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ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE
ON
SELF - GOVERNMENT

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SUBMITTED BY:
EILEEN JOYCE COURCHENE

FOR: NONGOM IKKWE OF THE
SOUTH EAST REGION
MANITOBA, CANADA

TO: THE ROYAL COMMISSION
ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

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This entire work has been produced by Aboriginal Women in Manitoba for Aboriginal women and their families.

Megwetch - Eileen Joyce Courchene
Nongom Ikkwe Inc.

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DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

HOLISTIC : complete (ie: " holistic treatment " is the complete treatment of a problem; including not only the problem itself, but all factors of life surrounding it).

ABORIGINAL: the term is used to encompass people of Aboriginal and Metis heritage. This includes both treaty/status and non-treaty/non-status individuals.

TRADITIONAL: conventional way of life of Aboriginal people.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT: pertinent to the Aboriginal cultural and traditional ways of life.

INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this report is to provide general information and subsequent recommendations related to Aboriginal women's experiences with the present Aboriginal government systems. The report is intended to provide the Commissioners of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples with an Aboriginal women's perspective on aboriginal self-government in the South East Region of Manitoba.

The recommendations are written with consideration to promoting changes which will benefit Aboriginal women and Aboriginal people as a whole.

The working group set out with the following principles to guide them in their task:

1. Aboriginal women are the keepers of the culture and community life.
2. Aboriginal women have the right to basic social and economic rights like those which are guaranteed to every Canadian - the basic necessities of life.
3. Aboriginal women must play an increasingly central role in Aboriginal government initiatives.

The purpose of Nongom Ikkwe Women's perspective on Aboriginal self government submission to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is to:

- (1) Describe the collective view of Nongom Ikkwe's membership on Aboriginal self government to date;
- (2) Identify issues and priorities in relation to Aboriginal self government development in their communities from the perspective of Aboriginal women from the South East Region of Manitoba.
- (3) Provide recommendations for change on the self government process and objectives for the future.
- (4) Provide specific recommendations for change in areas where new policies and programs may be required to address the specific needs of Aboriginal women.

BACKGROUND:

Nongom Ikkwe is a regional body of the Indigenous Women's Collective from the South East Region of Manitoba. The mandate of Nongom Ikkwe is to address the social, economic and political issues confronting Aboriginal women within the South East area of Manitoba. Since it's inception in 1986, Nongom Ikkwe Aboriginal women's group has been active in addressing the socio-economic inequality of Aboriginal women in Manitoba and within our region. Nongom Ikkwe's definition of self government is as follows, "It's our collective effort in improving the quality of life of Aboriginal people through self determination - doing for ourselves."

Contrary to the views of some of our Aboriginal leaders, Nongom Ikkwe's view of self government is not gender-specific, rather self government development must include all members of the community. To this end, Aboriginal women must take a responsible role in decisions impacting the Aboriginal community to ensure that all will benefit from these decisions.

Historically, Aboriginal women played an equal role to men in Aboriginal societies. Women contributed in decisions about the family, property rights, and education. This system of equal participation in Aboriginal societies has been lost since European contact. The role of Aboriginal women is to re-activate the participation women in decision making levels of self government. We believe that this form of traditional government needs to take place in order to develop healthy well-balanced Aboriginal communities.

METHODOLOGY:

Nongom Ikkwe of the South East region of Manitoba received delivery assistance funding to organize and undertake the drafting of a position paper on Aboriginal self government from the Aboriginal women's perspective in February, 1993. From this funding, Nongom Ikkwe gathered data from several sources in preparation of this paper. These sources included community consultation workshops, agency visits, and some questionnaires distribution within our region.

Initially, a planning workshop was held in Winnipeg with women from the South East Region at the beginning of February to plan Nongom Ikkwe's project on Aboriginal women's perspective on self government. Another planning workshop was delivered in March to design questionnaires to be used by the Coordinator for consultation purposes.

A community consultation workshop was held in Fort Alexander, Manitoba in May. In total, 45 women attended from the following communities; Berens River, Little Grand Rapids, Winnipeg, Little Black River, Grand Marais, Long Plains Reserve, Roseau River Reserve, Powerview, Pine Falls, Lake Manitoba First Nations, Fairford, Silver Falls, Woodridge, Victoria Beach and Sagkeeng First Nations.

