INSIGHTS INTO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN FIRST NATIONS
A *Poverty Action Research Project*

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A CIHR-FUNDED POVERTY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

ABSTRACT

This research adds to the understanding, planning, and implementation of community health and wellness development in First Nation communities: transformative insights revealed through the Poverty Action Research Project. The article describes key learnings that respect different worlds and languages, thereby fostering and nurturing key relationships. Additional insights, related to community direction, cultural influences, and community-level descriptions of poverty are shared. As well, the local and often unique determinants of health and well-being, the role of external supports, the benefits of "bridging social capital", and the acknowledgment of community-based politics are highlighted. Six recommendations are made for policy change in support of distinctive poverty alleviation initiatives, acknowledging differing approaches to collaborative assessment, planning, and implementation.

BEFORE ALL OTHER WORDS

We first extend our gratitude to the five First Nations that are part of the Poverty Action Research Project (PARP): Eabametoong First Nation, Misipawistik Cree First Nation, Opitciwan Atikamekw First Nation, Sipekne'katik First Nation, and T'it'q'et. The PARP research team is committed to ensuring these First Nations' collaboration and consent on the content of this chapter. Without their participation in the project, however, this knowledge learning and sharing would not even be possible. In the spirit of Indigenous research, the entire PARP research team wishes to acknowledge the participation of the five First Nations communities in the project. Breaking from the conventions of academic authorship and introducing how the practice of mutually beneficial Indigenous research extends to publications, we acknowledge the five First Nations as equal partners in the preparation and content of this chapter, and they appear as co-authors. In addition, we are acknowledging the nature of Indigenous political organizations as governments, so political terms such as Chief and Council and Band Council are capitalized throughout this chapter.[2]

INTRODUCTION

From 2011 to 2017, the Poverty Action Research Project was on a dynamic and creative journey for community development with five First Nations across Canada. The research teams, over this time, experienced first-hand and gained a deep respect for the many strengths and resilience of First Nations peoples. As well, we learned about obstacles that they continue to face as they strive to provide for and ensure the well-being of their people and build healthy, thriving communities.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to raise awareness of these First Nations' strengths as well as to appreciate their great capacity and fortitude in light of the challenges that they continue to face. As noted by Dr. Marlene Brant Castellano and Dr. Frederic Wien, one of the "fundamental requisites of reconciliation" is "removing impediments to a healthy, empowered future for successive generations" of Indigenous peoples in Canada.[3] The 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) provides an honest account of how these impediments have arisen. The 2015 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) builds on RCAP recommendations and calls for immediate action to restructure relationships in all sectors of society, reconciling past wrongs by investing time and energy to build truly mutually respectful relationships. Given its longitudinal nature, PARP is in a key position to contribute to this conversation, advancing the process of reconciliation by revealing insights into these "impediments" and offering perspectives grounded in trusting relationships and first-hand experiences. Some of these impediments are internal, but a significant number are external to communities, imposed on them by an outdated understanding by present-day institutions, reinforced by media, of the capacity, education, and experience of First Nations.

Toward this objective, this case study will first introduce the PARP project and the five participating communities. Summaries highlighting some of the "action research" pursued through PARP are also presented. One of the main findings of the project relates to Indigenous perspectives on *poverty*, seeing as this word sits prominently in the name of the project. So in this chapter we discuss how First Nations reject the label, preferring to frame PARP in a holistic context related to community health, cultural vitality, and other factors that contribute to well-being in First Nations. As well, we explore the value of community-driven

research in the context of crediting First Nations with a great deal of experience, capacity, and resourcefulness in the face of resource scarcity (e.g., human and capital), inequitable funding, and burdensome government bureaucracies. Finally, we discuss impediments that hinder the empowerment of First Nations toward health and well-being, and we offer observations based on PARP experiences as a contribution to the discussion about reconciliation and relationship building. Although PARP researchers worked solely with First Nations communities, much of what is shared in this chapter relates to many Indigenous peoples across Canada, even though the chapter has a focus on First Nations.

Having said that, we acknowledge the distinctness of each First Nation, the Inuit and Métis, as well as Indigenous peoples living in urban settings. PARP thus unfolded differently for each community that took part in the project. What we share here are threads that have been picked up from experiences in each First Nation, which when woven together present a tapestry. These threads, or elements, hold insights and observations that we believe are important to share as all sectors of society discern how to make transformative change for reconciliation and relationship building between Indigenous peoples in Canada and non-Indigenous Canadians.

Most of the communities described here are some distance removed from urban centres, sometimes hundreds of kilometres away and in one case accessible only by air or ice road. Commentators from the south are quick to dismiss the prospects for development of First Nations communities, jumping to the conclusion that the only rational solution is to relocate the communities (meaning to disperse individuals) to more "promising" southern locales.

In this chapter, we take a different view, one that emerges naturally from close and sustained interactions with community members. It is a point of view that emphasizes the long history of inhabitants in their regions, their deep spiritual and cultural attachments to the lands and waters, their strengths and resilience, especially because of their ties to place. It is also a point of view that does not accept the status quo as a given; rather, it emphasizes the possibilities that exist if Aboriginal and treaty rights to lands and resources are recognized and if self-determination is supported. Nevertheless, developmental challenges are significant, and it is instructive to learn how the First Nations communities themselves, with assistance from external resources, approach the task of improving community health and well-being through deliberate actions.

BACKGROUND

PARP had its roots in the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) 2006 campaign to "Make Poverty History" and was first conceptualized through a joint partnership between the AFN and university researchers from across North America. The six-year research project was funded through a grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, specifically the Institute of Aboriginal Peoples Health and the Institute of Population and Public Health. The overall aim of PARP was to work with First Nations communities to develop and begin implementing long-term strategies to reduce poverty, create a sustainable economic base, and provide the foundation for community health and well-being.

At the outset, sixty-one First Nations communities across Canada expressed interest in participating in the project. Five volunteer communities were selected to reflect the diversity of First Nations across the country. These five communities are Sipekne'katik in Nova Sco-

FIGURE 1
Locations of the Five Communities Participating in PARP

tia, Opitciwan in Quebec, Eabametoong in northern Ontario, Misipawistik Cree at Grand Rapids, Manitoba, and T'it'q'et at Lillooet in British Columbia.

RESEARCH PROCESS

As in any research undertaking, the work plan outlined a general process for all research teams to follow. In addition to researchers travelling to and building positive working relationships with the communities (if they did not already exist), a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was to be established to guide and approve the researchers' activities, with regular reports to Chief and Council. When the project got underway, however, research teams deferred to the direction of each community. In Opitciwan, Quebec, for example, the Nikaniw Committee was established (in Atikamekw, *nikaniw* can be translated as "go forward") and included representation from all interest groups in the community, including Band Council, health and social services, education, employment, youth association,

women's association, and Elders. In Manitoba, the Misipawistik Cree Advisory Committee was called E'Opinitowak, which means "giving a hand up," and was composed of several community members and two external representatives (from Manitoba Hydro and the provincial government), both of whom were trusted by the community. Although other First Nations also formed CACs, Chiefs and Councils for some communities preferred to serve as the coordinating bodies, and no CAC existed. Both approaches were effective to varying degrees, and both raised challenges. An article in the *Engaged Scholar Journal*[4] explores these and other issues related to the process that each PARP team followed and the lessons learned, not only for researchers to consider when engaging with First Nations in community-driven participatory research, but also for government and industry personnel when developing policies and programs or building relationships for development ventures.

A community coordinator was also hired by PARP to assist the research team with various tasks. These tasks included, but were not limited to, undertaking a community assessment to identify salient characteristics, strengths, challenges, and opportunities; collaboratively preparing an economic development strategic plan; working with the community on its implementation; and eventually undertaking research to measure project outcomes. Every community hired at least one coordinator. In at least one instance, however, the First Nation and project team opted to work together in a different way (e.g., dealing directly with the Band Council and Administration or with the CAC).

