come with strings attached which might take the process out of the hands of the participants and into the agendas of the bureaucrats or politicians. Some funding sources focus on designated countries with the ironic result that small populations of Indigenous peoples—such as that in Costa Rica—are further marginalized in their countries because their population is not significant enough. And again, partnerships between community groups and academics to give voice to the marginalized are made difficult this time by the requirement that funds go to incorporated Indigenous organizations, often re-inscribing power differentials within the community whether based on gender, clan or class. We were held accountable by university administrators because we did not manage to secure solid representation at the Roundtable from the formal Indigenous political organizations. From our viewpoint, this attitude reflects a limited understanding of the internal divisions within Indigenous communities between formal elite Indigenous organizations and many community-based members that feel their interests have been marginalized or excluded by these formal organizations. For many of our participants, the lack of a leading role by the Indigenous political organizations was

viewed as a strength, not a weakness, because it greatly reduced hierarchies of political influence and interference.

At the lead institutions in Costa Rica and Canada, the project suffered from lack of resources, both monetary and non-monetary, at best, and from patronizing attitudes on the part of administrators toward the organizers at worst. Institutions that claim to value outreach and engagement and Indigenous issues and take for granted the importance of international meetings to further social scientific research, build research networks, and create new knowledge had a hard time seeing the value of an international gathering of community-based practitioners and academic researchers committed to celebrating and strengthening Indigenous women's community economic development. One result of this was that potential sources of private funding were largely put out of reach. Only the least likely sources were identified. We were told, on the one hand, that relationships were everything in gaining support, and on the other hand, that we should make all the contacts ourselves. Another result was that we were unable to find sufficient resources to send delegates to Costa Rica in February 2006 and the conference had to be postponed. We are pleased to report that

a third result is that the unsupportive attitudes have served only to stiffen our resistance to the status quo and our resolve to push forward with the project in some form.

CONCLUSION

Through our collaborative work, we have found that when women meet to discuss their understandings, practices, and dreams about development in Indigenous communities, they also discuss the opportunities for on-going relationships to promote development their way within and across their regions. Across the gamut of development — from the provision of health, education, and justice to fairly mainstream businesses — they negotiate powerful discourses and material conditions that would otherwise divide us in order to maintain the status quo (Muisse, 2003). Challenging neo-liberalism's depleted narratives of development, maturation, catch-up, or trickle-down, its new modalities of displacement and dispossession in reconstructions of sustainable development (Banerjee, 2003), or its new-found faith in (a more efficient) civil society (Mohan & Stokke, 2000), their stories will contribute to the performance of community and ceremonies of cohesion. It is in this context

Practical Strategies of Redeveloping Development

- Trust your stories; they help to make Indigenous women the strong people that they so often are.
- Think outside traditional frameworks of discussion and dialogue. Discover the sewing circles, roundtables and kitchen table methods of dialogue to ensure that many different voices are included.
- Keep speaking truth to power inside and outside your communities to re-right the wrongs of past and present.
- At the same time, seek out commonalities with the broadest range of others in order to resist marginalization of your voice.
- Through efforts large and small, try to raise some money that will help enable one or more local women involved in community development to connect with other women at regional, national, and international levels. Pooled together, these funds can facilitate independence of thought and action.
- Organize, organize, organize! The act of organizing is itself a key source of learning, motivating, and mobilizing for change. New communities and networks enrich us all.
- Listen to your hearts, think independently, act cooperatively, and celebrate the difference Indigenous women can make together.
- In the face of setbacks and unforeseen problems, stay focused on your goals, especially the long term goals of redeveloping ideas and relations of development.

and spirit of exposing contradictions, resisting categories, defying binaries and competitive systems that would define insiders and outsiders, winners and losers, that we undertook to make space for an holistic, cooperative approach to Indigenous community development affected by colonization in the past and by neo-liberalism in the present. In doing so, we have been humbled, inspired and energized by women who, despite incredible demands on their time and energy, have negotiated obstacles with marked good humour and generosity at times, and tears and solidarity at other times.

We have been honoured to work side by side with community-based women and be part of important “colearning” (Maru & Woodford, 2001). Even if we have not all shared power equally in the past or have had different experiences of a prolonged “marinating” in “colonial cognitive frameworks” (Battiste, 2004, p. 61), we have all been damaged by them and have benefited from the conscientization (Freire, 1970) promoted by women organizing and working together for justice for all. Negotiating the structural impediments to Aboriginal women’s community development — development that remains so critical to sustainable livelihoods — the women have developed multiple strategies in multiple sites, always alert to opportunities to organize and act, to turn negatives into positives, to celebrate the real strengths they share, and never content to accept the way things are. In the interests of healthy and sustainable communities, we share these stories of new solidarities and identities nourished by Indigenous women who think for themselves while acting with and for the many others who continue to experience inequities in local and global contexts.

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