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Introduction to International Research

Internationalization

Introduction

The APRC 2006 had a much more international outreach, and examined many issues of comparative and international importance than previous conferences. During the APRC (2006) The Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held a consultation on how best to develop well-being indicators that could be used across the many countries of the world. This consultation was part of a multi-continental set of consultations. Ms. Elsa Stamatopoulou, Chief of the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and Eric Guimond, acting director of the Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate, Indian Affairs Canada addressed a plenary of the conference on the issue of well-being indicators. The abridged versions of their speeches below provide a wonderful introduction to our international papers.

Part One

Address of Ms. Elsa Stamatopoulou, Chief, Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Division for Social Policy and Development, UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs

I would like, first of all, to recognize the Indigenous peoples of this land, the Ojibwe, for hosting us in these traditional territories.

Indicators are a difficult issue, they take long to develop and they are a so-called sensitive matter, at the UN and elsewhere. They raise the issue of the definition of no more and no less than what is happiness, or what Socrates called “the highest good.”

Some years back, when I was working in OHCHR, I was very involved with our team in trying to integrate human rights in the UN system’s development work and we had a really difficult time with indicators: our colleagues from the development agencies thought that our language was from another planet! Such conceptual differences are not unfamiliar to Indigenous peoples when they try to put forward their visions of their own development, and it is sure that one of the

challenges is one of communication, of cultural translation between Indigenous development visions and non-Indigenous development visions.

One day, a seminar was organized in New York on good governance indicators by high-level experts of an important state: they said they had been working on good governance indicators for 13 years, with inconclusive results ... In our work during this conference, on Indigenous peoples and indicators of well-being I am thinking: the states can wait, the intergovernmental organizations can wait, but Indigenous peoples **cannot** wait.

1. The Work of the UNPFII

The development of data and indicators that capture the situation of Indigenous peoples based on their own perceptions and aspirations is a methodological priority of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. This priority is due to the overwhelming invisibility of Indigenous peoples in national censuses and other surveys which measure progress and inform policy initiatives in a large number of countries. We understand from certain global estimates that Indigenous peoples in most parts of the world are marginalized, and disproportionately constitute a significant number of the world's most impoverished people. We also know from statistical data that many Indigenous peoples in the developed world are living in conditions of the so called 'fourth world.' The Permanent Forum therefore believes that disaggregation of data is an essential strategy to bring more visibility to the disparities, and address the situation of Indigenous peoples. Without such data, or relevant indicators for measuring Indigenous peoples' well-being, mainstream models of development intervention are often thrust upon Indigenous peoples based on assumptions that they work, thereby resulting in inappropriate development policies, forcible assimilation, and dependency on certain welfare-oriented service delivery models.

In response to these issues, the Permanent Forum organized a workshop on data collection and disaggregation in January 2004. The workshop noted a number of important conclusions and recommendations which were consequently adopted by the Permanent Forum. Some of the key observations of the workshop included: that data collection and disaggregation should help "detect discrimination, inequality, and exclusion of indigenous peoples, both individually and as a group" and it should be "culturally specific" and relevant to the problems identified by Indigenous peoples.¹ The workshop also noted the necessity of qualitative and human rights indicators to assess the true social situation of Indigenous peoples.

Some of the key recommendations of the workshop included: the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples in data collection; the involvement of Indigenous peoples themselves in data collection, analysis, and reporting; and the desirability of long-term standardized data based on multiple identification criteria developed with the full participation of local Indigenous peoples. The

workshop also noted that data collection exercises should be conducted in local languages and employ local Indigenous interviewers.

Based on this work, last year, the Permanent Forum stated that "...poverty indicators based on Indigenous peoples' own perception of their situation and experiences should be developed jointly with Indigenous peoples."²

2. The Ottawa Conference in a Global Perspective

Let me explain how this conference, including the international expert meeting we conducted, fits within a global process and effort that will feed into the Permanent Forum and the international system.