The project unfolded differently for each community. PARP collaborated with the five First Nations to pursue numerous undertakings, ranging from research and strategic plan development and implementation to capacity building, policy development, and governance initiatives within the Band Administration. Initiatives also included cultural and economic development programs to engage youth and people of all ages interested in seeking employment or setting up a local business. What follows is a brief summary from each of the research teams and communities highlighting some of the major research and action initiatives pursued through PARP.
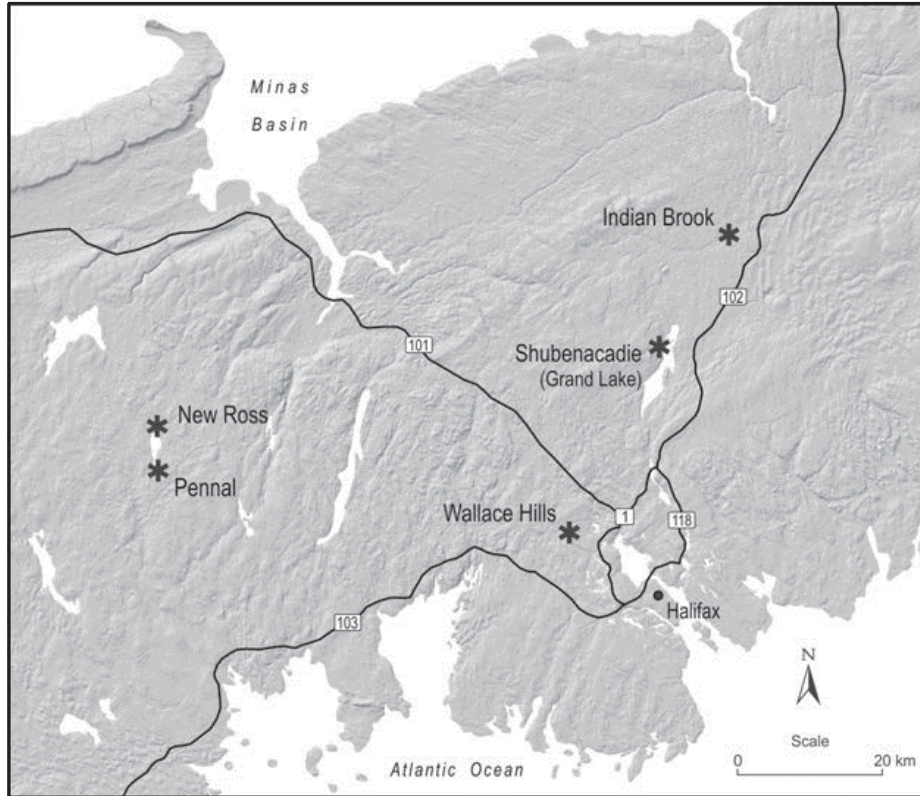
RESEARCH IN ACTION

Sipekne'Katik First Nation in Nova Scotia

Sipekne'katik First Nation is the second largest Mi'kmaq band in Nova Scotia and includes the communities of Indian Brook Indian Reserve 14, New Ross, Pennal, Dodd's Lot, Wallace Hills, and Grand Lake. Sipekne'katik First Nation has 2,588 band members, with approximately 1,244 members residing in the community and 1,344 members residing outside of it. The land area of Sipekne'katik First Nation spans just over twelve square kilometres and is located sixty-eight kilometres from Kijipuktuk (Halifax) and twenty-nine kilometres southwest of Truro.[5]

The PARP project in Sipekne'katik had a large Advisory Committee composed of persons from both within and outside the community. It included the Chief and several Band Council members as well as an Elder, agency heads, and others. External members included academics, senior federal and provincial government personnel, and representatives of First Nations governments and organizations.

An initial activity was the development of a strategic plan, ultimately called "Building Our Community Together: The Poverty Action Plan of the Shubenacadie First Nation." It

FIGURE 2
Sipekne'katik Communities

was grounded in historical research, in a large number of key informant interviews, secondary data analysis, input from Advisory Committee members, and meetings with agency and department heads. Several open community meetings were also held.

Once developed, the strategic plan was approved in principle by Chief and Council, but further input from community members was mandated. Thus, a household survey of community members was conducted.

Of particular concern to the community's leaders was a more integrated approach to providing services to community members in need, in a bid to get away from a pattern of isolated and uncoordinated service provision. In response to this need, PARP developed and implemented a project in which community members, especially social assistance recipients, were invited to take part in a pilot in which each volunteer met with a group of relevant service providers who pooled their knowledge and services in support of the individual and his or her particular needs. The hope was that this holistic approach would be more successful in helping individuals to make the transition from dependence to self-reliance.

Opitciwan First Nation in Quebec

Opitciwan is an Atikamekw nation composed of three communities: Manawan, Wemotaci, and Obedjiwan-Opitciwan. Atikamekw means "whitefish" and refers to the species of fish that the people have eaten for ages. Opitciwan was formerly located at the tip of Mékiskan, a site that is accessible by water and is one hour by canoe from the spot that the community occupies today. In 1920, the Gouin Dam flooded the community, causing the families to move closer to the bay. The people settled slowly in the territory where the rising rivers meet, hence the name Opitciwan, which means "the meeting place of the rising rivers."

Opitciwan is located in the heart of Quebec north of the Gouin Reservoir in the region of La Mauricie. It is accessible by a logging road 166 kilometres long, linking the reserve to Highway 167 in Lac-Saint-Jean. Opitciwan is also accessible by La Tuque (Logging Road 10) and by Chibougamau (Logging Road Barrette-Chapais). Based on the 2011 census, the community has a population of 2,031 people.[6]

FIGURE 3
Nitaskinan Territory

Source: http://povertyaction.ca/community/opitciwan-qc
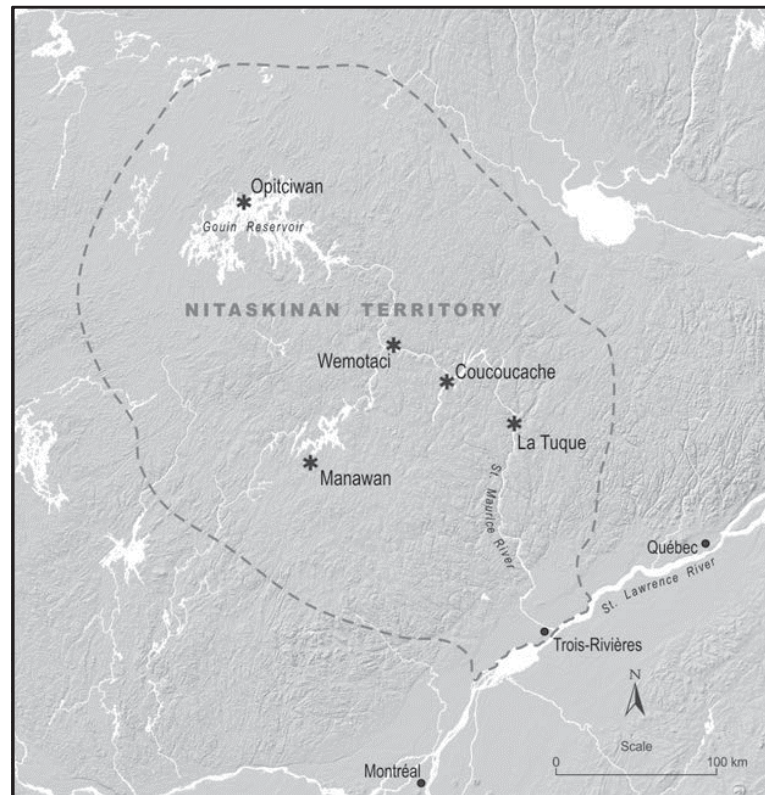
Early in its existence, Opitciwan's Nikaniw Committee decided to rally the largest possible number of people and organizations in the community in activities relevant to the fight against poverty. The committee directed its actions toward the well-being of children, family support, and the transmission of traditional knowledge. Toward this goal, it pursued activities, not without difficulty, by mobilizing human, material, and financial resources. Two activities are highlighted here.

The Family House had been under the supervision of the Women's Association of Opitciwan. However, it was not operational since the facility did not meet building standards, and no activities had been organized. The Women's Association and the Nikaniw Committee worked together on the project. With the collaboration of the Opitciwan Atikamekw Council, the building was brought up to code and the status cleared. Thanks to a financial arrangement involving the PARP project and a program called Child Future, a coordinator was hired to prepare and implement a program. The activities of the Family House have included, to date, a community kitchen that brings parents together, a room equipped with children's toys, conference luncheons, breakfasts for children, and a day nursery. The luncheons, held monthly, have been particularly popular. Up to fifty parents gather at a time and determine the topics for discussion. The program contributes to the well-being of children and supports families.

