

A culturally appropriate approach to civic engagement: Addressing forestry and cumulative social impacts in southwest Yukon

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on an experimental civic engagement approach to link community observed cumulative effects of numerous local events and periods of resource development to indicators for sustainable forest and land management for the future. We describe a process where the interview findings with 28 key aboriginal and non-aboriginal informants in the Champagne Aishihik First Nations' (CAFN) Traditional Territory were summarized into key themes by researchers in a community workshop to elicit a selection of social indicators for future cumulative effects assessments. These responses were visions for the future based on a great deal of experiential learning that interviewees identified—part and parcel of any betterment to the community as new developments unfold. Themes such as “social healing” were further broken into indicators such as “community support systems” and then further broken into local measures, such as “the presence of, and access to, a youth centre, youth programs, and youth centres”. The local historical approach to cumulative effects assessment helps us not only understand more about forestry, but more about the broader connections between community members and leaders, forestry and other resource developments, and lessons people have learned from the past and visions for the future.

Key words: civic engagement, cumulative social impacts, social indicators, sustainable forest management, Northern Canada

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article fait état d'une approche expérimentale d'engagement civique servant à relier les effets cumulatifs observés dans une communauté suite à plusieurs événements locaux et survenus lors de périodes de développement des ressources aux futurs indicateurs de durabilité des forêts et de gestion du territoire. Nous décrivons un processus par lequel les résultats tirés des entrevues de 28 personnes ressources tant autochtones que non autochtones résidant sur le territoire traditionnel de la Première Nation Champagne Aishihik ont été résumés selon des thèmes dominants par les chercheurs lors d'une session de travail au sein de la communauté afin d'initier une sélection des indicateurs sociaux d'évaluation des effets cumulatifs à venir. Ces réponses constituaient des visions de l'avenir reposant en grande partie sur l'apprentissage par action que les interviewés ont identifié – élément et ensemble de toute amélioration apportée à la communauté lors de l'implantation des nouveaux développements. Les thèmes comme « la guérison sociale » ont été par la suite subdivisés selon des indicateurs comme « les systèmes d'aide communautaire » et encore subdivisés selon des mesures locales comme « la présence, l'accessibilité à un centre pour jeunes, programmes pour adolescents et centres pour jeunes ». L'approche locale de l'évaluation des effets cumulatifs nous a aidés non seulement à mieux comprendre la foresterie, mais également les relations générales entre les membres d'une communauté et leurs leaders, entre la foresterie et le développement d'autres ressources, ainsi que les leçons que les gens ont tirées du vécu et leurs visions de l'avenir.

Mots clés : engagement civique, impacts sociaux cumulatifs, indicateurs sociaux, aménagement forestier durable, Nord du Canada



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Introduction

In the past three decades in North America, and particularly in Canada, social science research addressing the role of civic engagement in forest planning has greatly increased (e.g., Smith 1998, Parkins and Beckley 2001, Tindall 2003, Karjala *et al.* 2004, Lecomte *et al.* 2005, Natcher 2008, O'Flaherty *et al.* 2008). This work is prompted by increasing public concerns, raised by local residents, aboriginal groups, environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) and others regarding the protection of broad values at stake in forest harvesting, such as ecosystem health, recreational opportunities, heritage and culture, wildlife, water quality and so on.

Concurrently, there is increasing concern about the ways in which multiple land uses affect ecosystems and communities; this being especially true in Northern Canada, because of changes underway such as industrial development, spread of pollution and contaminants, international trade, and goals for sustainable development, the interrelations of which are poorly understood (Nuttall 2005). Social scientists' attention to the role of civic engagement in this more cumulative context of effects³ is less developed (Duinker and Greig 2006). Ross (1990) makes a significant contribution to this literature by documenting the importance of taking a cumulative view to social impact assessment (SIA). Taking a cumulative view, by exploring impacts in a historical and regional context with consideration of the future, and emphasizing local values and perspectives are highlighted as key factors in developing a community SIA framework, which is increasingly expected in Northern Canada.

An important aspect of these developments is the growing field of social indicator research that allows broad objectives (e.g., sustainable development) and desirable features of a landscape (e.g., ecological integrity) or community (e.g., cultural well-being) to be broken down into quantitative and qualitative measures of how well those objectives have been met. For example, a common indicator of sustainable forest management identified by many communities has been stable employment (Beckley and Burkosky 1999) and more recently, community capacity (Beckley *et al.* 2002). Social as well as ecological indicators have been embraced by various stakeholders to evaluate the benefits of forestry and monitor how a community is adapting to social, economic, and ecological change.

