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OUR WAY OF BEING: GATHERING OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN ON SELF GOVERNANCE

1. Opening / Introduction

In all meetings and gatherings of the Hodinohso:ni people, an opening Thanksgiving Address is recited to give thanks to all of Creation and to acknowledge and welcome all human beings with one mind and a good heart. This paper is a report on a gathering of Indigenous women who came together with a good mind and heart from across Canada to discuss how to educate all Indigenous women on self-government issues. The host territory was the Hodinohso:ni lands: Six Nations of the Grand River.

The women came from all directions; they were from many Nations; and they all worked in various fields dealing with many issues. Many of these women have leadership roles in their communities and many of them have already thought about and dealt with these various issues that were discussed over three days. Many of the women felt empowered by listening to the similar stories from different communities and many women expressed gratitude for the sharing that happened at this gathering. This report reflects the various issues that were discussed and provides a framework for presenting and educating Indigenous women across the country.

This report is in three parts. The first part deals with the complexity of the term “self-government” and the issues that the women of this gathering discussed about self-government. The second part deals with the barriers that affect Indigenous women’s goals of self-determination. The final part presents some recommendations and suggestions that is needed to implement self-determination as well as ideas to educate other Indigenous women across the country about self-government issues.

2. What is Self-Government?

The issue of self-government is at the forefront for Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government; however, the term or concept has at least two varying philosophical ideas. Aboriginal peoples have always considered themselves to be a self-governing people, but as a result of the various forms of colonization and oppression, they have not been able to assert their right to the proper form of self-government. Currently, the Canadian government has been negotiating and implementing self-government agreements; however, these agreements operate within the Canadian Constitutional framework, which basically means that they are developed within Canadian jurisdiction and must abide by Canadian law. These self-government agreements, as noted by the Canadian Government’s federal policy guide, do not “include a right of sovereignty in the international law sense, and will not result in sovereign independent Aboriginal nation states”¹.

¹Canada. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. *Federal Policy Guide. Aboriginal Self-Government. The Government of Canada’s Approach to Implementation of the Inherent Right and the Negotiation of Aboriginal Self-Government.* www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/sg/plcy_e.html

As a result, there are significant differences between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government about the concept of the term “inherent right to self-government”. It was admitted by the Canadian government that there are “significant differences” between Aboriginal peoples and “some governments” about the definition of self-government. When reviewing the Federal governments inherent right’s policy on self-government, it obviously conflicts with the Indigenous women’s view at the gathering.

The women at the gathering stated that there should be no jurisdiction of the Canadian government when it comes to self-determination of Indigenous peoples. The women at the gathering reiterated that the language of “self-government” is problematic in that the word does not take into account Indigenous perspective of being a people and a nation. The words that kept being used to describe self-government or self-determination was “our way of life” or “our way of being”, which incorporates many things such as our languages, our cultures, our beliefs, our ceremonies and our responsibilities. Self-determination has also been described in this way:

We are put here by the Creator to care for each other and for Mother Earth. We should therefore be responsible for ourselves, for our families, for the next generation and for our community.²

One participant noted that when we try to describe self-government, we are trying to use the English language to describe it, but she noted that “English is different”. Speaking in our languages comes from our heart and that we do not put “things” in boxes. Our languages are descriptive, provide actions to our words and establishes relationships with the people that we speak to. The English language does not do this but in fact changes our whole description of what we are speaking about. Mohawk writer, Patricia Monture-Angus states:

When Aboriginal peoples discuss the meaning of self-government and/or self-determination, we are forced to do it in a language that is not our own. We must express our ideas in English or in French, both of which epitomize our colonial experiences. It is almost solely Aboriginal energy that fosters the accommodations that are required to carry on both the political and legal dialogues in either of the Canadian colonial languages.³

One of the recommendations of the women was to express in English what the idea was, but then to give it to a person who speaks the language. This will ensure a positive realm of thinking and will also ensure that the thoughts and feelings that went into that idea is presented correctly.

²KSCS (Kahnawake Shakotia’Takehnhas Community Services). *Aboriginal values and social services: The Kahnawake experience.* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development) 1994 at 22.