The Nikaniw Committee also established the Ocki Magadan program. Based on the active teaching of traditional knowledge, the program was initially intended for young adults who had dropped out of school; it has since been redirected toward youth in high school. In its different phases, Ocki Magadan has been made possible thanks to the resources of PARP, the Youth House, the Québec en forme program, the Quebec Social Initiatives Fund, and the education sector of the Opitciwan Atikamekw Council. The program holds activities in which young people learn traditional skills such as making tents or other utilitarian objects (e.g., canoes, baskets, etc.), beginning with the harvesting and processing of the base materials (e.g., moose hide, birch bark, etc.) and ending with the sales of products. The program contributes to the retention of students in Mikisiw High School, the transmission of traditional knowledge, and family support through generational bridging.

Eabametoong First Nation in Ontario

The community of Eabametoong First Nation (EFN, also known as Fort Hope) is located on the north shore of Eabamet Lake, 360 kilometres north of Thunder Bay. EFN is a member of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and the Matawa Tribal Council and a signatory to Treaty 9.[7]

Eabametoong is a traditional name, which in Anishinaabemowin (the Ojibway language) means "the reversing of the water place." Each year, because of runoff, the flow of water from Eabamet Lake into the Albany River temporarily reverses. The name Fort Hope comes from the Hudson's Bay Company fur-trading post built by the lake in 1890. Nothing remains of the old trading post; however, two churches at the old bay site still stand, and the cemetery remains in use today. The site, referred to as Old Bay or Old Fort Hope, is six kilometres southwest of the community's current location across Eabamet Lake.

Today EFN has approximately 2,400 band members, about 1,300 of whom live on reserve, with the balance living in Thunder Bay, Geraldton, and other surrounding communities. EFN is accessible year round only by air with flights operated by two airlines. In recent years, the "winter ice road season" has been shortening because of climate change. Residents

maintain these roads, which enable them to travel to Thunder Bay (sixteen hours), Pickle Lake (nine hours), and other surrounding First Nations.

The PARP research team took its direction from EFN's Chief and Council. When community input was required, individuals formed ad hoc committees to provide and coordinate public input. Several initiatives were undertaken and received PARP support, two of which are summarized here.

Previous attempts by EFN to establish an economic development corporation ended unsuccessfully. Since one PARP team member had corporate experience, Chief and Council sought PARP's assistance in establishing a new development corporation to separate Band politics from business yet remain consistent with the First Nation's vision and strategic goals. After a number of Band-wide meetings and surveys to gather community input on the proposal, Chief and Council passed Band Council Resolutions (BCRs) authorizing the start-up and affirming the corporation's overall direction to establish external sources of revenue for the Band. Board directors were selected, the first board meetings were held, and a strategic planning retreat was scheduled to set the direction for the corporation.

In February 2015, Chief and Council asked PARP to pursue a local economic development project with and for Eabametoong. After consultation with external resource people, the PARP research team proposed a Cultural Tourism Showcase Capacity Building Project to the Chief and Council, the economic development officer, and then the community in an October 2015 Band-wide meeting. Receiving EFN's approval for the concept, the PARP researcher began applying for grants from funding agencies. By August 2016, 100 percent funding was secured from the Ontario Aboriginal Economic Development Fund, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, the Ontario Tourism Development Fund, Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment and Training Services, and EFN, raising over $110,000 for the project.

The Cultural Tourism Showcase Project was a community-wide project with three phases:

1. *Training:* augmented previous training of the EFN tourism group; neighbouring communities were invited to participate in the training sessions.
2. *Learning through doing:* provided on-the-job experience to the tourism group in planning, advertising, and hosting a pilot Cultural Tourism Showcase Project in Eabametoong in the summer of 2017.
3. *Post-event review and analysis:* assessed the undertaking and determined its feasibility and the next steps for a variety of tourism ventures in EFN territory and northern Ontario.

Misipawistik Cree Nation, Manitoba

The Misipawistik Cree Nation (MCN) is located on the northwestern shore of Lake Winnipeg where the mouth of the North Saskatchewan River enters the lake. Traditionally, people from the Misipawistik Cree Nation have considered their community the geographic centre of Manitoba. Misipawistik Cree Nation is approximately 400 kilometres north of Winnipeg and is accessible by Provincial Highway 6, by air, and by water. As of 2012, the total membership was 1,753, with 34 percent under the age of fifteen, of whom 20 percent were under the age of five.

PARP's team of two research co-leaders worked with a CAC throughout the project. This advisory group set the name and vision for the group. E'Opinitowak, "giving a hand up," was chosen instead of a reference to poverty, which the advisory group strongly objected to since they did not think that it would be an accurate depiction of the state in which they live. The advisory group determined that youth should be the focus of their collaborative efforts with PARP to help the community increase employment and improve living standards. The youth in MCN, as in other First Nations, include teenagers as well as those in their twenties and sometimes in their early thirties. As a result of the group's vision, the PARP research co-leaders secured donations of computers for the adult education computer lab as well as hockey equipment for use by youth so that they could enjoy their refurbished arena. Both were secured from provincial programs that, until then, were unknown to the community.

Other initiatives that E'Opinitowak pursued in collaboration with PARP included projects oriented toward youth that were locally designed and delivered. Although small in scale and low in cost, these projects were cost-shared and reached large numbers of community members. Deepening the revival of culture was important, as was a focus on employment and strengthening the resource economy of the community. Examples of projects include a life skills/canoe adventure course, the Lake Keepers program, and an initiative to help community members obtain a driver's licence.

T'it'q'et, British Columbia

The community of T'it'q'et (formerly Lillooet Indian Band), situated adjacent to the town of Lillooet, is approximately 254 kilometres northeast of Vancouver on Highway 99. T'it'q'et is one of eleven communities within the St'át'imc Nation that share a common language, culture, history, and territory. T'it'q'et currently has 394 registered members. The Band has seven reserves, including the main reserve, Lillooet Indian Reserve 1, and a shared reserve with the Bridge River Indian Band.

Through PARP, T'it'q'et undertook a number of projects, one of which was the preparation of a community health survey report to understand further the health and well-being of the community, to acquire information and data relevant to the development of the community's profile, and to improve health and well-being while concurrently reducing poverty by contributing to the development of an economic strategic plan for the community.

The research assistant designed questionnaires for adults (eighteen and older), youths (from twelve to seventeen), and children (up to eleven), and they were the primary tool for data collection. The development of these questionnaires was based on the national First Nations Regional Health Survey (conducted from 2008 to 2010) and a list of priority health indicators (identified by the T'it'q'et Regional Advisory Community). Using the questionnaires, two data collectors administered the house-to-house health survey in the community in November 2014.

The baseline data collected from the health surveys, once analyzed, will be an important tool for the community to use as a basis for comparison after future initiatives are implemented (in economic development and other pursuits) to determine the impacts of activities on various health indicators and, by extension, the health and well-being of the community.

A second project undertaken through PARP was a synthesis of the impacts of climate change and an introduction to management strategies used by First Nations communities in

response to climate change. People across Canada, including First Nations communities, have noticed changes in their local environments and have been learning to adapt in order to survive. First Nations are strongly connected to natural environments for subsistence and for the preservation of their cultures. However, because of the frequency of fluctuations in weather patterns and the intensity of natural disasters (as consequences of climate change), communities are unable to make predictions using traditional knowledge with previous degrees of confidence; as a result, they have become vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. People in the Upper St'át'imc Territory, in particular T'it'q'et, have expressed concerns about the effects of climate change on their lifestyle, specifically on agriculture (or farming) and food security, fishing, hunting, logging, food gathering, and community traditions and culture.