Social indicators research over the past three decades has increasingly relied on civic engagement to generate locally meaningful social indicators (e.g., Parkins *et al.* 2001) and to include previously silenced or marginalized parties in the planning of forested areas, particularly in Canada where much of the forested land is Crown land. Civic engagement is generally understood as the process of citizens coming together to work towards common goals, such as sustainable forest management. Kemmis (1990) defines civic engagement as a "face-to-face, hands-on approach to problem-solving, with its implicit belief that people could rise above their particular interests to pursue a common good" (p. 11).

Civic engagement is highly relevant to the case study shared herein, where we expose the nuanced nature of locally

derived social indicators generated from our findings on cumulative effects of past land uses, including forestry, in the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations' Traditional Territory, Yukon, Canada. A notable contribution of this study is the way in which our methodology involved two phases of civic engagement, first through First Nation-supported research interviews, and secondly by sharing findings with members of the community as a springboard to develop social indicators for cumulative effects management, of which forest management plays a central role.

Civic Engagement and Yukon Land Management

In the context of natural resource management in the Yukon Territory, Canada, civic engagement has taken numerous forms, many of which are associated with negotiated settlement and implementation of comprehensive land claims across the territory. Examples of such forms include renewable resource councils that act as co-management boards that seek local First Nations' and non-First Nations' perspectives on a variety of issues for the purposes of making recommendations on the management of forest resources and fish and wildlife in traditional territories, regional land-use planning commissions that assist government and First Nations to coordinate community-based land-use planning, and a Yukon-wide environmental and socio-economic assessment body (the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board) that holds participation of the public as integral to its assessment processes. Comprehensive land claims for 11 of the 14 Yukon First Nations and numerous land-use planning exercises have sensitized residents to their human rights and interests in land-use planning. Environmental and socio-economic indicator-development and monitoring efforts that elicit local and traditional knowledge from members of the public comprise another form used in many of the processes discussed above.

Indicator development and monitoring efforts, in particular, are becoming increasingly popular as means of galvanizing public interest and involvement in forest management in the Yukon. By tracking certain societal, political, economic, and environmental conditions, these monitoring efforts can bolster the ability of natural resource managers to measure whether or not overarching forestry goals and principles are met. The year 2004 marks the beginning of forest co-management in the Yukon with support from an indicator-monitoring regime designed to ensure forestry principles and goals identified by multiple parties are met. Other forest co-management efforts in the Yukon have followed suit, such as development of the Teslin Strategic Forest Management Plan (Yukon Government, Teslin Tlingit Council, and the Teslin Renewable Resources Council).

Southwest Yukon and the Development of a Sustainable Forest Management Plan

Southwest Yukon is a place that may be characterized by big mountains, high tundra plateaus, broad river valleys, and wildlife such as grizzly bear, salmon, moose and sheep. Change is common to the landscape here, as evidenced by scars that indicate volcanic activity, glacial flooding and surges, and wildfires. This dynamic landscape, as many call it, has generated rich oral and scientific literatures (Cruikshank 1991).

³Cumulative effects are defined here as, "the additive and interactive impacts that may result from human activities that are repeated over time and space" (Tollefson and Wipond 1998: 371).

Approximately half of those who live in this region are Champagne and Aishihik First Nation citizens. The CAFN have always called this region home, but it was only recently that they acquired treaty recognition of ownership to it. Prior to land claims and the establishment of self-governance in 1995, a number of development activities were carried out within their traditional territory without meaningful consultation—the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898, construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942, creation of Kluane National Park in 1972, and development of a hydro-electric dam in the early seventies at Aishihik Lake to name just a few. Thus, creation of a sustainable forest management plan (SFMP) represents a significant attempt at co-management of natural resources in this region, and is actually the first community-based forest management planning process in the Yukon.

Impetus behind development of the SFMP in southwest Yukon converges on a number of factors that, no doubt, reflect the region's complex history, including the following: interest in developing commercial timber operations; the perceived risk of forest fires; the wide range of social, economic, and environmental impacts associated with the Spruce Bark Beetle infestation; contention over appropriate uses of forest lands; and the absence of regional forest management planning in the Yukon (CAFN and YTG 2004).