At the workshop , questionnaires were filled out by the participants attending the workshop. The participants answered the questions privately and some oral interviews were conducted. The participants then broke into groups to discuss broad community issues and then focused on specific social, political, justice and economic needs and concerns. The resulting issues, concerns and recommendations were prioritized for this paper. In order to eliminate the possibility of misinterpretation of Women's experiences, women statements are included within this report.

This report was carried out under the close supervision of an advisory committee of Aboriginal women. in spite of the small sample size and time constraints, both the advisory committee and individual Aboriginal women of the South East Region of Manitoba indicated that the results are representative of the Aboriginal women from this region.

PRINCIPLE ONE:

Aboriginal women are the keepers of the culture and community life. They are the caretakers of Aboriginal children the future leaders of our communities.

ISSUE ONE: THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN NEEDS
TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED:

ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

" Our people will not heal and rise toward becoming self governing and strong people both in spirit and vision until the women rise and give direction and support to our leaders. That time is now, the women are now actively participating in insuring the empowerment of their people. Life is a daily struggle as women, as mothers, as sisters, as aunties and grandmothers. We are responsible for the children of today and those of tomorrow. It is with pure kindness and our respect for life that allows us to gladly take up this responsibility to nurture the children, to teach of what we know, from what we have learned through trial and error. Through this the very child within us learns and remembers again what it is to be a spiritual being, as we share the lives of those young and innocent teachers."

Aboriginal women in their societies did not have to fight for their rights. Aboriginal women had a strong role in the family, in tribal governments and in spiritual functions. The woman was considered and treated an equal. She was respected and revered by all men as she is the life-giver and the caretaker of life. All people have been brought forth from the womb. She had grown and nurtured life within her, and these life-giving powers were considered very sacred and powerful.

The present day mentality of men being the "king of the castle" is not taught in the traditional teachings, but is of the European culture. Within the Aboriginal family, all members were equal, regardless of their age, sex, physical or mental handicaps, and were entitled the esteem due to them as people.

The women took care of all people and all things in her home. She determined the discipline of the children. The man would help out as required in the manner best suited for the proper function of the home. Similarly, the women would assist the man when he required it. Both worked co-operatively together. Then times began to change. Alcohol was introduced into the Aboriginal community. Our traditional teachings and ceremonies were outlawed.

Dishonesty and disrespect entered into Aboriginal culture. Despair and discouragement were also by-products of the undermining of the traditional ways of our people. Aboriginal people began to lose more and more of their traditional teachings and ways, which were replaced by Europeans ways and teachings.

The view of women as inferior to men was never part of our culture. This view came from the Europeans. Unfortunately, many Aboriginal men came to accept this view as proper and right way of life. This view has been reinforced many times since the first contact with Europeans in a variety of different ways. The most obvious way was the Indian Act in which women were blatantly discriminated against. For example, Aboriginal women were disenfranchised when they married Non-Treaty men. Yet, when Aboriginal men married non - treaty women and they became an Aboriginal women by law.

Much of the discord that exists today in dysfunctional aboriginal families can be attributed to the Canadian the government's process of acculturation. The symptoms of this process are the loss of cultural identity, frustration from poor economic conditions, lack of understanding of cultural differences, and overall feelings of hopelessness and finally despair.

SUMMARY

Although Aboriginal women have had their traditional roles eroded due to the colonization of their people, Aboriginal women have continued to play a leadership role in the development of evolving systems of Aboriginal self government. In recent years, Manitoba has witnessed the emergence of Aboriginal women as elected community leaders. Although still small in number, Aboriginal women are increasingly assuming positions such as Mayors, Chiefs and Councillors within their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS;

1. School Curriculum must reflect the true history of Aboriginal people and most importantly, Aboriginal women.
2. Cross - Cultural Aboriginal personal development workshop should be made available and funded by Health and Welfare Canada, to facilitate the building of Aboriginal Women's positive self image, build confidence and self esteem.

PRINCIPLE TWO:

Traditional Aboriginal family life is an important component of Aboriginal society.

TRADITIONAL CHILD REARING PRACTICES

ISSUE TWO: THERE ARE MANY PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH RAISING A CHILD WITHIN TWO DIFFERENT VALUE SYSTEMS.