HIGHLIGHTING FIRST NATIONS STRENGTHS

One of the many benefits that PARP team members enjoyed during the project was the meaningful relationships forged and strengthened. PARP's long-term nature fostered trust in new and ongoing friendships across the country. Team members saw first-hand the inherent strengths of communities as a whole and among band members of all ages — from political as well as non-elected leaders to Elders to youth. Many First Nations across Canada have rebounded from the impacts of colonialism-capitalism and residential schools, building on their connections with the land, their resilience, and their unremitting pursuit of their visions under strong leadership. Many are still struggling. The five communities that participated in PARP are at different points along this spectrum of health and well-being, and, in their own ways, they are working hard to achieve a healthy balance in community life. In this section, we shine a spotlight on the strengths underlying their tenacity in this quest in spite of ongoing adversities.

The six years during which PARP worked with the five First Nations across Canada showed us, as researchers, a perspective that few in Canadian society are aware of or few researchers attain, as nowhere in the literature have we come across what is highlighted here. That is, the picture that emerges from PARP's experiences and relationships shows the incredible capacity of leaders, the expertise in the community, and the exceptional education of workers in the community. Mainstream media and many non-Indigenous Canadians often assume that these attributes are deficient in many First Nations communities. For example, assumptions exist that the leaders and communities lack capacity, that few possess expertise, and that the majority lack the formal education required to address issues and/or solve problems.

With these assumptions firmly in place, generally speaking, the predominantly accepted approach to solving community problems has been to adhere to a prevailing system in which a First Nation is given little freedom or flexibility and is subjected to rigid controls. From the perceived lack of internal education, expertise, and thus capacity of the community to address effectively its issues, deferring to outsiders (i.e., outside the First Nation or non-Indigenous expertise) has been the default strategy of federal and provincial governments. First Nations have been given insufficient independence or power either to make their own decisions or to implement them.

From the experience of PARP, however, we learned that the leaders are able to deal with a multitude of incredibly complex, interconnected, and personally challenging issues

simultaneously. They illustrate a high degree of capacity to move issues forward in a difficult, bureaucratic environment. With resilience and perseverance, despite the innumerable challenges that they face on a regular basis, First Nations communities demonstrate their expertise, responding to often simultaneous and interconnected challenges in pursuing a brighter, more positive future. Additionally, in spite of the need for more practical professional training and the requirement to learn on the job, the workers in the communities show a high degree of education and effectively integrate a number of disparate job functions with demanding and excessive funding and reporting requirements all within a challenging work environment.

The point that we want to emphasize, from the insider perspective offered by PARP, is that Western-based conceptions of capacity, expertise, and education take on a whole different meaning in and among First Nations. From the perspective of the PARP team, there are leaders in every First Nation community with which we worked (elected officials, staff workers, and members of the community) who have the education, expertise, and capacity to work together to solve their problems. The workers and community members have the ability, desire, and motivation to move issues forward and seek a better future. What will enable them to do so is the provision of ample and equitable resources and the acknowledgement of their independence so that they can make and implement their own decisions.

The perspective offered by PARP researchers is that First Nations communities are not given the credit that they deserve. They consistently demonstrate that they are able to succeed despite incredibly difficult circumstances (take, for example, the list below of interconnected and complex issues with which many First Nations have to cope). We even speculate that few highly educated and experienced people from the rest of Canada, if thrown into the situations in which many First Nations find themselves (especially in remote communities), would be able to succeed as First Nations have been able to do.

To illustrate, PARP researchers can verify the challenges imposed on First Nations that seek funding and a green light to proceed with any given project. Granted, good planning is essential. However, a few issues have arisen in these approval processes that present unique challenges for First Nations. These issues include any one of the following or a combination of them: (1) when government forms, procedures, and deadlines shift midstream, requiring the completion of even more forms and steps before a file is considered ready; (2) when an agency fails to receive a report from one project, affecting the approval of another project seeking funding from the same agency; or (3) when one project requires multiple funders in order to proceed and, in turn, each funder requires separate expense reimbursement procedures and different templates for reporting. Workers in any agency can become stressed and frustrated with these fluid and complex circumstances. Keeping all of the forms, deadlines, and reporting requirements straight for several projects simultaneously places a significant burden on Band staff, especially when core funding is inadequate to support sufficient staffing levels and the few staff members carrying the load are stretched to the maximum.

We can throw into the mix additional complexities that First Nations face, not to mention emergencies and crises that occur all too frequently. Consider the following (some of which are recounted in the media, whereas others are less publicized but still present significant challenges):

- population explosion among youth (up to the age of twenty-nine) with a high percentage of teenage parenthood;
- underfunding of schools, educational programs, and social programs;

- understaffed medical facilities;
- inadequate housing and infrastructure (water, sewer, electricity, fire protection);
- food insecurity and lack of affordable, healthy food options;
- environmental contamination;
- high expense of everyday living complicated by high unemployment rates;
- health issues (diabetes, etc.);
- high rates of violent death, suicide, prescription drug and other substance abuse;
- multigenerational echoes of residential school experiences;
- stitching together from twenty to thirty different funding programs every year;
- two-year election cycle mandated under the obsolete Indian Act (unless a First Nation has held a referendum to increase election terms), suspending Band activity during the campaign and causing delays or stoppages when new Chiefs and Councillors take office.

If thrown into these conditions, would many other Canadians be able to handle the demands and pressures? First Nations have proven to be resourceful in the face of historical and ongoing hardships and restrictions. They have developed the knowledge and skills to adapt to their changing environments and survive. Whereas most non-Indigenous Canadians have lived in very different conditions, developing knowledge and skills that might be good fits for "mainstream" society, such advantages might not help them to survive under conditions found on reserve that Indigenous peoples must endure, cannot escape, and rightly choose not to because of their strong connection to place. So it is inappropriate for outsiders to believe that they can turn up like saviours with the answers. Given this reality, this is why research projects such as PARP must be community driven and why Indigenous peoples deserve more credit for their knowledge, expertise, and capacity.

Indigenous perspectives, PARP also found, embrace a different understanding of success. Through PARP, we came to understand that a First Nations view of success includes a broader view compared with that of mainstream society.[8] First Nations success operates, in part, in an administrative environment that few others experience. It is where First Nations leaders, workers, and community members continue to move issues forward given on-the-ground realities arising from a long-endured bureaucratic regime under the Indian Act that has perpetuated repressive federal, provincial, and corporate mindsets and actions. Despite these circumstances, the resilience and adaptability of First Nations have prevailed, and they are still here.

One might question the plausibility of this stance given the tragedy of youth suicide; high unemployment rates; gaps in education, health, and housing; and ongoing addictions, among other news stories that make media headlines on a regular basis. But these headlines only scratch the surface. To accept the veracity of our point of view in this chapter, one must appreciate First Nations from a perspective of strength as opposed to that of deficit. And, in order to appreciate First Nations strengths, long-term respectful relationship building is a prerequisite — one that the TRC mandated in its calls to action for all sectors of society. One must take the time to learn to see beyond the headlines. The members of PARP had the privilege of gaining this insight over six years.

With this new perspective, as realized through the PARP research project, a totally different paradigmatic approach to solving the problems in a First Nations community is possible. From this point of view, the community is capable of solving its own problems. If given

the resources to mitigate the overall challenges of the operating environment, the community has the experience, expertise, and capacity to succeed on its own terms. All that it requires is the independence to make its own decisions, and equitable resources will help to support and implement those decisions.

RESPECT FOR FIRST NATIONS CHALLENGES

This is not to dismiss each people's distinct cultural lens (recognizing that common ground exists between peoples) or to minimize the real challenges that First Nations continue to face (as noted above). What was reported in 2016 in the media about Attawapiskat, Ontario; Lac La Ronge, Saskatchewan; and other communities is not happening in isolation. First Nations across Canada are experiencing, to varying degrees, hardship and crisis. Their challenges are compounded by a number of issues that PARP explored in detail in an article published in the *Engaged Scholars Journal*.[9] The article also discusses several distinctive cultural protocols, perspectives, and other considerations especially relevant to academic and other external groups wishing to work or partner with a First Nation or in some way contribute to a community's development (on its terms). The article's main points follow.

Respect for Different WORLDS

An overarching theme from PARP is the acknowledgement that core differences exist between mainstream Canadian society and all five communities involved in the project (and by extension other First Nations, Inuit, and Métis across the country). Our differences are not to be seen as negative, for our combined strength lies in the diverse nature of all our peoples. To ignore our differences and engage with First Nations insensitive to the histories and cultural traditions that make Indigenous peoples distinct is unacceptable in this new era of reconciliation.