To address these issues through a planning process, the Champagne and Aishihik Traditional Territory Forest Management Planning Team (CATT Planning Team) was appointed with support from the Alsek Renewable Resource Council (ARRC). Members of this planning team span the ARRC, The Village of Haines Junction Town Council, forest stakeholders within the planning area, and federal, territorial, and CAFN Government representatives. Together, the ARRC and the CATT Planning Team had the responsibility to make recommendations to three levels of government concerning the joint management of forest resources within the CATT region (Wortley *et al.* 2001).

A major component of the SFMP was the identification of forest management goals, objectives and indicators, designed to reflect broad values associated with sustainable forest management, that allow comparisons across regions, as well as more specific means of demonstrating community values. The development of indicators can offer a more systematic approach to identify and formalize public values, and indicators are more likely to allow transparency to offset the ability of local actors to frame impacts too narrowly or to legitimize activities that may not be consistent with forest management goals. For example, in order to support the goal *community sustainability and benefits*, the SFMP lists *where appropriate, increase the amount and diversity of recreational forest-based activities* as an objective, and *level of satisfaction with recreational opportunities* as a supporting indicator.

In 2005 one of the technical working groups responsible for implementing a research and monitoring framework identified that there was a lack of socio-economic expertise in terms of the identification and monitoring of local-level socio-economic indicators. The summer of the following year, the first author of this paper was hired to assist the CAFN with a literature review of socio-economic indicators and examine how their preliminary set of local indicators fit with social indicators chosen for forest management planning elsewhere. Christensen's summer work concluded that indi-

cators typically associated with quality of life, important to the First Nations as part of their long-term development goals, were generally not addressed by the CAFN or YTG in the context of sustainable forest management. This conclusion is consistent with Tindall (2001) and others who note that often socio-economic indicators are poorly understood by forest managers.

Strengthening the Social Component of the SFMP through Collaborative Research

The desire to augment the aforementioned socio-economic aspects of the plan as well as the lack of attention to cumulative effects in Canada's North prompted our research team to get involved in this project designed to enhance the social component of the SFMP. Our main objective was to work alongside the CAFN in order to understand the human impacts of pre-SFMP forestry activities in the region amid other important changes and gain insight into the nature of cumulative social impacts to date. The second objective was to develop a set of culturally appropriate social indicators reflective of cumulative social impacts that would have application across the long-term and not only to forestry, but a wide range of current and projected development activities. Together, these objectives were meant to enhance the ability of community members to engage in a multitude of land-use planning initiatives, particularly in light of likely future development changes, including forestry development, pipeline development in the region, and mining and exploration activity.

One of the key mechanisms that enabled us to work collaboratively was the research agreement we developed. In our case, the research direction, iterative steps, and potential use of our research was mediated through governance of the CAFN, which led to a research agreement endorsed by CAFN, the University of Alberta, and the researchers, including legal counsel for the CAFN and the university⁴. We believe this research agreement articulated the needs for frequent exchange of ideas, interpretations, CAFN involvement in data collection, sharing of preliminary findings, and for a final workshop that naturally pushed the research into a more central place of decision-making for the CAFN.

A local-historical approach to understanding cumulative social impacts

Our results on cumulative social impacts in the CATT were informed by discussions with the CAFN and a set of semi-structured interviews with 28 key First Nations and non-First Nations informants (given the community is about 50% First Nation and 50% non-First Nation, our sample also reflects this representation); the interviews were carried out by a local liaison and the first author. In the interviews we used key events or developments that signified "change" in local history as markers for the semi-structured interviews, derived from initial scoping open-ended interviews with CAFN. Events selected included the Klondike Gold Rush, which is

⁴As our research involved interviews with non-First Nations, in addition to CAFN citizens, we applied for and obtained a research license for these activities as per the Yukon Scientists and Explorers Act.

associated with the early contact period for the CAFN and many other Yukon First Nations, construction of the Alaska Highway, referred to by locals as the “second rush”⁵, forestry and other resource development activities in the region, forestry and other resource development activities in the region, the recent Spruce Bark Beetle outbreak, which is the largest and most intense of its kind in Canada, and settlement of land claims. Notable here is that changes important to locals span a century of time, beginning with the early contact period, and multiple drivers of change, including those environmental, political, cultural, economic, and social in nature—a commonality shared with Ross’ (1990) findings with the East Kimberley Aboriginal communities of Australia. This aspect of civic engagement—i.e. citizen involvement in design of the questionnaire—is critical to understanding and addressing cumulative effects, because it fosters greater understanding of the historical origins of contemporary ideologies and problems, which will become evident in the next section. Taking such a historical perspective that recognizes cultural domination, for example, is what some health researchers are now doing to better explain issues related to aboriginal health. Mitchell (2005) notes, for instance, that the delivery of health services to aboriginal communities could be more effective if providers increase their awareness of the social and historical origins of distress.