³Patricia Monture-Angus, *Journeying Forward. Dreaming First Nations’ Independence* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing) 1999 at 22.

When discussing the term “self-government”, there were many ways that were used to describe the term. It was reminded that we were to remember the principles of the Guswentha (Two Row Wampum Treaty Belt). This treaty belt symbolizes the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the colonizer nations. The following is a description of this Treaty Belt:

When the Haudenosaunee first came into contact with the European nations, treaties of peace and friendship were made. Each was symbolized by the Gus-Wen-Tah or Two Row Wampum. There is a bed of white wampum which symbolizes the purity of the agreement. There are two rows of purple, and those two rows have the spirit of your ancestors and mine. There are three beads of wampum separating the two rows and they symbolize peace, friendship and respect. These two rows will symbolize two paths or two vessels, traveling down the same river together. One, a birch bark canoe, will be for the Indian people, their laws, their customs and their ways. The other, a ship, will be for the white people and their laws and their customs and their ways. We shall each travel the river together, side by side, but in our own boats. Neither of us will try to steer the other’s vessel.⁴

The whole purpose of this sacred agreement was to recognize the separate but equal relationships between the two parties. What has happened over time is that the colonizer nations have violated this treaty relationship and have actually forced its laws, languages and customs on Indigenous peoples. A prime example of this is the fact that the Canadian government does not recognize the “real” inherent right to self-government: sovereignty - or as noted by the Indigenous women at this gathering - “our way of being”.

Another issue that was relevant to ensure “our way of being” was healing. Many Indigenous peoples are experiencing the effects of colonization; for example many communities are dealing with alcoholism, drug abuse, violence and suicide. The women at this gathering felt that in order for our people to move into self-determination, everyone must look after themselves - to be healthy - and for women to take their proper places and to take responsibility in their communities. As noted by one woman, this would cause a revolution if women took responsibility for all children, as this once was their responsibility. Another women felt that we cannot place all the responsibilities on individuals to heal because this puts too much of a burden on one person. This women felt that community issues should be dealt with first (ie. looking at history, effects of colonization), which will assist an individual in that community to deal with his/her own issues. She also felt that this takes away the responsibilities of government to accept that it, too, must be taking action in assisting the healing of communities. As noted by Wayne Warry:

⁴Warren, William, *History of the Ojibway Nation*, (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1957), at 219.

Forms of political representations – band councils and elections – were imposed on Aboriginal people under the terms of the Indian Act. The fact is that First Nations are incipient political communities. To date, their identity has been defined by the state, rather than by the communities themselves. At the same time, community identity has been articulated partly by way of political philosophy in opposition to the state, and specifically, through emerging notions of what rights First Nations should exercise. By this I do not mean to suggest that the inherent right to self-government has not been sustained through history. Rather, I am suggesting that the sense of political status evident in the concept of First Nations is tied to state recognition of band councils, and that this political status is distinct from any sense of community identity.⁵

Identity is the strength inherent in any community. Language, spirituality, customs and relationships to traditional territories of an Indigenous community are just a few facets of knowing Indigenous identity. According to Hodinohso:ni culture, when a child is born they are born into a clan and a nation. Children are provided with identity as soon as they are born because they follow their mother's clan and nation. Once a child knows his/her clan and nation, they know immediately what his/her/their responsibilities are. They have full responsibilities to the Creator to be healthy and to stay healthy. All of these facets have been effected by colonization and the cultural genocidal tactics of the colonizer governments. As one woman at the gathering stated, there is "no facet or part of life that has not been contaminated." This is the responsibility of those colonizer governments at all levels to assist in the healing of Indigenous communities.

Basically, leadership in any Indigenous community should take the lead in creating healthy environments. If the leadership is unhealthy, as noted by one participant, then this causes difficulties for the rest of the community. If a person were to take control of his/her own life and then lead from there, this would create excellent healthy opportunities for his/her community. It would be at this point that those Indigenous communities are taking action and making the good choices to become stronger. This is all a part of acknowledging and knowing "our own way of being".

