

PROPERTY OF
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AN OVERVIEW OF PSYCHO-SOCIAL IMPACTS OF RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Blair Dunbar

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A. INTRODUCTION

Resource exploration and development in the Northwest Territories is a reality that northerners have been living with for some time. The Department of Social Services accepts and supports the concept of controlled development. Change is inevitable and development will proceed. Nevertheless it is the position of the Department that the pace and magnitude of this change must be controlled. No society is impervious to change. In addition to those changes which come from the natural development of northern people and their life styles, there is also, at present, rapid change which is being imposed from outside. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that this change is manageable and that the ability of people to cope is not overwhelmed.

The Beaufort Sea-Mackenzie Delta Environmental Impact Statement prepared by the proponents for the consideration of this Panel acknowledged that there are also adverse consequences associated with the development proposal.

The assessment of the psycho-social impact of development is a very difficult task. The proponents have acknowledged that such social assessment is more art than science. Consequently much of

the evidence presented in the field of social impact is based predominantly on the experience of professionals and their understanding of human behaviour rather than on hard data. The assessment of these impacts in the Northwest Territories remains one of the least understood, and least studied, processes within the field of resource development and assessment. By definition these impacts are personal, affecting individuals, and are difficult to outline. Some impacts can be positive, while others can be very negative, or the same impact can even have both positive and negative components.

The psycho-social impacts of development must be evaluated and managed in terms of individuals and their quality of life. The Department of Social Services submits that the major impacts of development on the individual, the family and the community can all be discussed in terms of change and its effect, stress. Change leads to stress and stress often results in altered behavioural patterns. The very anticipation of change, even before the event occurs, can lead to as much stress as the actual change itself. The residents of the north have been dealing with change for many years. The question is not now to prevent change from occurring, but how to manage it to the benefit of the people who are affected, to maximize the positive aspects and minimize the negative impacts. What is of concern to the Department at the present time is to ensure that the changes generated by resource development projects are manageable, and that the results are in the best interests of the community.

The Department of Social Services recognizes the potential for positive changes through resource development. It is hoped that the result will be further support for people in the north to lead independent lives. It is the submission of this Department that the Government of the NWT's policy of approving a resource development project when its "overall economic, social, and environmental implications are judged to result in net benefit to the people of the Northwest Territories" can be achieved through controlled development and through intelligent cooperation of companies and government agencies with the residents themselves.

It is essential that the pace and magnitude of development do not overwhelm a community, or for that matter, the ability of its residents to cope. An adequate community infrastructure must be in place. Such an infrastructure includes an awareness and knowledge on the part of residents as to exactly what is happening, an understanding of anticipated events and mechanisms for communication between residents, developers and governments. Further, the broad range of human services which includes health, welfare, police, education, housing, transportation, and communication services must also exist. With such a physical and social infrastructure in place individuals and communities will be better able to make informed decisions regarding their future. In the absence of such an infrastructure community members are more likely to respond inappropriately to requests made by government or industry, and are less able to make informed decisions regarding management of their own lives.

Although there have been few specifically northern, formal studies on resource development, there has been a proliferation of publications about social impact assessment techniques and case studies. A review of available literature predicts a wide range of potential responses from 'gloom and doom' to total optimism. The one common factor is a clear indication that changes in the social life of an impacted community will inevitably occur. Certain social problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, family violence, suicide, divorce, crime, depression and other mental illnesses are intensified by resource development activities. Further, where problems already exist in a community, these problems are disproportionately exacerbated. As is the case with all social problems, there is no one single causative factor, or single agent that can be blamed. However, there is a factor common to them all - stress. The stress being experienced by individuals often leads them to perform acts of desperation entirely out of keeping with their normal pattern of behaviour, and reduces their ability to cope with even the most normally insignificant problems. In the same way, the normal social patterns within a community can be disrupted by stressful situations, with the perception of residents that their lives are being controlled by something or someone other than themselves. Further change increases distress and results in feelings of hopelessness and anomie.

Nevertheless much can be done to mitigate the negative effects and to assist individuals, families and communities to prepare for resource development. The quality of life within impacted communities must be maintained, promoted and improved. One means to accomplish this would be through fostering self-sufficiency and the maintenance of an independent lifestyle by all northern residents. The hydrocarbon industry can contribute to this through the provision of employment, but this must not overshadow the fact that there are also negative consequences. Recommendations contained at the conclusion of this paper endeavour to suggest some steps which can and should be implemented to minimize these potential problems.

One role and responsibility of Government is to ensure that basic social services are available to all citizens. Major resource development projects are an extraordinary factor and the response to anticipated and real impacts depends on cooperative relationships between citizens, industry and governments. The Department of Social Services has a responsibility to work with individuals, families and communities to assist them with social problems. Several programs are already in place. However, their capacity to deal with increased levels of demand which could be brought about by major resource development projects is marginal. Already many services are operating at maximum capacity.