AN ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

" I was never in a residential school. I was raised at home with my parents I believe that has helped me in raising my children because I learned some good parenting skill from my parents. My parents were traditional spiritual people and other members of my community were the same way. Everyone was responsible for looking after the children in our community. If a child did anything wrong older members in the community had the Moral responsibility to correct him or her, by that I mean speak to the child. Physical punishment was never used. As children we were made aware of our mistake and we were told to make some kind of apology to the person we had hurt and make amends to that person. We were taught to be responsible for our actions and that we had the ability to think for ourselves. We made our own choices and if those choices were not right we were spoken too and it was up to us to change. I remember too, our parents always included us in family meetings and decisions. The children were listened to and we had our say. In this way our parents and older family members always showed us respect. We were also taught to respect one another, especially our elders. We learned early in our childhood years to listen to elders patiently, never to question unless our questions were well thought out, and our questions were never to ask for an answer but to help us figure out the problem ourselves. Violence was never a part of our lives and we learned from observation. Our parents spent time with us as children, teaching us about life, usually by telling us stories we had to learn find the lesson on our own from the stories told to us. I think today, many Aboriginal people did not have this kind of childhood and this is why today Aboriginal parents are having problems raising their children. Because too many Aboriginal people were taken away to residential schools and were raised there."

According to the literature available on this topic, the characteristics and philosophies of Aboriginal child-rearing practices are common to all North American tribes. The studies selected for reference in this report give support to the above statement and to create an understanding of Aboriginal child - rearing.

In the book by Evelyn Blanchard, *Extended Family: Parental Roles and Child Rearing Practices*, the children are of ultimate importance because they represent the renewal of life.¹ The Aboriginal child is seen as an independent being, who can, within a short time after birth, make the decision regarding the identity he/she will assume. In Traditional Philosophy, each Aboriginal child is born with a "personal power" and the ability of choice free will.

The education and training of the child encourages him/her to be in touch with his/her world. It is perceived that the child's relationship with other life forms allow him/her to learn from them as they learn from the child. The lessons the child learns make sense because they are directly related to his/her is environment, the life in the community and the child's place in that life. The child then learns through expectation as a member of the community,

¹ Blanchard, Evelyn Lance. *Extended Family: Parental Roles and Child Rearing Practices*. Arizona State University; Phoenix, Arizona, USA 1988.

Thus, the child has the responsibility to meet his/her requirements of living a good life, and respecting him/herself and all life forms.

The Aboriginal child is taught the freedom of choice, Physical punishment or force behaviour is discouraged. However, children are disciplined and are taught expected behaviours. It is anticipated that they will respond to those expected behaviours. The child's freedom of choice or will is respected at all times. The children and parents share a more fairly equal status in the family. Through mutual respect children learn that in the family there is a place for everyone. Everyone is valued and has a role. Everyone belongs, is important and is needed.

According to, Kishawehotesewin, A Native Parenting Approach, Manual by Jocelyn Bruyere,² instruction through observation and participation are commonly used method's in training Aboriginal children. Children are often told what to do and left on their own to experience life.

² Jocelyn Bruyere's Kishawehatesewin, a Native Parenting Approach. Canadian Public Health Association: Ottawa, Canada, 1984.

If the education and training have not been given, it is the inappropriate to require accomplishment. Numerous relatives share the role of parenting in the education of the child. It is also the role of other community members to correct inappropriate behaviour. This places the child in situations where they are observed and taught by many people.

Aboriginal children are taught by observation and the art of listening. Children gain understanding and knowledge through these methods. Listening, understanding, thinking and feeling become an important part of one's life.

Aboriginal people have a special connection with their Mother Earth. As Mother Earth revolves, so does the life force. The belief is that the good you do in life comes back to you. This is evident in the relationships parents have with their children. Among Aboriginal families children were at the centre of communal life. The birth and growth of the children was a matter for ceremony and thanksgiving. Children were showered with attention and affection and were taken everywhere with their parents. Even now, adults still take their children to social gatherings, and meetings.

The aim of Aboriginal traditions was to bring children up in self-disciplined and self reliant ways children were respected as contributing members of society at an early age. One of the most important tradition was the role of the extended family and community. Aboriginal people considered children to be the responsibility not only of their parents but also of the extended family and community.

Today, Aboriginal people struggle to understand what has happened to have created such confusion in the life - styles of their people. From first arrival in North America Europeans strove to replace the aboriginal culture with the values of Western Europe.