An important aspect of our local-historical approach was that locally significant changes were discussed within a broader historical context for the region; that is, we used a timeline in the interviews as a visual cue, which allowed us the freedom to discuss focal changes without losing sight of how they were embedded in the region’s history. Our timeline was developed by members of the CAFN research review committee (the formal CAFN body through which all research activities were coordinated), a community liaison, and the first author; interview participants also contributed to its development in an iterative fashion. See Table 1 for a reconstruction of this timeline.

For the semi-structured interviews, we developed an interview guide for those in key positions related to land management or land use in the CATT. Our informants were those who had long-term experiential knowledge⁶ of the community, either in resource-related programs or activities, social programs, leadership in the community, or intimacy with periods of significant social change for the region; CAFN residents, non-First Nation residents, natural resource managers and health and social workers were all included as informants (Fig. 1). We also tried to balance the gender and cultural backgrounds of our participants (Fig. 2). This combination of participants resulted in a rich assemblage of knowledge on the nature of interactive and additive change in the region.

⁵Construction of this highway resulted in a cultural shift far more pronounced than the first in 1898, because of the many things brought with it, including more than 34 000 men employed during its construction, new technology, government administration, disease epidemics, and increased availability of alcohol (Cruikshank 1998).

⁶Experiential knowledge is that derived from the process of daily life learning, which infers that knowledge is produced from being continuously generated and tested out in experiences of the learner (Kolb 1984).

Table 1. Events associated with cumulative social impacts in the CATT

1890–1900	Klondike Gold Rush
1900–1910	Residential schools (North Yukon) Federal Indian Act legislation
1910–1920	World War I Fur trapping regulations applied to First Nations peoples in the Yukon
1920–1930	Residential and public schools (Southwest Yukon) Gold Discovery on Squaw Creek
1940–1950	World War II Construction of the Alaska Highway Creation of the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary Construction of the Haines Highway Aishihik Road and airport built
1950–1960	Construction and operation of the Haines to Fairbanks Pipeline
1960–1970	Fuel spill on Dezadeash Lake
1970–1980	Pipeline closure Creation of Kluane National Park Construction and operation of the Aishihik Dam
1980–1990	Mine at Windy Craggy Mountain proposed
1990–2000	Spruce bark beetle outbreak CAFN land claims and self government Creation of Tatshenshini-Alsek Park First Nations Sawmill
2000–2010	Shutdown of First Nations’ sawmill Radioactive water discovered at Champagne

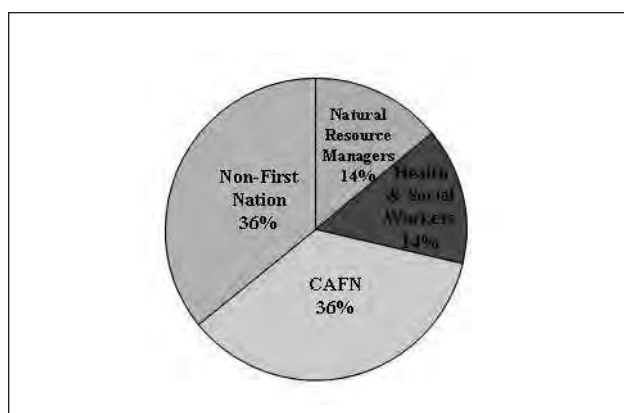


Fig. 1. Cross-section of participants interviewed, N = 28.