Respect for Different Languages

This has already been discussed in relation to Western and Indigenous understandings of words such as *poverty, success, capacity, education*, and *expertise*. Where English or French is not the original language of the people, and where different worldviews exist, special consideration must be given to word choice and communication strategies.

Spending Time Taking Care of Relationships

The building of a positive relationship serves as the central foundation for working with First Nations. When working with First Nations communities and organizations, taking time at the outset to establish respectful, trusted relationships is crucial, and taking care of these relationships over time is vital. People who wish to conduct research or business with First Nations must take into consideration and budget for the increased amount of time required in such undertakings. Those who seek to work with a community must realize that trust is not given overnight but earned.

Respecting First Nations' Priorities with Time

Part and parcel with the above distinctions are the implications for time management. Many factors affect the pace of work:

- Weather: for fly-in and remote communities, bad weather will undoubtedly cause flight cancellations or poor driving conditions (if road accessible), causing project delays.
- Process: many, if not all, communities wish to ensure community-wide support for a particular "action" being contemplated. Chief and Council might call for Band meetings to seek broad endorsement of an initiative.
- Respect: many Chiefs and Councils and Band Administrations, unfortunately, are simply too busy at times with the demands of their positions. In addition, seasonal hunts require people to be absent for a few weeks each spring and fall. Unforeseen circumstances or planned absences can cause meeting deferrals and delays in the overall process.
- Emergencies: throughout PARP's tenure, all First Nations had to cope with deaths because of illness as well as suicide, with losses of the old as well as the young. In many if not all communities, when a death occurs, the Band observes the tradition of closing the Band office; all work halts so that everyone can pay respects to the family and honour the individual who has passed.

Respect for Different Pressures and Social Forces

In addition to frequent requests to listen to proposals or participate in socio-environmental assessments, First Nations have had numerous obligations to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) (now known as Indigenous Services Canada) and other federal departments and ministries. As already highlighted, extensive reporting and disclosure requirements, along with application deadlines and forms that sometimes change midstream, create a dynamic and demanding environment in which Band staff have to navigate.

As well, First Nations rely on federal transfer payments for their core funding, and until recently they have been operating in a budgetary reality in which federal funding increases had been restricted to 2 percent per year since 1996, despite higher rates of inflation and population growth.[10] With efforts by the current Liberal government to lift the funding cap, the creation of Indigenous Services Canada, and the dissolution of INAC, it is hoped that shortfalls will be eliminated and that cumulative impacts because of inequitable funding will be redressed.[11]

The short electoral cycle of two years as mandated by the Indian Act has caused its own set of pressures. Some communities are pursuing the change to three- or four-year terms, but this takes time.[12] With a two-year term, after acclimatizing to the job, before they know it, Chief and Council realize that only one year remains before the next election, so time is short to get anything accomplished before thoughts turn to the next campaign.

Human Resources

Depending on the community, grade eight might be the average level of formal, Western-based education attained by Band members. Fewer high school diplomas are offset by all of the learning on the job and life experiences of the Chief and Council and senior staff.

Although formal postsecondary education might be limited, especially in more remote settings, as already discussed, First Nations have a great deal of experience and have adapted their skills and knowledge to navigate the complex bureaucracies of provincial and federal governments:

• Professional development programs for staff and management in Band Administrations are constantly needed. Additional training in various fields is sought, but this depends on the availability of funds, time, and coverage for those away on training. Distance learning might be a possibility, but in remote communities, such as Eabametoong First Nation, slow internet connectivity can be a limiting factor.

• Staff turnover is another issue. Job vacancies are common, and some First Nations struggle to retain people in key positions. Although not only an issue for remote communities, being a fly-in community exacerbates the challenge, for the population is isolated and might be comparatively smaller. The remoteness might not entice qualified people to apply and, once there, stay long term. Housing shortages also affect people's ability to commit to a position.

Information Technology (IT)

It may be likely that for some communities, such as those closer to urban areas, bandwidth speed is fast, and technology is available, facilitating effective communications via email and videoconferencing. Also, distance learning and online professional development courses may be readily available (but these assumptions may still be unfounded for some First Nations, even if they are closer to urban areas). For more remote First Nations, however, IT problems persist. In bad weather, often the internet and telephone lines disconnect. In Eabametoong First Nation, for example, limitations on bandwidth have restricted internet speeds and access to online instruction. Also, capabilities that others take for granted, such as sending email attachments, using programs such as DropBox to transfer larger files, and sharing calendars, fail. Downloading monthly bank statements and exploring websites for resources and information take too much time. Troubleshooting problems remotely is not possible given the limited bandwidth speed. For remote communities such as Eabametoong, these problems have significant impacts on staff productivity and impede information sharing and timely communication.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS INTO A FIRST NATIONS
HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

In this section, we describe a number of additional insights gleaned from PARP's long-term association with the five First Nations. As in other sections of this chapter, our intention is not to be prescriptive, for each community's distinctness necessitates an individualized process. We offer these insights in the spirit of sharing what PARP research teams learned during the six years of the project, contributing to the discussion on reconciliation and relationship building between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Accepting Communities Where They Are and Where They Want to Go

An important task for us in the first year of the project was to select the five volunteer communities with which we would work. Two considerations influenced the selection process. First, we did not want to be accused of cherry-picking — that is, choosing communities that had the best prospects for development and leaving aside those in more challenging circumstances. Second, consistent with the first consideration, we wanted to include communities from across the country, a French-language community as well as an English-speaking community, at different stages in the process of development, and in a range of geographic locations, from urban or close to urban to rural and to northern fly-in. With these criteria in mind, we took direction from the AFN to ensure that all 633 communities had an equal opportunity to be considered. Sixty-three First Nations replied to the initial invitation, of which half provided additional information related to location, size, on- and off-reserve populations, and development challenges and opportunities. The final selection was made based on the aforementioned criteria.

During the decision-making process, we were advised by knowledgeable individuals that we should avoid including the community that had the most challenging development prospects on the ground, as it would be difficult to work under crisis conditions. The First Nation had recently declared a state of emergency because of prescription drug abuse. We ignored that advice partly because the need for assistance was so clear. We also had the idea that we should take the communities where they were at and where they wanted to go and try to provide assistance to move the yardstick along on each chosen journey.

The process of selection that we followed reinforced the community-driven nature of PARP as we worked to ensure that the First Nations chosen were representative of different environmental/geographic regions of the country as well as a range of socio-economic circumstances and stages of community development. With respect to the most challenged community, our experience was that it took longer to establish a proper relationship and to determine where we could be most helpful, but in the end the collaboration between the community and PARP yielded a strong relationship and significant project outcomes, which included establishing an economic development corporation and hosting a cultural tourism showcase, among other projects.

Significant projects were also undertaken in the other communities based on their priorities and directions. For example, the E'Opinitowak Committee in MCN noted that many youth did not have a driver's licence, a qualification for the majority of employment opportunities. PARP facilitated a process for youth to obtain their licences. T'it'q'et community members chose to do a health survey to understand better baseline pictures and health needs. They also pursued a study on food security and anticipated impacts of climate change. These were only a few of the many projects undertaken with PARP, illustrating the diversity in directions that the five First Nations chose to take with their respective PARP teams.

Culture Is Everywhere

In earlier decades, writing about the economic development of disadvantaged communities or nations tended to emphasize the importance of having certain narrowly defined technical requirements for success. They included factors such as location in relation to mar-

kets, availability of natural resources, human capital, transportation networks, technology, and funds for capital investment.

Culture tended not to be an important part of these development models unless it was argued that the culture of the community or nation was all wrong — too tied to tradition, too present oriented, too much emphasis on extended families, and so on. In more recent times, culture has come into the picture in another way — as a product or experience that can be marketed, such as handicrafts or cultural tourism. Indeed, with PARP, one of the more isolated communities in the project, Eabametoong, developed a cultural tourism experience that brought southern visitors to the North, exposing them to a rich cultural experience in the broadest sense.