According to the 1989, the National Inquiry into First Nations Child Care Report, government policy on Aboriginal peoples had the aim," from the very beginning, to assimilate Aboriginal people through education and to teach them new ideas and principles that stressed hierarchy and division - man verses woman, priest verses layman, ruler verses poor, adult verses child. " ³

The rich gave the responsibility of nursing and rearing their newborn to their servants. They taught only their male offspring by mechanical repetition. Physical punishment was used to make their children obey and develop a sense of sin.

³ 1969, First Nations Child Care National Inquiry Report.

They valued individualism in endeavour and conformity in belief. They were materialistic, seeing nature as darkness and chaos, to be used or abused and governed. Children and women were men's chattels; children were to be moulded - by force, if necessary.

The solution to the Indian problem in the late nineteenth century until the early 1960's was the residential school system. It was designed to ensure that children were properly educated in "civilized" values, away from the influence of their families. "It was assumed that the pre-industrial culture of the Indian was irrelevant to modern society and that, for both practical and humanitarian reasons, the Indian would have to be culturally assimilated -- in effect, remade in the image of the white man."

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Today Aboriginal children grow up facing conflicting expectations and values: one based on interdependency; the other individualism. The education system has contributed to the destruction of the Aboriginal family. The separation of children from family has caused many Aboriginal people to grow up with insecure identities.

⁴ Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians* (1880; rpt. Toronto: Coles Publishing Co. , 1979), pp.13

SUMMARY;

Traditional child rearing was of the highest human quality and of a holistic nature, treating life as a continuum and giving equal emphasis to the health of community, family, and child. These traditions are the standards Aboriginal peoples should restore. Aboriginal women recognize the need for a culturally appropriate approach to child-rearing. Aboriginal people now operate with a mixture of traditional values and modern methods learned from other cultures. It was felt by the women in the South East Region that there is a need to integrate traditional child - rearing practices and new methods that would be an extension to the present systems used by Aboriginal parents.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Promote research that increases understanding of the values and beliefs inherent in Aboriginal child rearing parenting, and examine the best methods to revive the traditional beliefs and values within the context of present day living.
2. Cross-cultural parenting awareness courses be developed and delivered by Aboriginal people in non-Aboriginal services sectors in order to foster an understanding of cultural differences. These would be delivered in justice departments, hospitals, and education institutions.

PRINCIPLE THREE:

Aboriginal women have the right to basic social and economic rights like those which are guaranteed to every Canadian - the basic necessities of life.

ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S SOCIAL/ECONOMIC RIGHTS

ISSUE THREE: THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE:

" The lack of any recognition of our rights to do for ourselves are a major concern of Aboriginal women. There is a vast philosophical difference between the kinds of services provided by the existing non-Aboriginal service providers and the kind of culturally appropriate services we need as Aboriginal people. This is creating problems. One major difference is that as Aboriginal service providers, our approach is holistic as opposed to non - Aboriginal approach which is individualistic. By this, I mean that we work with not only individuals but also with extended families and communities. The present Child and Family Services of Winnipeg does not reflect the values and customs of our people and thus are ineffective. Most families locate to urban centres because the living conditions in these communities lack essential resources, such as fuel, water and bathroom facilities. These people are usually not familiar with the urban environment. As a result, their children are apprehended because traditional values, such as close extended family ties, which often lead to gatherings of family members and relatives, in some cases this leads to the involvement of alcohol. As well, single mothers will often move to the city because they are neglected in their communities because they have no husbands to provide and care for their interests in the community. There is a serious problem with the present child welfare legislation. The legislation, regulations and code of standards that govern our communities do not reflect our values and practices. Many women have expressed the frustrations of dealing with a law that they do not understand and one that is based on conditions that exist in urban centres, which make current child welfare policies and administration irrelevant to us. The current child and family system is not

community or traditionally based, and is disruptive to the communities well being. Aboriginal people have suffered psychological and mental damage under this foreign system. The decision making powers of Aboriginal people continue to be undermined. Aboriginal peoples life giving institutions, which include our customs and values that once served us well, are being disregarded. In this process our children are being denied their basic rights to culturally appropriate services and programs."

Our consultation with Aboriginal women within our region included the child welfare system as a part of this study, due to the concerns by our women to address this issue.