One cannot predict with any degree of accuracy the number of individuals and families who will be unable to cope with increased levels of stress. In fact, it is not possible even to predict which specific individuals will experience increased levels of stress. Nevertheless, the experience in the Northwest Territories certainly indicates that many individuals and families do have great difficulties in coping with the major stresses created by change in their community life style.

There are many individual examples which can be offered to illustrate the problems which have been experienced thus far. We can quote examples, in communities affected by development, of families devastated by the effects of alcohol, of young people whose self-concept has been undermined to the extent that they can no longer face life, and of children caught in the conflict between two cultures. However, although it would help illustrate the problem, the enumeration of such examples would foster the development of more judgemental approach when what is really required is an attempt to get at the causes in a non-judgemental way and, more importantly, developing concrete action plans to resolve problems. This can be most easily done by focussing on assessing the ways in which problems can be minimized and managed.

B. PROGRAM INITIATIVES AND DIRECTIONS

The Department of Social Services is responsible for developing and administering programs designed to meet the normal social service requirements of Territorial residents. These programs include Institutional and Community Corrections, Financial Assistance to persons in need, preventive and treatment services for children and families, services for aged and handicapped residents, consultative services for alcohol and drug abuse, funding for community based programs, training activities and information resources to assist staff and community groups to cope with the range of social problems normally present in a community.

Through the years, the Department of Social Services has initiated programs to respond to demands for service in various communities. In addition, it has been necessary to plan initiatives necessary to enhance programs already in place to cope with stresses perceived by staff and residents. In order to cope with anticipated changes and the resulting stress which will result from increased resource development activity in the Beaufort Sea-Mackenzie Delta area further resources, both human and financial, will have to be made available for communities.

Some of the initiatives, as well as an indication of some directions which should be taken, are highlighted below.

1. As early as 1969 a program was initiated in the Mackenzie Delta to recruit and train Social Workers who had been born and raised in Beaufort Sea and Mackenzie Valley communities. Social work positions were established in each of the major communities and a local person recruited to fill these positions. Two of the original six employees hired at that time are still working for the Department of Social Services. This type of in-service program was broadened by the Department of Personnel which established a trainee program. Through this program, persons received both on-the-job training and attended an accredited Social Work Program at a community college or university. This ultimately leads to acquiring the qualifications as a Social Worker which enables a person to seek employment anywhere in North America. It is important to note that, although these initiatives are in effect, time is necessary to realize their fulfilment. For instance, it takes a minimum of two years to adequately train a Social Worker -- consequently, advance planning and funding are essential if we are to be able to meet impending demands.

2. It has been necessary, during the past few years, to increase the level of staffing in certain impacted communities. Social work positions have been increased from one to two in Coppermine and Tuktoyaktuk. A part-time social work position has been established in Aklavik to complement the full-time worker. A position has been established for Norman Wells. This increased level of staffing was due, in part, to the demand for counselling services by people who were experiencing a high level of stress and unable to cope with it.

3. The department has encouraged the development of advisory committees in communities. Members of these committees assist the Social Workers in determining the type of services which ought to be provided. In many instances, committee members become involved in delivering services by talking to people who are encountering problems and providing encouragement to them. The success of these groups has varied from community to community but they offer a degree of local input and control over social services, and are a proven vehicle for the management of changes.

4. The department has in place a policy which provides for the transfer of responsibility for the delivery of Social Service programs to a community council. However, it has been our experience that most councils in communities affected by resource development activities have not had the time and/or interest to take on increased levels of responsibility. They are usually too busy coping with the pressing demands of dealing with the required physical infrastructure to cope with social changes, many of which are accelerated with resource development activities.

5. The abuse of alcohol and other drugs remains as one of the greatest problems for individuals, families, and communities. Recognizing the importance of having programs generated from within communities, the Government of the Northwest Territories funds an Alcohol & Drug Coordinating Council which is comprised of representatives from each region in the Northwest

Territories. This Council reviews program proposals developed by community groups. Much has been written and said about alcohol and drug problems and many attempts have been made to find effective ways of coping both with the stresses which result in a significant number of people becoming involved in substance abuse and with the problems that ensue. The consequences of alcohol and drug abuse are tragic for large numbers of people. The stresses these situations create for families and communities are enormous. It is a problem which the department is trying to address by supporting the development of preventive services, community projects, and through training, education, and counselling programs.

6. With regard to specific planning for resource development impact, the department has assigned a staff member in Headquarters to review impact literature from other areas and to prepare resource documents for field staff. Much more needs to be done, but financial resources are limited.

7. In recognition of the need for greater personal and financial responsibility among northern people, especially those undergoing the rapid transition brought about by technological development, the department has initiated programs to assist people to move away from a dependence on government supplied assistance. These initiatives are necessary to ensure maintenance of a productive, independent life style, even in the face of a potential "bust" following the peak of development.