It was one of the major contributions of the Harvard Project on American Economic Development to bring forward another way in which culture plays a role, the concept of cultural congruence. This refers to American Indian Tribes or Canadian First Nations that have had a particular institutional structure imposed on them by colonial authorities in a one-size-fits-all manner (e.g., an elected Chief and Council system). Rarely have such structures matched the culture and traditions of the community, leading to a situation in which decisions made by the imposed institutions lack legitimacy and contribute to internal conflict. First Nations going back to their own traditions and reshaping their institutions accordingly as part of a nation-building process are addressing this lack of fit. T'it'q'et, for example, and the St'át'mic Nation of which it is a part, have written their own constitution, delineating relationships and responsibilities for present and future generations with respect to the lands and resources, people, language, and culture. The constitution is grounded in St'át'mic beliefs and values and reflects a holistic view of community self-governance, outlining principles related to St'át'mic title and rights, the economy, trade relations, justice, and spirituality. T'it'q'et's governance structure includes individual mandates for a Traditional Council and an Elders Council that collaborate with each other as well as with the Band Council. In fact, the Band Chief and Council report and answer to both the Traditional Council and the Elders' Council, the latter of which holds veto power over decisions, based on community direction.

What became evident over the six years that PARP worked with all five First Nations, and what we have tried to emphasize through this chapter both directly and indirectly, is that culture is central to how the communities prioritize their daily responsibilities and how they operate. For example, the First Nations involved in PARP taught the research teams how their cultures inform their processes of development in the conception of what constitutes a good life or in the culturally based protocols by which relationships are established between the communities and outside groups. In addition to the foundational principles that we followed, culture informed many of the project choices undertaken with PARP, such as Lake Keepers (already mentioned) and *Awakening the Spirit* (a video project for self-esteem among youth) in MCN, a birch bark course that can be taken for credit in the Opitciwan school, and a Cultural Tourism Showcase Project in Eabametoong, to name just a few. The conclusion that we have drawn is that culture is everywhere in First Nations, not only to be acknowledged but also to be respected in all aspects of the work at hand.

Community-Level Determinants of Health and Well-Being

In our proposal to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) for funding, our initial thinking was to undertake research and action, in conjunction with the chosen com-

munities, to address poverty as a social determinant of health. As noted above, in relation to community perspectives, we were too focused on the economic dimension. Our causal argument was that improvements in areas such as jobs, incomes, and business development would have direct, positive impacts on the health and well-being of individuals and families, though we were worried that the impacts might not be visible during the life of the project.

Our thinking changed as the project evolved and for reasons already discussed in this chapter. We began to see ourselves as contributing in a modest way to a process of nation building by undertaking a variety of initiatives following from community strategic plans — activities such as creating an economic development corporation (EFN), improving communication capacity and training for Band staff (EFN), undertaking surveys so that leaders can be better informed to guide decision making (T'it'q'et), developing a food preservation and food security project (T'it'q'et and MCN), piloting an integrated services model to support persons seeking to exit social assistance (Sipek'nekatik), and, in MCN, engaging youth and Elders in learning traditional life skills, learning how to drive, and applying traditional knowledge as Lake Keepers. The idea was that, by supporting communities in projects of their choosing that reflect a holistic approach to "living well" (one of the terms that communities preferred to "poverty"), we would make a contribution to strengthening those communities. That in itself would have positive benefits for the health and well-being of community members.

The Role of External Supports

In the introductory sections of this chapter, we noted that all First Nations communities involved in PARP shared the common aspiration that the project contribute to improving community health and well-being. They sought to travel farther along the roads that they defined. Could they do it on their own? Our experience suggests that government supports are essential in the early stages even if communities are later able to generate significant own-source revenues. The driver's licence initiative that the E'Opinitowak Committee launched in MCN is a case in point; PARP team members coordinated with the government of Manitoba to facilitate the program so that community members could get their licences, which in turn increased their eligibility for employment.

Also, grants for training, infrastructure, communication, travel, and of course salaries are critical. The other requirement for government programs is that they be flexible and supportive, that they not seek to implement a centrally determined agenda but be available to support the strategic plans that the communities have set out. There would be little point in undertaking the development of strategic plans if support for their implementation were unavailable.

A related question is whether the academic sector can make a contribution, and here we are at risk of being self-serving. Suffice it to say that we were able to support relevant research (e.g., undertaking key informant interviews in MCN, T'it'q'et, and Sipek'nekatik or surveying the population to measure health status in T'it'q'et). We contributed our knowledge of the literature as well as specific academic expertise (e.g., in legal matters, in economics/business, or in the social determinants of health). Additionally, we helped to connect First Nations to other academics or to governments when requested. Importantly, in both Sipek'nekatik and Eabametoong, we provided a respite for the leaders to break away from crisis management and created opportunities to consider longer-range plans for the community. At the end of PARP, all five communities indicated a desire for the project to continue.

The Benefits of Bridging Social Capital

Related to the above discussion is the usefulness of "bridging social capital," the social ties that connect people across divides such as race or class[13] to foster economic development and community well-being in geographically remote First Nations communities. As noted above, Indigenous peoples have many creative ideas, abilities, and talents, but as a result of colonization they do not always have access to the material resources necessary to implement them. A key role that PARP played was to connect First Nations to individuals, organizations, and municipalities that have abundant resources and are committed to reconciliation and social justice but do not themselves have the knowledge or connections to make good on their intentions. For example, PARP researchers working with Eabametoong First Nation helped to facilitate a unique partnership between EFN and Markham, Ontario.[14] As per this agreement, Eabametoong students now have access to Markham's online library system, the Band Administration can seek professional advice from Markham's municipal management on various issues, and the city and Markham citizens donated sports and fitness equipment to the First Nation.[15] Meanwhile, Markham's mayor and two city and regional councillors visited EFN to meet in person with the Band Council as well as community members at a PARP-sponsored dinner and community-wide breakfast. Finally, several Markham citizens travelled to EFN to participate in a Cultural Showcase in which they learned about EFN history, culture, and living conditions. This inaugural trip was part of a larger project that PARP fundraised for to build economic development capacity in tourism and related businesses. The point here is that such mutually beneficial connections do not necessarily emerge spontaneously; they often require deliberate bridging by a trusted third party. Investing in social infrastructure, and not just individually targeted policies and programs, is therefore critical to reducing poverty and enhancing well-being in First Nations and beyond.

Political and Administrative Leadership and Stability

Although there is considerable debate in the literature about the importance of leadership in the process of development, our observations in the five communities were that it is of considerable significance. The challenges of development facing the communities are considerable, and both strong and visionary leadership is required for everything from dealing with crises to managing internal divisions, developing a vision for the community and related strategic planning, and dealing with external governments and private interests. Indeed, a strong case can be made that the leadership displayed is not fully recognized and appreciated by outsiders, governments, and businesses, and supports for leaders and leadership development are inadequate.

In addition to the quality of leadership is its stability. Most of the five First Nations involved in PARP are still bound by the two-year election cycle mandated by the Indian Act, which interferes significantly with longer-range planning. Over the life of our project, we experienced three elections in those communities with the two-year time frame, not to mention resulting changes in leadership.

To increase leadership stability, it appears that communities have two main options. The first option is to elect the same people repeatedly, a pattern that depends on many variables but works best when given leaders have outstanding abilities and community support.[16] The second option is to break away from the two-year cycle and choose a longer term between

elections (e.g., four years) under the authority of the recently enacted First Nations Elections Act.

We found that leaders in these communities were well aware of the advantages of a longer period in office, and indeed one of the five communities does have elections every four years. It is difficult, however, to build community consensus for a longer term because of concerns about the ability to change leadership in short order if the people elected turn out not to be the best as viewed by a significant proportion of the community. This uncertainty is especially likely to arise if there are strong divisions within a First Nation.

Re-establishing a traditional system of governance, as in T'it'q'et and the other St'át'mic Nations (described above), is an approach that some communities are beginning to explore to address shortcomings of the election provisions in the Indian Act. The annual PARP gatherings, at which representatives from all five First Nations were present, were opportunities for them to learn from each other and gather ideas that they could take back to their respective communities for further discussion. Having been introduced to what the St'át'mic Nations were doing, other communities became curious about its potential for them.