The Child and Family Services Act is provincial legislation that established the mandates of child and family service agencies who oversee the welfare of children and families. These mandated agencies are given legal authority to apprehend children into their care for period of time. As a result, the provincial government department, Child and Family support, is set up and designed specifically to deal with all aspects of child and family services.

Concern was raised over the control, management and delivery of child care services for Aboriginal people. The women felt that there is a need for Aboriginal women's input into existing mainstream institutions, and the establishment of separate Aboriginal child care infrastructures. It was felt that the existing systems were hard to understand due to the legal provisions involved when women and their families come under the agencies notice and care. Further, these present systems are not equipped to provide preventative and protection services.

Presently, the existing systems are not meeting the needs of Aboriginal families. The women expressed the need for Aboriginal family centres that would provide preventive services using a holistic perspective, and the appropriate language of that community.

These family centres would incorporate into its mandate Aboriginal traditions in its philosophy and promote Aboriginal pride, offer Aboriginal parenting courses and support groups in areas such as, teen parenting, family violence, and residential school syndrome.

Aboriginal women view their situation as a whole and yet only receive individual services. They require services for the whole family that are culturally appropriate in addition to the standard services provided under the Child and Family Services Act of Manitoba. Examples of Culturally appropriate services are:

Community education programs;

Liaison with other existing services;

Family violence healing programs;

Participation of community elders;

Sweats - Healing Lodges;

Use of Healing Circles-Medicine Wheel Teachings;

Self - help Groups;

Aboriginal parenting Classes;

Youth Leadership programs.

However, presently the provision of these holistic services are hampered by the funding process. The provision of holistic services require more money than the provision of family crisis services, mainly because this method of treatment is more intense.

Furthermore, holistic treatment is not recognized by government as a quality effective treatment with licensed professionals. Therefore, holistic treatment is not included in any government criteria for treatment. It is disregarded as a legitimate, effective service.

Consistently, throughout the consultations, the need was expressed for individual and community healing to begin, in order to deal with the complexity of problems evidenced in the communities. It was often noted that, despite an emphasis on dysfunctional problems, existing strengths in the communities must be recognized, supported and built upon. The following is a summary of the issues that emerged in the course of our consultations.

1. Aboriginal people need to be able to begin the process of healing resulting from the historical effects of abuse, neglect and violence, and to grieve the losses they have experienced, both collectively and as individuals.
2. Traditional values, beliefs and healing practices must be emphasized in developing programs and services dealing with Aboriginal people. These program strategies must be culturally appropriate and community based.
3. The holistic approach envisages;
 - the individual in context of family
 - the family in context of community
 - the community in context of larger society
 - the impact of socio-economic problems such as poverty, unemployment, welfare dependence, poor living conditions.

SUMMARY:

As a result of the generations affected by residential schooling, there has been a serious disruption of the normal, traditional handing down of parenting skills from generation. Generations of Aboriginal youngsters were not exposed to traditional Aboriginal parenting practices and so important links with grandparent were not maintained. As a result, generations of Aboriginal parenting skills have been lost.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Provide special support and programming for parents with specific problems, such as single parents, parents in addictions, perpetrators of violence and child abuse, etc.
2. Promote an extended family approach to prevention, assessment, treatment, aftercare and support services by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people.
3. Establish a specific mandated commission parallel to the Child and Family Support department with direct communication with the Provincial Minister of Child and Family Services.
4. Establish full jurisdiction for Aboriginal families wherever they reside, because Aboriginal people are transient.
5. Legal services be made available for all Aboriginal women.

6. Aboriginal people do not understand the present system and more often do not understand the English language. The result is that many of our women get lost in the system. Further to this many of our children are abducted because non-Aboriginal social workers have no understanding of the values and traditions of our people. They do not understand that most of our people are victims themselves and need support, understanding and cross cultural awareness. We want our own Child and Family Service agencies that will focus on prevention and will work from the holistic perspective, utilizing Aboriginal traditions and philosophy.
7. Establish community based resource centres within the four regions of Province of Manitoba, that will focus on healing and treatment initiatives to address loss and grief issues and will support Aboriginal women.
8. A research study on Aboriginal parenting skills be conducted by Aboriginal women to use as information in the development of Aboriginal Parenting classes. These classes would help those communities who have lost these skills.