Another issue that was presented was self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency, according to the group at the gathering meant unity - everyone in the community is helping everyone else and that everything that everyone does benefits everyone. Self-sufficiency meant being at peace and that what each person does is coming from the heart. There was also a question as to how Indigenous peoples can be self-sufficient by living off of the land when we are dealing with environmental damage such as toxic waste land, poisoned animals, berries, land, etc. Another barrier to self-sufficiency is that we have become disconnected from the environment and dependent upon buying foods at the grocery store. These are examples of the barriers to self-sufficiency.

⁵Wayne Warray, *Unfinished Dreams. Community Healing and the Reality of Aboriginal Self-Government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc.) 1998 at 230.

3. Barriers to “Our Way of Being”

As a result of colonization, there are many barriers to developing and re-creating positive forms of self-determination for Indigenous peoples. Some First Nation communities are developing self-government agreements with the federal government; however, there are some First Nation communities that still feel that they have to be acknowledged as sovereign nations prior to any further discussions with the federal government. The women at this gathering felt that all Indigenous peoples needed to know all of this information; everyone needed to know the barriers that hinder our self-determination development. There were questions like, “why can’t we just go ahead with it?”

One of the main issues that Indigenous peoples have had to deal with is the fact that the colonizer governments and settlers believed that Indigenous peoples did not have a law, religion or social order. They forced their values and beliefs onto Indigenous peoples. There is a term that has been used to describe this: Eurocentric diffusionism⁶.

Eurocentric diffusionism is a product⁷ of colonization⁸ that has affected the traditional lives of Indigenous peoples. Eurocentrism has been described as more than European ethnocentrism. “The word is a label for all the beliefs that postulate past or present superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans.”⁹ It is also defined as a belief in the notion that European civilization -- The West -- has had some unique historical advantage, some special quality of race or culture or environment or mind or spirit, which gives his human community a permanent superiority over all other communities, at all times in history and down to the present. Justice T.R. Berger described what can also be termed as Eurocentric diffusionism:

Man put his unique stamp on the world around him. His values, ideas, language and institutions exhibit his understanding of himself and his world. These things are his culture. Any people seek to ensure that these things are transmitted from one

⁶Beverley Jacobs, *International Law/The Great Law of Peace, Masters of Law Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Faculty of Law, December, 2000.*

⁷J.M. Blaut, *Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric history* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1993) at 18.

⁸Robert A. Williams, Jr. defined colonization as a form of racial discrimination as follows: *European colonization in the New World normally required displacement of one cultural group in favor of another cultural group seeking to exercise self-determining rights over the same territory and resources. The exploitive goals of European colonization thus entailed a form of racial discrimination denying equal rights of self-determination to those different peoples colonized by the colonizer. Robert A. Williams, Jr., A Columbus=s Legacy: Law as an Instrument of Racial Discrimination Against Indigenous Peoples= Right of Self-Determination@, [Fall 1991] Vol. 8, No. 2 Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law 51 at 54.*

⁹Blaut, *Colonizer=s Model, supra, note 7.*

generation to another, to ensure a continuity of the beliefs and knowledge that a people hold in common. We sought to erase the collective memory of the native people - their history, language, religion and philosophy - and to replace it with our own.¹⁰

Another description of Eurocentric diffusionism is that:

Taking from models based on consumer societies, the market economy and alleged intrinsic goodness of modern (Western) social organization, they tend to establish a mythical indisputable superiority of the culture (in particular of the political culture) of the so-called free world, Western Judeo-Christian paradigm, and to consolidate as conventional wisdom the notion that other conceptions in those areas are backward and obsolete and, for that reason, inferior and, if at all, of negligible value.¹¹

Eurocentric diffusionism has impacted Indigenous communities because those Eurocentric values, ideals, language, laws and institutions have affected Indigenous history, language, religion, laws and philosophy by not accepting them as real – as part of the lifestyle and way of life of Indigenous peoples. The institutionalization of Eurocentric law (political systems and legislation) and its rules and procedures have been forced on Indigenous peoples¹².

Those colonizers who developed Canadian legal and political institutions also believed that Indigenous people's ways were backward, obsolete, inferior and "of negligible value". This was why Indigenous peoples were unable to continue with their own processes – their own way of life. Eurocentric institutions have violated many of the treaty relationships with Indigenous peoples and specifically has violated the Two Row Wampum Treaty. Colonizer governments have blatantly refused to acknowledge the specific nation-to-nation relationships of Indigenous peoples. Even more difficult to deal with is the fact that the Indigenous women in those communities have also been effected.