Politics and Business

One often hears in "Indian country" the refrain that politics and business need to be separated in order for development efforts to succeed. This point of view is often attributed to the Harvard Project, but in fact it represents a misreading and an oversimplification of what the project has to say.[17]

We found in the five communities that in fact the elected leaders play a crucial and necessary role in the development process. Although patterns vary from one community to the next, political leaders play a central role in defining community visions, developing strategic plans, putting in place a qualified civil service, enacting bylaws (BCRs), policies, and regulations, and dealing with external governments and private sector interests such as resource development or hydro companies. It is a very demanding role, placing considerable stress on both leaders and Council agendas.

Not everything can or should come to the table, however, and a strong case can be made for the formation of a separate but accountable structure such as a community economic development corporation. It can assemble the staff expertise required to deal with economic development initiatives, including the management of community-owned ventures, as well as provide a degree of separation from political considerations in decision making. Indeed, in Eabametoong, that is what we were asked to help establish, with a key project team member assisting in laying the legal and organizational groundwork. He was also asked to serve as a board member for the corporation. The Chief and Council represent all the shareholders of the corporation (the whole community) and play a key role, ensuring that the corporation complies with the strategic vision and plan for the community.

Academic Tensions

The kind of action research that we undertook in this project is a long way from mainstream practices and leads to significant tensions as a consequence. Even the language of mainstream research is problematic. For example, we responded to an opportunity for funding billed as "intervention research," a term that we abandoned quickly because the concept of (external) intervention does not have a happy history in the First Nations context.

Since the competition for grants from national funding agencies has become more competitive,[18] the expectation is high for proposals to be incredibly detailed about the research and how it will be implemented. This is at odds with the expectations of community-based research in the First Nations context, in which community engagement throughout the research process is a highly valued expectation. We have already noted the community-driven nature of PARP and how its original focus was substantially altered for a number of the communities. In our original proposal, we handled this tension to some extent by specifying only the common *process* that would be followed in each community (e.g., an Advisory Committee, research to develop a community profile, etc.). We avoided setting out a specific model of the development process or articulating required elements of a strategic plan.

Given the expectations of peer review committees, we might not have been successful in obtaining a grant were it not for the fact that CIHR had in place a mechanism whereby proposals in Indigenous health research could be reviewed by a special committee composed of persons who had knowledge of and experience in Indigenous health research and who inherently knew, as a result of their experience, that room for community influence had to be part of the research design.[19]

A similar tension exists with ethics reviews in which the mainstream practice is to require at the outset detailed specifications concerning how the work will be implemented before the research process begins. Requirements include having appendices with the actual questions to be used in the interview during the selection process and details on how participants (in this case, entire First Nations) will be recruited. In a related project submitted by one member of our research team, the ethics submission came to some 120 pages, and this was all before the research could actually begin. Our only recourse was to be specific but also not to hesitate in adapting research instruments as we went along, a process that required going back to the relevant ethics boards for amendments to the original application.

Other tensions arise with financial administrators in university settings who are reluctant to approve expenditures outside the norm, such as providing funds for feasts in the communities, paying for child care so that parents can participate in meetings, honorariums for Elders, or door prizes at community events. Their reluctance is rooted in a fear of being audited by the national granting councils, which suggests that a resolution of these tensions lies in changing practices and expectations at the national level.[20]

The granting councils and university-based ethics boards are far more comfortable and practiced when it comes to the *research* component of a project and much less geared to handle the *action* or *intervention* component. Ethics applications, for example, relate to matters such as research design, informed consent, and the risks/benefits of the research; nowhere do they ask for information assessing ethical practices and potential risks from the action part of the project. Yet it is more likely to be the action components that represent risks to participants than being asked a few questions by an interviewer or participating in a small group discussion.

A final point regards conventional approaches to knowledge arising from the research, most often deemed the property of an academic institution, and knowledge transfer, which typically has included requirements for publication and presentations at conferences. Recognizing that the knowledge shared by First Nations is *their* knowledge, the academy needs to adjust its policies on knowledge ownership and knowledge transfer to honour the principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP).[21] At the beginning of the project,

PARP developed a written policy in partnership with AFN to ensure that permissions from the five First Nations were obtained before any article was published and that the principles embodied in OCAP were followed. One of PARP's practices, as a result, was to include all of the First Nations as authors of this chapter.

As this discussion shows, there is a lack of fit between the institutionalized requirements of mainstream research and the demands of community-based research in a First Nations context. Academic research ethics boards (REBs) and their ethics approval requirements are not set up for the type of action research that PARP pursued, a project that needed to be community driven: that is, based on what the communities wanted, not on what the researchers or academic institutions wanted. In response to the TRC Calls to Action and in this era of reconciliation, REBs have the potential to become increasingly responsive both to First Nations' expectations for any proposed research project and to community-driven action research protocols for developing good relations and working with First Nations partners.

Respecting Traditional Knowledges

The mainstream model of knowledge transfer typically shows that knowledge is generated by a research-oriented organization such as a university, hospital, or government laboratory and then transferred or applied to grateful recipients at the community level. Although this is a simplistic description even within the bounds of the mainstream model, historically it has been the prevailing orientation, with knowledge defined in Western scientific terms and collected accordingly.

Working with First Nations, a different perspective emerges. Since such research ideally involves the full engagement of the community in all phases, there is more of a sense that the community itself provides much of the knowledge, assembled and to some extent interpreted by the research partner. Furthermore, Indigenous knowledge is part of the picture in both conscious and subconscious ways, though it struggles to be recognized on par with Western science.[22]

For example, many of the projects that PARP researchers engaged in with their First Nations partners involved sharing traditional knowledge, seen by community members as integrally linked with improving health and well-being. Two projects illustrate this point. The first project was a culture-based credit course in the Opitciwan high school that involved harvesting birch bark and making baskets and canoes and that counted toward earning a high school or graduate-equivalent diploma (GED). The second project was a culture camp held around the summer solstice in MCN involving a fish fry (starting with setting the nets and catching the fish), learning food preparation, cooking, and preservation, sharing traditional teachings, and more. In these and other projects, PARP researchers observed and listened to both instructors and participants, reflecting on their experiences with increased senses of self-esteem, wellness, and connection to their roots and the land.

A further insight is that many First Nations in British Columbia have the traditional knowledge and applied skills to keep suicide levels low, so First Nations have much to learn from each other on how to tackle this important issue.[23]

Nation-to-Nation Learning

PARP attempted to incorporate opportunities for nation-to-nation learning into the project design, with mixed results. The formal mechanism used was an Advisory Committee for

the work in each community, leaving the details of its composition to be worked out in each case but providing some general guidance. In one community, for example, the Advisory Committee included community members such as the Chief, several councillors, an Elder, and others. It also included senior provincial and federal government representatives, on the ground that the design and implementation of a strategy to address poverty would benefit from government perspectives and funding. There were two academic members from the national project team and leaders from two First Nations in the same province who were widely recognized as having made great strides in achieving economic self-reliance and reduced government dependence.

The idea of having such an advisory body was outstanding in principle but less successful in practice. In this particular case, for example, though the Advisory Committee met several times and provided some useful guidance, there was resistance from some Councillors in recognizing that neighbouring communities, having made great progress in achieving self-reliance, had much to offer the First Nation involved in PARP. An element of intercommunity competitiveness came into play and impeded collaboration and opportunities to learn from each other's experiences. In other locations, either an Advisory Committee was not formed or, if it was, it contained key members from the community itself, such as the directors of various programs employed by the Band.