ISSUE FOUR: THE PRESENT EDUCATION SYSTEM IS FAILING OUR CHILDREN.

The Canadian Education system both in the present and in the past has failed Aboriginal people. Historically, the Indian Act required that all Aboriginal children attend residential schools. Children were taken away from their homes at an early age with the intent to take away their Aboriginal identity for the purpose of assimilation.

Presently, the effects of the policy of assimilation still remain. Many of those children of the residential school era are parents today. These parents are now struggling to find a positive Aboriginal identity. Unfortunately, in some cases where in - roads have been made in local control of education problems arise in terms of the low education level of our Aboriginal administrators.

In consultation with women, those women who have acquired degrees in education so that they could teach in Aboriginal school spoke about the frustration in working with school boards who are not educated and administrators who are either non - Aboriginal or have are Aboriginal, but with no experience or educational background. In many cases, these decision makers do not understand the complexities in developing culturally appropriate school programs.

Often times, these Aboriginal educators spoke about being devalued by their own people because they are Aboriginal.

Comments, such as the following examples from Aboriginal women indicated that there exists a need in the present systems to have an Aboriginal consortium on Education;

" As Aboriginal teachers we are afraid to voice our concerns about what is happening in our schools because our school board fires people who speak out."

" Local control of our school only means something when we have a system that is controlled by the people... right now we do not have any say on what should be taught in our schools... it seems like only white teachers are listened to."

In addition, some of the young people in the workshop spoke about

not liking to go a local high school because the principle, who is non-Aboriginal, treating the children with little or no respect.

Participants considered how to ensure quality of Aboriginal representation on local school boards. The women suggested maybe a standard of education levels should be set up for all local school boards and administrators, throughout the province of Manitoba. Presently, there are no policies in place and anyone become a board member.

All agreed that the education system should reflect Aboriginal values and traditions. Yet, outdated culturally inappropriate teaching models are still in use.

According to the Aboriginal teachers we consulted much of the Aboriginal materials they use in the classroom has been developed by them at their own cost. Very little dollars are spent on making Culturally relevant materials for the students use.

One teacher told us this story;

" Last year we had a principle in this school who was physically abusing the children. Everyone was afraid to do anything about this abuse. I couldn't take anymore so I helped to organize a concerned group to get this principle out. I am from this community and I was concerned as a parent myself. We did succeed in getting this principle relieved of his duties but I in turn lost my teaching position of fifteen years. Now, the Aboriginal teachers are afraid to speak out on issues. I know from experience what happens to us if we try to change the system."

Many of the women we talked to spoke about the fear to speak out publicly about important issues in their communities. We were told that sometimes welfare is cut off or children are failed in school if these women become social action oriented.

SUMMARY:

Although many positive inroads have been made in the education field, there is much to be done yet. Problems of control still exist mainly because the adults who are in decision making positions have forgotten traditional ways of life. They have become the new oppressors of their people. Many of these leaders need to work on their own inferiority complex. They often discriminate against their own people because they have become lost between two cultures. This in turn is reflected in how they administrate the schools. The curriculum is still pro-European and the staff is mainly non-aboriginal. In many of our northern area schools the staff is predominantly non-Aboriginal and yet, the children who attend these schools speak English as a second language. In most cases these children learn English at the time they begin school.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That an Aboriginal provincial consortium on Education be set up to examine the potential development of a Provincial Aboriginal Department of Education that would ensure a quality education, that reflects the culture, values and traditions of Aboriginal people throughout the province.
2. That a provincial policy on Aboriginal education be set up that would ensure all administrators of Aboriginal schools have proper qualifications.
3. That a National Aboriginal Teachers Association be established.

ISSUE FIVE: ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE:

" It very hard for us as Aboriginal women to start businesses mainly because we do not know where to go for help. I have a small business I started on my own. When I approached my reserve to help me get some financial assistance I did not even get a letter to say that they received my proposal. I feel that I am being discriminated against because I am a women living off the reserve and because I am a single parent. I have been running my business on a part time bases while I work a full time Job. I do not know where to go for help or funding. The only help I get is from our women's group but that is not enough. I know our women's group can help us only so much because they do not even have staff to help us. It's very frustrating working this way. If we did not have this group.. no one would help us. The Chiefs do not consider us members, only use us for numbers to get funding on our behalf. They won't even look at us when we need assistance. Yet, the women in our communities are the one who work the hardest; we are always successful at what ever we do because we work hard and we never give up...the government must step in and give us our own programs runned by our women. This is what we need: our own business resource centre. I am tired of being controlled by our leaders who do nothing for women. They only look after their friends and families. And whenever we try to ask for help on our own.. these government bodies only tell us to go ask our leaders. Who in turn, do not even want to help us."