8. The department is initiating a major program to develop alternatives to imprisonment. Such alternatives would include a Fine Option Program, Community Service Work Orders, increased use of Wilderness Camp Programs, and increased use of Volunteer Probation Officers. Volunteer Probation Officers have been used in the communities of Coppermine and Cambridge Bay with some success. There is also an increased level of training activity planned for Probation Officers. We know that incarceration, or any similar punishment, does not serve as a deterrent. Consequently, emphasis is being placed on programs that maintain people in their own community, and reduce the heavy costs of imprisonment. In keeping with this philosophy of maintaining people in their home communities, the department has signed Exchange of Prisoners Agreements to return southern inmates to their home province. The per diem costs for this program, although less than those for constructing a jail, could be substantial.

9. In the past few years, the Child Welfare Program has undergone significant changes. The Child Care facilities which the Department has in the Beaufort Sea-Mackenzie Delta area are undergoing alterations in their functions as they are called upon to cope with the older children coming into care. There is an extensive Child Care Worker training program underway to assist departmental staff in taking on new roles and to ensure the provision of high quality programs.

10. The development of summer camp programs has provided culturally appropriate alternatives to law-breaking by youth during their vacations. This program, given appropriate funding, has potential for considerable expansion and has proven itself effective in assisting young people to cope with their problems before major conflicts arise. This, and other programs which provide support to children and their families prior to the development of major disruptions, are increasingly essential as family patterns and life-styles change. Increased development, changing employment, changing expectations, and a changing world-view, all contribute to the total stress on families and the potential for disintegration.

C. CONCLUSION

There is much which still needs to be done. It must be borne in mind that it is necessary to listen to the residents of impacted communities as they articulate what is valuable about their way of life. We must remember that we are dealing with individuals and communities for whom increased economic benefit does not necessarily lead to improved life circumstances and experiences.

Programs that are developed must be culturally sensitive and designed to meet the often unique needs of our northern communities.

One of the most important steps which has to be taken is to create the situation in which communities are in a position to plan as opposed to having to react to impacts after they have occurred. Community based plans to deal with real and anticipated problems must be in place before major development proceeds. Such an approach which focusses on a community's ability to help itself, and which provides adequate support, enhances the development of a community infrastructure capable of dealing with social problems.

An adequate data base is crucial to a good planning program as outlined in the departmental NOGAP submission to the Federal Government. There are elements of such a data base in place for the Beaufort Sea-Mackenzie Delta communities but a great deal of work is still necessary in order to determine what are the critical data required by communities for their own planning activities. There is a need for more research oriented activities governed by the needs of communities, not necessarily by what government and industry think might be useful.

We cannot wait for all the studies to be completed prior to engaging in positive program implementation. Consequently, we are proposing the following recommendations for consideration by all parties involved in the development of the hydrocarbon industry in the Northwest Territories.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Only those scenarios which result in controlled growth in communities should be supported.

2. Assistance should be given to communities to develop a strong infrastructure of informal, volunteer, as well as professional, human support services.

3. Work to establish a strong data base regarding the psycho-social impacts of resource development in the Northwest Territories should be supported by industry, government and residents.

4. The availability of liquor and drugs both within the work sites and in affected communities, should be controlled and the effects of any increased availability closely monitored.

5. The proponents, contractors, and sub-contractors be required to have adequate employee Alcohol and Drug Assistance Programs in place. (These have been begun by some companies, but need to be used more extensively).

6. The proponents, contractors, and sub-contractors should be required to return an employee to his/her place of hire, no matter how the employment is terminated, whether by illness, imprisonment, or other means.

7. The proponents, contractors, and sub-contractors should be required to have on-site cultural awareness/orientation programs for both southern hires and northern hires in order to ensure appropriate adjustment and the development of healthy, cooperative work relations.

8. Guidelines for access to a community by employees at a campsite should be developed in consultation with the affected community.

9. The proponents, contractors, and sub-contractors should continue to support community based preventive social programs such as day care, alcohol and drug committees, recreation committees.

10. Proponents should cooperate with communities and government in planning for the abandonment phase of the project.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: A. Blair Dunbar

POSITION: Assistant Deputy Minister
Department of Social Services
Government of the Northwest Territories
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

EDUCATION: BA University of British Columbia 1965
BSW University of British Columbia 1966
MSW University of British Columbia 1969

NORTHERN CAREER: Area Social Worker Inuvik Region
May 1969 to May 1979

Area Supervisor Inuvik June 1970 to June 1973

Area Supervisor Fort Smith June 1973 to June 1976

Program Policy Officer-Health Care Plan
Yellowknife July 1976 to Dec. 1976

Head, Standards and Research-Health Care Plan
Yellowknife Jan. 1977 to Dec. 1977

Chief, Staff Development and Training
Yellowknife Dec. 1977 to Oct. 1979

Assistant Deputy Minister, Dept. of Social Services
Yellowknife Oct. 1979 to Present.

PUBLICATIONS: Author, **Central and Eastern Arctic Health Services Study**, Government of the N.W.T., April 1977.

Co-Author **A Theoretical Model of Competencies for Community Social Service Work in the N.W.T.**, February 1979 (Paper presented at Canadian World Social Work Forum, Victoria, B.C. February 1979)