More informal mechanisms for intercommunity learning seemed to work better. There was great interest among community representatives to attend our annual national meetings, for example, and they showed considerable interest in hearing about the range of challenges that the communities faced and how they set out to address them. For instance, the other four First Nations were interested in learning more about the traditional governance structure in T'it'q'et and the children-centred approach to family and child services in MCN, among other issues. Another mechanism for intercommunity learning involved the sharing and collaboration within Tribal Councils that brought together communities in the same geographic area that shared the same history and culture. Outside our project, learning also takes place at the annual meetings of organizations such as CANDO (Council for the Advancement of Economic Development Officers), which gives annual awards for excellence and offers multiple workshops on specific issues that delegates are free to attend if they so choose.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATION-TO-NATION POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

As Canada moves to interpret and act on the TRC Calls to Action, building upon RCAP and defining nation-to-nation relationships, a number of recommendations for policy and institutional change can be drawn from the preceding discussion. First, First Nations, and by extension Indigenous peoples across Canada, have a strong sense of their policy priorities and needs, requiring little outside help, if any, to know what is best for their communities. Allowing First Nations to direct processes promises to yield positive results, as it did for the communities that participated in PARP. In MCN, for example, setting the priority to increase opportunities for youth led to successful initiatives for this largest demographic of the community, providing training (e.g., to get a driver's licence) and employment (e.g., establishing a local seafood processing plant) as well as programs in life skills, culture, and recreation (e.g., the Lake Keepers program). Carrying out these programs in a comprehensive and

holistic way, again taking direction from the community, was the key to success. In a number of instances, low-cost investments with minimal reporting requirements yielded significant, positive results; the driver's licence program is a case in point. So community-driven action research projects that build on community strengths and incorporate First Nations expertise, capacity, and knowledge are strongly recommended.

The same can be said when federal and provincial governments set their priorities. Rather than governments establishing Indigenous-focused initiatives for their various departments, a nation-to-nation relationship means that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, respecting that they know their needs best, are consulted and have a say in setting directions and deciding funding levels. In other words, federal and provincial governments ought to take their cues from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments rather than imposing one-sided decisions.

Second, strengthening ties to land and water is important for community well-being on economic, cultural, spiritual, mental, and emotional levels. A holistic approach to research for community health and well-being is therefore essential. This needs to translate into government funding that applies to all aspects of this holistic approach to health in support of physical wellness, mental strength, emotional balance, and spiritual freedom. Current funding envelopes, for example, tend to focus on the treatment of physical addiction, economic development, or infrastructure, with little or no funding for the mental, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of community wellness (aside from temporary supports given after specific emergencies and crises). For lasting improvements to health and well-being (on both individual and community levels), a holistic approach to funding that addresses all four dimensions is needed.

Third, important projects need not be large and costly. PARP funding, in various amounts, contributed to several successful community initiatives. Collaborating with the community and leveraging the external connections of PARP team members kept costs down in a number of initiatives, and the First Nations appreciated these lower costs. This project, however, though both timely and important, came to an end. Although all five communities expressed interest in continuing the association with the PARP teams, funding for such long-term collaborations does not exist. How can this approach to partnering in community-driven action research be supported in the future?

Fourth, the demand for project funding exceeds the supply, even with outside leveraging. Communities have developed sharp skill sets for prioritizing projects and reworking budgets, but ultimately there is a shortage of funds for small but effective projects as well as larger ones. Having to secure external funding on a project-by-project basis is onerous and time consuming, often with stringent limitations and reporting requirements. Equitable funding is essential, as is changing the bureaucratic maze and streamlining government funding processes to be in accordance with priorities set by First Nations. Although this will be challenging, it nevertheless needs to be done.

Fifth, hand in hand with ensuring equitable funding is the need to give First Nations autonomy and decision-making control over the use of the funds. One way to translate this recommendation into practice involves releasing First Nations from onerous reporting requirements on a per project basis in favour of one annual audit and report to be made available to all funding sources at the same time each year (rather than having one or more reports per project per funding agency throughout the year).

Finally, for granting agencies and academic REBs, policies need to reflect Indigenous priorities, protocols, and customs. What are First Nations ethics, and how can they be hon-

oured in academic research application and approval processes? Rather than adhering to strictly Western conventions, adaptations are needed to reflect the distinctness of collaborative research with First Nations. For example, terminology and customs need to be contemplated from Indigenous viewpoints and changed accordingly (e.g., the inappropriateness of intervention research, restrictions on honorariums, expectations to acknowledge the collaboration at a project's end with a gift exchange, etc.). REBs and granting agencies have an opportunity to learn from Indigenous peoples and, in the spirit of reconciliation, make their mandates flexible enough for the diversity that exists among Indigenous peoples and their protocols and customs.[24]

CONCLUSION

From 2011 to 2017, the Poverty Action Research Project was on a dynamic and creative journey for community development with five First Nations. The purpose of this chapter has been to raise awareness about the many strengths of First Nations peoples and to understand better a number of impediments that present challenges to them as they work for their communities' health and well-being.

Toward these objectives, this case study has

- described the Poverty Action Research Project;

- raised awareness about our different worlds and explored how poverty is perceived by First Nations, preferring instead to frame issues in holistic terms of health and well-being;

- highlighted First Nations strengths and acknowledged the credit due for their resilience and creativity in the face of significant and ongoing challenges;

- outlined distinctive cultural and other characteristics of First Nations especially relevant to academic and other external groups that wish to contribute to a holistic, collaborative, and community-driven process of development;

- discussed additional observations and insights based on PARP experiences; and

- suggested recommendations for policy and institutional change in light of the experiences of the PARP research team with the five First Nations that participated in the project.

Acknowledging the distinctness of each First Nation, how PARP unfolded differently for each community, and that this account is by no means exhaustive and all-encompassing given the diversity among Indigenous peoples across Canada, our intentions here have been to inform work in all sectors of society as together we discern how to progress toward reconciliation and strengthen relationship building between Indigenous peoples of Canada and non-Indigenous Canadians.

NOTES

1. As with any group effort in writing, it is extremely difficult to arrange the order of authorship since everyone's experiences and contributions to the research and writing processes are invaluable. Jennifer Dockstator and Frederic Wien co-wrote the "Introduction," "Background," and "Research in Process" sections. The various authors contributed to their respec-

tive sections in "Research in Action," describing PARP activities in the communities with which they worked. Jennifer and Mark Dockstator co-wrote the section "Highlighting First Nations Strengths." Jennifer summarized some of the challenges that each community faced in the section "Respecting First Nations Challenges." Frederic authored the section on "Additional Insights." Jennifer and Wanda Wuttunee contributed to the "Policy and Institutional Recommendations" section. Jennifer wrote the "Conclusion." And Jennifer and Frederic co-edited the chapter based on input from the research team.

2. The precedent for the practice of listing First Nations as authors can be found in Lonczak et al., "Navigating the Tide Together," and Smylie et al., "Indigenous Knowledge Translation."

3. Brant Castellano and Wien, "Sharing the Land, Sharing a Future."

4. Dockstator et al., "Pursuing Mutually Beneficial Research."

5. See http://sipeknekatik.ca/community-profile/.

6. See http://povertyaction.ca/community/opitciwan-qc.

7. For information presented in the first part of this community profile, see http:/eabametoong.firstnation.ca/.

8. See, for example, Cornell, "American Indians, American Dreams."

9. Dockstator et al., "Pursuing Mutually Beneficial Research."

10. See http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/how-does-native-funding-work-1.1301120.

11. See http://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/first-nations-funding-cap-lifted-1.3359137.

12. Lengthening terms is now possible after the First Nations Elections Act came into effect April 2015, requiring the development of a community election code, adoption by a majority vote of the membership, and passage of a BCR. See http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1407356680075/1407356710099.

13. Baron, Field, and Schuller, *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives*; Halpern, *Social Capital*; Lin, Cook, and Burt, *Social Capital Theory and Research*.

14. See http://www.yorkregion.com/news-story/7095569-markham-signs-partnershipaccord-with-eabametoong-first-nation/.

15. See http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/first-nations-girls-0hockey-1.4091247.

16. Wien, "Profile of the Membertou First Nation, Nova Scotia."

17. For more information on the Harvard Project, see http://hpaied.org/.

18. Our grant came from CIHR.

19. Subsequently, CIHR did away with the special peer review committee and moved to a format in which reviewers would no longer meet face to face for much of the peer review process and with no guarantee that a given panel was composed of people with experience in the field. In response to protests, CIHR is moving back to the original model.

20. Moore, "Implementing Chapter 9"; Stiegman and Castleden, "Leashes and Lies."

21. Schnarch and First Nations Centre, "Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession."

22. Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall, "Two-Eyed Seeing."

23. Chandler and Lalonde, "Transferring Whose Knowledge?"

24. Fortunately, significant progress in adapting ethics requirements to meet the needs of research with Indigenous populations has been made; see Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, "Tri-Council Policy Statement," Chapter 9.

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