Aboriginal women from the South East Region of Manitoba have recognized that the strength of our people depends upon the strength of economic conditions; that economic strength is a necessary condition for social, political and cultural survival.

" If we had businesses in our communities we would be strong people because then we would have a good economic base.

" We need to develop our own businesses so that our children will have futures to look forward to. Right now they only have welfare. No wonder our children give up and turn to drugs and alcohol."

There is an increasing proportion of women who have gone into joined business ventures or as owners/managers. However, the participation rate of Aboriginal women in business initiatives has been very low. Very few Aboriginal women have successfully entered the business world. There are no statistics available in this area but one has only to look within the business community, on or off the reserve, to note the barriers that exist for Aboriginal women entrepreneurs.

Small business represents the backbone of the business community in the South East region of Manitoba. Aboriginal women from this region are trying to become part of this business community. The women expressed their dissatisfaction with the Aboriginal Economic Development program, since its inception. The women in business consulted in this report had not received any assistance from this program nor as it have been of any assistance to the women from our region.

Aboriginal women spoke of a need of a program specifically designed for Aboriginal women, an instrument vehicle that will promote change in policy and assistance to Aboriginal women attempting to become economically self-sufficient. Emphasis must be placed on several key areas that will ensure that businesses thrive and move economically. Some problem areas have been identified throughout our membership by Aboriginal women attempting to enter the business world are as follow;

1. Lack of coordination among Aboriginal organizations and government agencies regarding the barriers that exit in terms of job and business opportunities.
2. Lack of sufficient numbers of educated, trained, and qualified Aboriginal women, primarily as a result of inadequate government financing of in-school and post school programs for Aboriginal women.
3. Insufficient career planning for Aboriginal women resulting in "non-progressive" work patterns, resulting in discouragement and ultimately business failure.
4. There is a lack of access to education and relevant business training and experience for Aboriginal women in our region. Therefore, they have extremely limited access to the business world.

5. Discrimination during the capital formation stage, both from government economic development programs and Aboriginal on reserve Programs.
6. Most business owners belong to some type of association and felt that these are necessary and useful for purpose of information exchange, contacts, personal growth, etc. None of these organizations exist for Aboriginal women, in our region and in all of Manitoba.
7. Workplace prejudice: those women who do get established find problems with supplier, salespeople or client prejudice, lack of trust; lack of cooperation by lending institutions; negative attitudes towards Aboriginal women as business people; the responsibility of family as well as business; sexual harassment; lack of connections and lack of credibility.
8. Problems exist with other groups for Aboriginal women in business such as:
 - Bankers are criticized for lack of risk taking attitude towards owners, lack of marketing and follow up on loans, requirement for co-signing, collateral etc.
 - Governments are painfully slow, paperwork burdened, generally uncooperative, and provide little information.
 - Aboriginal Economic Development initiatives discriminate Aboriginal women entrepreneurs - that have been labelled Bill C - 31 or to those living off the reserve.

In the discussion that ensued within our workshop, the following concerns were raised;

1. The lack of financial assistance available for women and no assistance offered for individuals with their application forms.
2. Aboriginal women have no place to go for assistance in acquiring information about funding that is available.
3. Aboriginal women get overwhelmed with the complex bureaucracy that needs to be dealt with in order to receive funding.
4. Aboriginal women's business involvement is limited because some band councils discriminate against women if they compete for program dollars with men on reserves.
5. Aboriginal women face discrimination by band administrators, the general work sector, and by funding institutions such as banks and the government.
6. There are no facilities or infrastructure available to allow business development for Aboriginal women in our region.
7. There is no encouragement or support for Aboriginal women to enter businesses.

8. Non-status and off reserve women experience difficulty in obtaining funding for training and business development.

Aboriginal women today are moving into the entrepreneurial era. They realize the potential of business opportunities as a goal toward determining their economic independence and success. We have found that women, in the South East of Manitoba, and Aboriginal women in general lack the knowledge of how to start a business, and are in fact, intimidated by the many obstacles. The intimidation that is based on fear that stems from lack of knowledge. This obstacle could be corrected.