One of the effects is that Indigenous women's voices are not being heard. The protocols in the communities are not incorporating women's voices, which means that these processes are not working the way they are meant to. The description of Eurocentric diffusionism can also affect Indigenous peoples, wherein they have learned Eurocentric values and beliefs so much that they have forgotten about their own processes and protocols; wherein violence and abuses are a result of the impact of colonization. A researcher of family violence states:

¹⁰T.R. Berger, "Native Rights in the New World: A Glance At History" [1979] 2 C.N.L.R. 5 at 10.

¹¹Document E/CN.2/Sub.2/1992/32, First Progress Report Submitted by Mr. Miguel Alfonso Martinez, Special Rapporteur. Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples. Study on Treaties, Agreements and other Constructive Arrangements between States and Indigenous Populations at 4 [hereinafter referred to as Martinez, A First Progress Report@].

¹²"...as the non-Aboriginal population increasingly came into contact with Aboriginal people, the non-Aboriginal legal system was imposed on these communities." Jonathon Rudin, "Aboriginal Self-Government and Justice", in John H. Hylton (ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd.) 1999 at 206.

In demonstrating that several important risk markers of violence do not account for the significantly higher prevalence of violence against Aboriginal women, the results indirectly lend empirical support to the theory that the unique experience of colonization of Aboriginals in Canada plays a large role in their disproportionate likelihood of violence against women.¹³

Many Indigenous men have learned Eurocentric patriarchal values and have treated Indigenous women with disrespect by abusing or violating them in one way or another. A recent analysis has been completed wherein it was acknowledged that:

It is possible that those partners of Aboriginal women who themselves are Aboriginal have not only internalized White devaluation of women but that this operates in a context where they themselves feel devalued by society. To feel some value in the society in which they find themselves, they may have adopted White devaluation of women and seek to attain a sense of self-worth through having power over their partner.¹⁴

Many Indigenous women in their communities are still having to deal with “White devaluation”. As a result of this, Indigenous women have been oppressed and have lost their voices. However, this is changing and Indigenous women are slowly regaining their strength and reclaiming their voices. Indigenous communities will change drastically when all women reclaim their voices and reclaim their original responsibilities to their communities. As noted by the Canadian Council on Social Development and the Native Women’s Association of Canada, “It is not simply Aboriginal women who have been rendered powerless – it is Aboriginal society.”¹⁵ It is therefore part of the task of Indigenous women in their communities to assist in reclaiming “our way of being.”

There are also language issues. In most of the remote First Nation communities, the people in those communities speak their First languages. Thus, there are not only language barriers with English or French speaking people but there are also barriers when having to write in English or French. Most of the time First Nation languages are unable to be translated into English or French and thus, the meaning of what was said was lost. It becomes a very difficult process to ensure that voices are being heard. It is recommended that this report be translated in as many languages as possible to ensure that Indigenous women are able to understand what is being written.

Not only are there language barriers with respect to translation, Indigenous communities are also having to deal with a deterioration or loss of language. This is a result of many issues, such as residential schools, the education system, etc. It is very important that

¹³Douglas A. Brownridge, “Male Partner Violence Against Aboriginal Women in Canada. An Empirical Analysis” [January, 2003] *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 18 No. 1. 65-83 at 81

¹⁴Douglas A. Brownridge, “Male Partner Violence Against Aboriginal Women in Canada. An Empirical Analysis” [January, 2003] *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 18 No. 1. 65-83 at 78.

¹⁵Canadian Council on Social Development and Native Women’s Association of Canada *Voices of Aboriginal women: Aboriginal women speak out about violence.* (Ottawa: CCSD) 1991 at 2.

language be re-incorporated into those communities. As noted earlier, language is an important facet of identity. It assists in the processes of Indigenous way of thinking.