In addition to understanding the range of accumulated experiences people had with change, we also sought to understand the role that responses, coping efforts, and social learning played in experiences and experiments in the community that in many ways were seen as failures. Thus, beyond ensuring culturally significant change formed the basis of interview discussions, the first phase of our approach to civic engagement may also be characterized by the placement of decision-making at the front and center of social impacts—in most social impact work human agency is downplayed. In other words, understanding humans as both agents and recipients

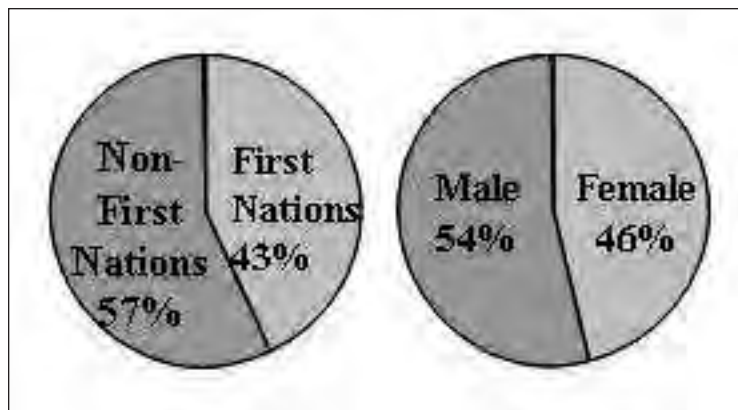


Fig. 2. Cultural background and gender of participants, N = 28.

of change in the context of culturally relevant change is important when trying to understand how cumulative effects manifest, and particularly when trying to understand how to manage them. Findings that support this idea in the context of forest management are provided in the section to follow.

Social indicators that reflect cumulative impacts

As part of a data-verification workshop that was carried out with 25 research participants involved in the project, we held an activity whereby a selection of responses to cumulative social impacts were used as themes from which indicators were derived. These responses were visions for the future based on a great deal of experiential learning that interviewees identified—part and parcel of any betterment to the community as new developments unfold. One of the themes from which indicators were derived was “social healing”.

Local people voiced a strong desire to overcome some of the substance abuse problems in their communities—a small segment of the population suffers from substance abuse, but family members and the wider community are also affected by virtue of the strong social networks in place in the CATT. Substance abuse, for some, has occurred in conjunction with resource development activities in the region, including pre-SFMP forestry, and has roots for CAFN citizens that extend back to the time of relocation of Indian people to highway settlement communities and residential schools. Substance abuse was recently exacerbated by the sawmill development project, which affirmed the notion that future development be done in conjunction with social healing, as this interviewee states:

“...when you look at development or any job creation I think you have to look at the social development of people, or the social healing of the people, because when they started that sawmill up, they hired a lot of locals who had problems with drugs and alcohol. When the first payday came, they didn’t show up for work, and that’s because they’re still suffering from alcoholism or drug addiction. They both go hand in hand. You have to *heal* the people as well as encourage development and job creation.”

At the workshop, Krogman explained that “social healing” could be indicated by other indicators along a continuum of conceptual indicators, like “justice”, to more measurable indicators derived from conceptual indicators, like increased

number of healing circles in the community. Parlee, who has done similar indicator workshop exercises with the Lutsel K’e community (Northwest Territories), presented examples of local behaviours or trends that are strongly associated with locally derived community values, so that a theme like “social healing” could be broken down into community activities, features, or trends that provide evidence of social healing. Krogman and Parlee discussed how such indicators could be assessed by counting behaviours or activities associated with that theme, or by qualitative assessment.

The 25 participants were split into four groups, each of which sat at a round table with a flip chart. On the flip chart a theme (derived from the interviews) was placed in the middle; for example, social healing in a circle on a flip chart page next to one of the tables, and participants in that group drew lines out from that circle with an empirically measurable (quantitatively or qualitatively) indicator. Each group had one person present the indicators generated for their theme to the larger group; see Table 2 for some of the examples of themes and indicators that were developed at the workshop. The intent of the workshop was to offer participants an opportunity to discuss with one another measurable indicators of cumulative effects of development in their forested territory.

What makes these indicators stand apart from others developed for similar monitoring efforts is that they reflect an explicit, cumulative view of the CATT’s environmental, social, political, and cultural history; those in the SFMP also reflect such linkages, but not in ways that consider the additive and interactive aspects of change. Take the theme just discussed, “social healing”. In this case, helping those individuals in the community who are suffering from substance abuse—which would include healing from historical events—is a highly desirable process that may indicate the improvement of overall community well-being and provide the basis for capacity to act, hope, and build on the collective commitment to take care of one another. Any forestry operation proposed for this region is considered with this perceived need for social healing in mind and thus cannot be separated from it despite the local understanding of the multiple causes of substance abuse in the community.