In fact, during this year, in addition to the meeting in Ottawa which focused on Indigenous peoples in developed countries and indicators of well-being, we will hold three more regional meetings on participatory indicator-setting, in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Africa, and in Asia. Parallel to this effort, the Inter-agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues, which brings together 29 UN and other intergovernmental organizations, has prepared and submitted to the Forum's session this coming May, its own paper and survey of Indigenous-related indicators that already exist and also identifying the gaps. The results of all the regional meetings and the UN survey will then be synthesized, so that a number of core global and regional indicators can be proposed through the Permanent Forum, to the UN system and other intergovernmental organizations, including IFIs, governments, the private sector, and other civil society actors, such as conservationist organizations. They can also be used by Indigenous peoples themselves.

Dear friends, I am pleased that our international expert group meeting on Indigenous peoples and indicators of well-being—the first in the series we are planning—has come to a successful conclusion. And we are grateful to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and The University of Western Ontario and the NAFC, for co-sponsoring this workshop. The workshop brought in Indigenous experts from the Russian federation, the Arctic, the First Nations of Canada, Native America, Australia, and New Zealand to discuss work done on indicators of relevance to Indigenous peoples within their respective regions with the following objectives in mind:

- Identify gaps in existing indicators at the global, regional, and national levels that assess the situation of Indigenous peoples, and impact policy making, governance, and program development, including from a gender perspective.
- Examine work being done to improve indicators so that they take into account Indigenous peoples and their concerns, and assess them according to qualitative and quantitative criteria, including a gender perspective.
- Examine linkages between quantitative and qualitative indicators, particularly indicators that look at processes affecting Indigenous peoples.

- Propose the formulation of core global and regional indicators that address the specific concerns and situations of Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous women, and can also be used by international financial institutions, the UN system and other intergovernmental organizations, including regional ones.

3. The Main Results of the International Workshop on Indigenous Peoples and Indicators of Well-being

1. Our meeting highlighted the necessity and importance of indicators for understanding and measuring the quality of life of Indigenous peoples according to their own perceptions. In particular, the meeting addressed the question of measurement, i.e. what is being measured, and according to whose standards and visions—is it government or Indigenous peoples themselves? Existing international and national indicator frameworks developed by governments and international institutions in many parts of the world often do not capture the situation, or inadequately capture the situation of Indigenous peoples. For example, an indicator such as the proportion of the population below \$1/day may not capture Indigenous peoples' perception of poverty. Indigenous peoples may perceive their own poverty in terms of lack of access to, and integrity of, their traditional lands and forests, scarcity and threats to traditional seeds, plant medicines, and food animals, or integrity of and access to sacred sites.
2. A second focus of the discussions was the gap in determinants of well-being amidst Indigenous peoples relative to the general population.
3. Thirdly, indicators were highlighted as a means for supporting data development, policy, and program responses. In many countries, collection techniques often overlook, or are unable to determine the quality of, life and well-being of Indigenous peoples. Inappropriate techniques or the lack of disaggregated data often place us in a quandary in terms of further data development in Indigenous communities. One method for breaking the cycle of data gaps is to develop indicators that are both statistically relevant and culturally appropriate as a means of capturing more precise and relevant information. When public policies are top-down, they result in improper and culturally irrelevant statistical information. And we all know that indicator and statistical frameworks inform debates and decision-making amongst Indigenous peoples themselves as much as government.

An important issue to capture in indicator-setting is the particular situation of Indigenous women—and gender more comprehensively—and also the situation of Indigenous peoples through the whole span of their life: children, youth, and elders.

We were encouraged to hear about some important efforts of Indigenous peoples themselves and others to capture culturally sensitive and relevant indicators of well-being, showing that good work is really possible if the will is there.

As one of our Maori participants from New Zealand repeatedly stressed, in doing this work on indicators and statistics “we need to continue to stay in a solution mode.”