Another barrier that exists is that Canadian mainstream society insists upon fragmenting areas or “putting these issues into boxes”. For example, justice, health, child welfare and education are just a few examples of areas that have been separated by federal and provincial jurisdiction. The governments have put these areas into fragmented areas that do not relate to one another. This has caused difficulties for Indigenous peoples because we do not put these issues into little boxes. They all relate to each other in some form or another. It was noted by one of the participants of the gathering that when we speak in our languages, there is no fragmentation.

Another issue that was presented as a barrier was the “individual/collective talk”. It was stated by most of the participants that we needed to stop talking about what our individual rights are and what our collective rights are. This “language” was not created by Indigenous peoples.

Another barrier created by colonization is the enforcement of sending Indigenous children to attend residential schools. At least five generations of Indigenous peoples across Canada have been affected by the federal government's oppressive policy of assimilation: the residential school system wherein Indigenous children were forced to attend boarding schools and where many of these children were physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, sexually, culturally and verbally abused while residing in these purported educational institutions. The detrimental effects of abuse in residential schools impacted upon many lives of Indigenous peoples causing a loss of culture, a loss of traditional values, a loss of languages, a loss of family bonding, a loss of life skills, a loss of parenting skills, a loss of self-respect and a loss of respect for others. It has also been linked to problems of alcoholism, drug abuse, powerlessness, dependency, low self-esteem, suicides, prostitution, gambling, homelessness, sexual abuse and violence. Some survivors of the residential school system and/or their descendants have also been in conflict with the legal system as a result of the detrimental affects.

Broadly speaking the residential school system provided for a loss of a whole culture of generations of Indigenous peoples – cultural genocide¹⁶. It affected the socialization and structure of Indigenous peoples by assisting in downgrading the Hodinohso:ni clan system. It affected all relationships with everyone and everything by losing the ability to communicate as a result of the abusive treatment of children if they were saw playing or were heard laughing, crying, speaking, etc. This also resulted in a loss of childhood. Children were never allowed to be children and were never able to express themselves as children. The loss of language has also affected communication skills as well as affected culture, ceremonies and spirituality. The loss of voice has affected the ability to think, feel and know. There has been a psychological loss affecting self-esteem, self-confidence and identity.

¹⁶Roland Chrisjohn and Sherri Young, *The Circle Game. Shadows and Substance in the Indian Residential School Experience in Canada* (Penticton, B.C: Theytus Books Ltd., 1997)

The residential school also affected our system of education in teaching our young. Elders and parents were responsible for teaching the children our way of life. The traditional education system has been detrimentally affected. Many families, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, etc. have been greatly affected by these losses which has caused an intergenerational chain of abuse and violence. Indigenous women are now faced with so much violence and disrespect that had never existed prior to colonization.

Included in this violation against Indigenous women and children is the Eurocentric political and legal systems that have also been forced upon Indigenous peoples. Canadian/provincial laws and policies are greatly impacting upon the lives of Indigenous women. An issue discussed by the women at the gathering felt that the Indian Act elected system was not effective - that the Department of Indian Affairs, as stated by one participant, "was never there to help us." Another participant felt that these Indian Act structures are self-perpetuating. They, too, have been affected by Eurocentric diffusionism where those Eurocentric structures have been learned so well, that Indigenous people working within those systems are perpetuating and internalizing racism and oppression. The women at the gathering stated that "we have allowed this structure to continue". It is now time to do something about it.

4. Recommendations

a) What are our responsibilities as Indigenous women to be a self-governing people?

There were many excellent ideas from the participants of the gathering when discussing what our responsibilities are as Indigenous women to be a self-governing people. They focused on many areas including roles and responsibilities, changing how we live day to day, changing our education systems, changing our mindsets, etc. They did not focus specifically on political leadership issues, but how things can be changed at the “people” level. The following sets out some of these excellent recommendations to ensure a positive change to “our way of being”.

Many of the participants discussed personal responsibilities - responsibilities to clan, family and community. The pivotal piece, as noted by one participant, was to acknowledge our relationships and our responsibilities to Mother Earth – that once we acknowledged these responsibilities, we were also acknowledging ourselves. We were also reminded that self-determination starts with “self” and that in order to adapt and change, our behaviours and the way we think have to change. In Haudenosaunee teachings, the people are reminded that the Creator made humans different than any other spiritual being - that human beings were given a mind to think; a mind to know what is right and what is wrong; a mind to do what is needed to be done. Therefore, we, as human beings, are responsible to make changes that will provide what is best for the rest of our communities.