Some of the limitations of these indicators include that our understanding of cumulative social impacts is limited given the short time frame of the workshop and the research. Furthermore, it is difficult to disaggregate lived experience of change into quantifiable categories and indicators. This is a persistent problem and criticism of research on social indicators as well as that relating to local and traditional knowledge, particularly those aiming to integrate it into conventional systems of planning and management (Nadasdy 1999, 2003; Agrawal 2002).

We also wish to emphasize the importance of community social indicators research and engagement to be carried out in a culturally appropriate way. Without such an approach, it is possible that decreased participation in impact assessment, by individuals or institutions, may result. For example, Shapcott (1989:64) notes that some Aboriginal groups have rejected participation in the impact assessment process on the grounds

Table 2. Samples from theme and indicator development activity

Theme	Indicator	Local measure of indicator
Social healing	Justice	• Healing circles • Restorative (increase in the number of referrals to justice restorative centre, decreased recidivism, divert negative activities)
	Culture	• Know who you are (strength of self awareness) • CAFN identity-supporting activities
	Mission school healing	• Reconciliation workshops • Settlements
	Community support systems	• Hockey rinks • Youth centre • Youth shelters • Youth programming • Recognize problems
	Drugs and alcohol	• Rehabilitation programs, including on the land camps
Healthy relationship to the land	Keep it clean	• Land claims, including the Healing Broken Connections Program (which has to do with the decades of law that forbade all subsistence harvesting in Kluane National Park and the Kluane Game Sanctuary). • Where people use the land (in homes, cabins, hunting, campsites, water bodies) • Reduced land/water pollution • Repair and cleaning up where needed (reclamation, managing garbage, bear-proof containers) • Respect
	Healthy animals	• More animals (healthy population)
	Teaching and education (First Nations and non)	• Culture camps • Fishing camps • Presence of skills at tanning hides
	Peoples' use of the land	• Take only what you need • Organized camps for youth • Trapping • Continued subsistence (berry picking, salmon, mushrooms, hunting, preparing and drying meat) • Use of traditional place names
	Protection	• Ensure fire is out (fire risk)
	Recreation	• Snowshoeing, hiking, skiing, snowmobiling, skijoring
	Government and Institutions	• Heritage resource assessments • Policies implemented (land-use plans, limited access, harvest plans, legislation, YESAA ^{a)}) • Employees using land

^{a)}Yukon Environmental and Socioeconomic Assessment Act

that it is a “legitimization of the status quo that asserts foreign sovereignty, laws and regulations over their land”.

We found that when community members can reflect on the larger meaning and usefulness of social data collected from their community, and imagine its distinct implications for future forestry and other developments, civic engagement is enhanced. In this case, workshop participants engaged in a face-to-face, hands-on approach to linking social indicators with broader concepts derived from their community around

the common good. Participants in our study included a wide range of experts and citizens from the community with long-term perspectives; this combination is important for social learning if resource management is to have legitimacy in the public view as well as local application. Numerous authors of civic engagement call for greater participation of citizens around the future use and stewardship of one's homeland (Howitt 2001, Vogt *et al.* 2007, Natcher, 2008), and this may be one method that can foster such engagement.

Conclusion

Cumulative effects assessment and social indicator work in the North may be strongly enhanced if research incorporates a local historical approach that addresses the decisions taken, lessons people have learned from the past, and visions for the future. Additionally, the changes considered—the role of specific players and the position of the assessment in a larger set of First Nation social and resource development efforts—are integral to the assessment. With regard to the local historical approach, this framework helps us not only understand more about forestry, but more about the broader connections between community members and leaders, forestry and other resource developments, and social change.

Lastly, we have learned that the actual act of the research itself must be seen as part of a governance structure that is generally becoming stronger in the North; people become invested in the connections between research, decision-making, and policy change if the research itself is deemed culturally appropriate, offering opportunities to build research and decision-making capacity. Our two phases to civic engagement—first through interviews with local experts and key informants around key concerns about cumulative effects of development, and then secondly in an all-day workshop that linked key concerns to possible social indicators for development, including forestry development in their territory—permitted a meaningful civic engagement process for a prosperous collective future.

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