Participation as the Permeating Theme

The Permanent Forum strongly believes that indicators and disaggregated data are important, not just as a measure of the situation of Indigenous peoples, but as a vital strategy in improving their lives by capturing their aspirations and world views, promoting development with identity, protecting and promoting their cultures and integrity as Indigenous peoples, and empowering them to utilize such information to their benefit.

I am confident to state today that, what we heard with the most clarity in the discussions we held is that unless Indigenous peoples themselves participate fully and effectively in data collection and the establishment of indicators, efforts will likely be incomplete, baseless or irrelevant, and essentially provide too fragile a foundation for wise policies, including public resource allocations.

It is ironic and unacceptable that a number of mainstream discourses on poverty and development still continue to exclude and marginalize Indigenous peoples. It is only through the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples in research, including in data collection and the setting of indicators, that we can go beyond the discourses to action that will improve Indigenous peoples' lives.

In the final analysis, indicators are about listening to Indigenous peoples, they are about a true dialogue between Indigenous peoples and the rest of society, they are about being open to Indigenous world views and respecting them.

Dear participants, the theme of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People adopted by the General Assembly last December is “Partnership for Action and Dignity.” The word “dignity” is linked to fundamental human rights and freedoms. And we all know, that there is no dignity without participation.

This is our major challenge. Let us respond to it.

Part Two

Address from Eric Guimond, Acting Director of the Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate, Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

There are many angles by which we can discuss and reflect on the importance of indicators. One might be driven by pure scientific consideration and curiosity. Another might instead focus on indicators in relation to the flavour of the day, e.g., accountability. Planning could also be a legitimate way of approaching this topic of indicators and their importance. My intent here is not to make the case for any specific context in which indicators have their importance, but rather to reflect on three basic principles about indicators.

Principle One: Indicators and Research are a Key Part of Policy and Program Development

Let's have a quick survey of the audience: if you wear a watch, please lift your hand. So, almost everyone is wearing a watch today. What is the purpose of the watch? To indicate time, obviously. We measure time through this device and we keep track of it through observations. We monitor time. Time is important. Our lives are to some extent, sometimes too much for my own personal taste, regulated by time. We make decisions, and take actions, based on time.

What key elements have we touched on here through this simple example? (1) A device that provides data; (2) an observer; (3) monitoring; (4) transferring knowledge into decision-making.

While this may sound a bit trivial and simplistic it is not. Let us take this four-part process apart, one key element at a time.

Scenario 1: Suppose we take away the data, we are left with a useless observer (might as well look for another job), no monitoring is possible as we have no way of monitoring changes, and finally any decisions made can only be in the absence of knowledge. In our own recent past in Canada, we never collected data on the movement between reserves (First Nations Communities) and cities. We assumed people were pouring from reserve to city. We made decisions based on this belief. When we finally began looking at the movement of people we found that First Nations people did indeed move from the reserves to the cities, and they also moved back. The churn migration actually meant that there has been a net positive inflow to reserves in the last few years. Lack of data is a recognized issue when it comes to policy and program development related to Aboriginal peoples and communities. There is an obvious need for more data. We'll come back to data collection in the second principle later on.

Scenario 2: Let's now eliminate the researcher from this process. What are we left with? A bunch of data, no monitoring, misinformed decision-making because knowledge transfer is disorganized and unstructured. Data and indicators do not have a life of their own. Indicators come to life through the work of the researcher. We have recently completed a study of community well-being. It has provided us

with the capacity to assess the well-being of the many First Nations communities. Before we became the researchers and carried out this assessment we had no opportunity to make these observations and policy could only suffer.

Scenario 3: Let's remove the monitoring part. Now, we have data which is analyzed by the researcher, but this data is only collected once. The result is again misinformed decision-making because the knowledge is partial. Is it possible for anyone to figure out an entire movie with only one frame? So why is it that too often, our research presentations on issues of Aboriginal peoples and communities only focus on the latest census figures, e.g., the latest statistical snapshot of the population? Without this idea of monitoring, we are unable to assess progress, or lack thereof. Many of Canada's major commissions have pointed to the need for monitoring/tracking. My United Nations colleagues would attest to the fact that the collection of data over time allows us all to assess changes in the human development index for countries of the world. This comparison makes it possible to track improvements, and potentially isolate best practices.