It was recognized by the participants of the gathering that there are basically two ways of thinking - the traditional ways of Indigenous peoples and the way that the colonizer governments continue to treat Indigenous peoples as inferior peoples. We were reminded that the best way to move forward is to ensure that our traditional practices continue and that our languages are kept alive. Most of the participants acknowledged that we needed to understand and continue our traditional values. These traditional values need to be re-taught to women as well as to the whole community. To find strength from traditional values will bring strength back to communities. Understanding roles and responsibilities from those traditional values will strengthen identities of everyone in their communities as well as provide a very strong sense of well-being.

It was reiterated by one participant that it will be important to return to our traditional beliefs that were given to us before contact and before colonization. Our traditional values and beliefs are important to Indigenous peoples based on the fact that these powerful values were given to us by the Creator. It creates power in the sense that we were given the tools and process as to how we would relate to each other and how to treat each other. As a result of colonization, we have lost those values for a little while and now is the time to reclaim and re-empower our own traditions. We need to put trust back into what was given to our people – to not be dependent upon the colonizer government system.

As part of reclaiming those traditional beliefs, it will be important for all women to be the original caretakers of Mother Earth as well as being responsible to all children - that all mothers are mothers to all children. This will mean that women must help each other and accept the responsibility that it is the women's responsibility to "keep watch" over the whole community. As one participant stated, it is important for the women "to keep our eyes on the real issues". Another participant stated that it is "our responsibility to do our responsibility." It was stressed by most participants that it is our responsibility to help our communities with a strong sense of compassion and respect. Once we acknowledge what we were given by the Creator works, this will assist in the empowerment to return to our beliefs, traditions, and cultures.

The women at the gathering were also reminded to relearn our moon cycles and to celebrate our gifts as a woman. It was reiterated that we must continue the rites of passage ceremonies for our young men and young women because these ceremonies assist them with their identity as well as their responsibilities at this time of change in their lives. It was also stressed by the participants at the gathering that it will be women's responsibilities to keep teaching our men (our brothers, husband and fathers) about their responsibilities, especially when it comes to their treatment of women and their responsibilities as hunters, fishers and gatherers. One participant discussed the way that our men, today, are hunting - that they are drinking while they are hunting and losing sight of the meaning of a hunt. It was stressed by this participant that the women must assert themselves to the men by reminding them that "this is not how you hunt." This will assist our people to be self-sufficient as well as being responsible to our Mother Earth - her lands, territories and the resources that are provided to us to sustain us.

Part of this responsibility is changing the way that we have been taught about foods and medicines. As a result of Eurocentric diffusionism, we have forgotten about our responsibilities to our bodies and the types of foods that we are feeding our bodies. It will be important to re-educate our people about planting our own foods and picking our own medicines - learning about not wasting, recycling, canning and preserving. One participant also stressed that we need to relearn the cycles of the seasons and knowing what ceremonies relate to those seasons and being prepared for the ceremonies. We were also reminded to stop making excuses and that we need to ensure that we do not behave the same as mainstream with respect to the commercialization of resources. We must also not make the same mistakes as the mainstream society when it comes to the consumption of those resources. We have to continue using our traditional methods of ecological preservation.

As noted in an earlier section, the colonizer governments are intent on fragmenting issues such as justice, health, education, child welfare, etc. and these issues are being presented in such fragmented ways. The women at the gathering agreed that these areas no longer be fragmented in their communities because it only created division and confusion with the traditional ways of dealing with these issues. It was also agreed that we no longer use the "individual/collective talk" - that when we discuss issues relating to our peoples, we remind others that we are talking about "our way of being".

b) How do we educate other Indigenous women about self-government issues?