Final scenario: Let's remove the knowledge transfer. In other words the researcher does not communicate his/her analysis. The end result is decisions made in the absence of knowledge. Researchers have a responsibility to communicate their work to Aboriginal leaders and communities, to policy and program analysts. Evidence-based policy and program development is dependent on this knowledge transfer.

Principle Two: It is Important to Distinguish Between Outcome and Output Indicators

In an area of accountability and performance measurement, the discourse around data and indicators has become increasingly confusing, probably even more so for Aboriginal data and indicators. One element contributing to this confusion is the obvious lack of distinction between two fundamentally different types of data/indicators: outcome versus output indicators. And most often, when the discourse points to the lack of data and, therefore, the need for increased data collection, efforts target both types of data indiscriminantly. It is like mixing oil with water.

What is an outcome indicator? Simply put, an outcome indicator is an indicator that measures outcomes! So, for example, an outcome indicator in education could be the proportion of kids that graduate high school with a diploma. Kids go to school, and we all want to know if they are successful or not. With outcome indicators, we try to measure many basic fundamental questions (peoples' health, educational attainment, labour-force activity etc.)

With respect to programs and policy, these outcome indicators are measures of program and policy effectiveness.

Now, what is an output indicator? An output indicator is an indicator tied to program delivery, not to program effectiveness. In more simplistic terms, it is about how many people have been served by a program (remember the motto of a

popular fast food chain of restaurants: one billion served). It is not about the actual outcome for the people of the program which might vary.

Principle Three: What is the Most Popular Research Product of Any Planning Activity? Demographic and Economic Forecasts.

Research about the past (e.g., trends in educational attainment) is extremely informative and essential to the work of policy and program designers. On the other hand, program and policy planners rely on research about the future, e.g., forecasts. Indicators about the past are useful. Indicators about future trends are equally useful.

Aboriginal research is largely, in fact to a disproportionate level in my own opinion, about the past, not enough about the future. For Aboriginal research to break out of its traditional limited role with respect to policy and programs, we need to invest in research about the future. Sound weird?

A little more than ten years ago, I was employed as a demographer by Hydro-Quebec, in a strategic planning and forecasting directorate. In this directorate, there were two units: one for electricity demand, one for the supply side. I worked on the demand side, and was responsible for developing the demographic forecast, e.g., population size, and number and size of households, for the entire province of Quebec. At the same time, another colleague, an economist, was in charge of producing the economic forecast of the province. The demographic and economic forecasts were the two pillars of the electricity demand forecast for the province of Quebec. The projected demand was then compared to the existing and projected supply of electricity. Thereafter, decisions were made on the necessity to curb the demand and/or increase the supply of electricity.

Now, the question that bears attention with respect to Aboriginal policy and program development and planning is: Do we have these two pillars of planning, e.g., demographic and economic forecasts?

With respect to demographic forecasts, current efforts are being made to fill a void at least as old as RCAP. With the exception of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada producing periodically registered Indian population projections, the last official set of Aboriginal population projections, e.g., Registered Indians, Non-Status Indians, Métis and Inuit, dates back to the Royal Commission (RCAP) in the mid-90s.

Developing indicators is an important task, for Canada and for all of us around the world. We have to base these indicators on sound research, careful assessment, and analysis. When we develop these indicators we have to use them in the process of understanding the realities facing peoples around the world and make worthwhile effective policy.

Endnotes

- 1 Report of the Workshop on Data Collection and Disaggregation for Indigenous Peoples to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Third Session, E/C. 19/2004/2.
- 2 Paragraph 15, Report of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on its Fourth Session, E/C. 19/2005/9.