At the end of the gathering, discussions moved quite quickly as to how we must educate other Indigenous women about self-government/self-determination issues. The following is a list of recommendations:

- ❑ There are already a number of experts or people already dealing with these issues. It is important that this knowledge be shared and that the research already being completed should be shared amongst everyone. It is also important to recognize our own experts in this field;
- ❑ As part of this process, it will be important to identify resource persons from Indigenous community, but also Indigenous peoples working in universities and Native organizations, etc;
- ❑ These issues should be presented more in published writings;
- ❑ Communication strategy should be developed such as database development. Human resources are also needed to implement a communication strategy. Networking could also assist in communication strategy;
- ❑ Garden parties be organized to bring together women and people to work the land, seed and plant - brings together the people and community;
- ❑ Develop and implement community gardens;
- ❑ Sharing and supporting each other;
- ❑ Training in communities;
- ❑ Culture-based, personal healing journey;
- ❑ Mentoring;
- ❑ Developing healthy processes;
- ❑ Language retreats (Hawaii example);
- ❑ Internet access/internet groups;

- ❑ Developing videos, tapes and brochures detailing all issues pertaining to “our way of being”;
- ❑ Presenting these issues in Native theatres and skits;
- ❑ Newsletters;
- ❑ Sharing and gathering stories of women from province to province who share similar struggles;
- ❑ Approach National and provincial Indigenous organizations to determine what they do to educate Indigenous peoples;
- ❑ Keeping traditional values;
- ❑ Ensuring that Universities/Colleges are responsible to the Indigenous community by ensuring that these issues are presented in curriculum;
- ❑ Role-modeling;
- ❑ Utilizing local means of communication in First Nation communities (ie. Satellite, radio, local newspapers);
- ❑ Ensuring that isolated communities receive this information as well as any other information and training regarding self-determination issues;
- ❑ Educating our own in our own way by changing the current education system or through home schooling - home schooling will enable parents and traditional teachers to control their children’s education and ensure they are learning the languages, the traditions and the ceremonies¹⁷;
- ❑ Ensuring language retention with the development of instructional materials¹⁸;
- ❑ Revise curriculum to ensure it is culture based with appropriate resources and texts;

¹⁷It was recognized that by restoring “missing elements of Aboriginal culture will also work toward the primary prevention of violence against Aboriginal women in Canada.” Douglas A. Brownridge, “Male Partner Violence Against Aboriginal Women in Canada. An Empirical Analysis” [January, 2003] *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 18 No. 1 65-83 at 81.

¹⁸“Language is a key to cultural action, and language maintenance is an area ‘where restorative justice cannot wait while negotiations for a new relationship progress at a deliberate pace’. Curriculum and instruction for language preservation is, therefore, an urgent pressure.” [notes omitted] Sherilyn Calliou, “Sunrise: Activism and Self-Determination in First Nations Education (1972-1998) in John H. Hylton (ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd.) 1999 at 165.

- ❑ Exchange programs from community to community, which will encourage partnerships between them;
- ❑ Home visitor program;
- ❑ Pooling resources together;
- ❑ Forming coalitions
- ❑ Linking Youth and Elders

Based on all of these recommendations, the participants of the gathering felt that these changes needed to start at home a- that the values and priorities within our traditional cultures are important and cannot be forgotten. They stressed that our communities can no longer wait for government handouts or government dollars because they will never provide what is needed for our communities. There are already good structures in the community. They just need to be reclaimed and empowered.

5. Conclusion

This gathering of Indigenous women was very powerful. All of the women were strong in their beliefs and their knowledge of what was needed in their communities. Each of the women were given a voice to express their own opinions and views. These views are reflected in this report. What needs to happen, now, is to begin implementing the ideas and visions that were presented at this gathering. In any Indigenous community, the women must acknowledge what her roles and responsibilities are and take the lead. The women are the backbone of their communities.

This paper reflected a little about what has happened in the past, what we are dealing with today and what is needed to be done in the future. All of the recommendations that were noted by the participants of the gathering must be implemented in one way or another. It will take innovative and creative initiatives to implement these recommendations. They are not difficult and they can be done.

A closing ceremony was done at the end of the gathering. Its purpose was to formally end the gathering and to deliver good words to those who were traveling back home - to ensure that they were given guidance and safety. These words were powerful, just as powerful as the spirits of all of the women who attended at this gathering. Thank you to all of those women who attended, gave teachings and who assisted others in many ways.