Nongom Ikkwe has been working on the establishment of a Aboriginal Women's Management Training Centre for Aboriginal women from the province. We propose to have a satellite Centre in Northern Manitoba. This centre would include service academic and skills such as upgrading and training to be conducted on reserves or in the community. This way women could remain with their families while receiving training. Our main focus would be to help women who have business ideas and plans and want to implement them but need assistance in realizing their goals. The training centre would also administer a school of entrepreneurs. This be designed to assist women towards taking advantage of opportunities offered in the business community.

The curriculum would be designed to dispel fears by giving instruction in the reality and nature of business. The course content would include; examining entrepreneurial spirit; the steps needed to be taken from the formation of an idea to its successful completion; proposal writing techniques, business plan development, financial and investment sources and knowledge; basic business skills.

This proposed plan of action by Nongom Ikkwe was developed in 1989 and submitted to the Native Economic Development Program the same year. The first thing that happened to this proposal was that it got lost in Ottawa. Then we re - submitted this proposal in 1990, It was at this time our proposal was reviewed again. The NEDP worker at that time to go to the Native Women's Association for funding. We told them Native Women's Association was not a funding agency. Presently, our proposal has been put on hold. They have told Nongom Ikkwe that this proposal did not belong in their department. We on the other hand submitted to them because we considered our proposal an economic initiative because we could market many of our training programs to other Aboriginal organizations to train their employees. Some organizations are still waiting for us to develop our Management Centre. The funding we requested covered the cost of doing a feasibility study.

RECOMMENDATIONS;

1. That Aboriginal women be assisted to become more politically active at the regional, provincial and national levels in order to better advocate and promote their interests and problems.
2. That the government provide specifically address Aboriginal women's special problems of low educational attainment, lack of access to financing, prejudice, and culturally and family commitments, by providing funds for Aboriginal women to develop their own Aboriginal Women's Economic Development programs.
3. Academic and skills upgrading and training should be conducted on reserves or in the community so that women may remain with their families while receiving training.
4. The government provide funding to Aboriginal women to develop their own training programs and business development centres, off the reserve so as not to encounter political interferences by Aboriginal leaders.
5. A separate fund specifically for Aboriginal women should be established.
6. There needs to be implemented a strong public relations and business women's support group in the communities. Aboriginal women need role models, business information and business support systems.

ISSUE SIX: ABORIGINAL SELF GOVERNMENT

Historically, the different groups of Aboriginal peoples have been self-governing in every sense of the word, and were acknowledged as such by the Royal Proclamation of and by resulting treaty process in Canada. The traditional governance structures varied from tribe to tribe. Political organizations were generally territorial. Each political unit usually included hereditary chiefs, civil chiefs or elder council members who had specific functions and duties.

With the coming of the Europeans, there were many various attempts by government to displace traditional leadership, especially where chiefs proved obstructive. To detract from their authority, such leaders were not recognized as spokespeople for their bands and every effort was made to replace their power and patronage with those of the Indian agent.

Furthermore, in 1876, the federal government introduced the Indian Act which consolidated all existing laws concerning Indians in the provinces and territories. This became the assimilation policy of the government. Elected band councils were introduced as modified versions of municipal governments.

In theory, such councils were meant to train the Aboriginal people in the principles of democracy, but more immediately, they represented as assault on Aboriginal tradition and tribal leadership.⁵

The net result of government policy of de - tribalization has been the breakdown of a culture, nationhood and leadership. In recent years, Aboriginal people have once again gathered an " Indian to forum, a new kind of resistance, " contrary to the belief behind federal policy, Aboriginal people are a resilient people.

The net result was one hundred years of resistance. The whole idea of integration has been repudiated by a growing demand for Aboriginal self-government. Aboriginal leaders have said that they intend to govern themselves according to traditional laws, values systems and principles. It is recognized that in many areas there cannot be a simple switch from the imposed state system to Aboriginal self government. The acute social crisis in which people find themselves together with external circumstances has changed the Aboriginal community since they last exercised complete jurisdiction.

Although Aboriginal women support Aboriginal self government they have expressed concerns and the following is a summary of

⁵ The Historical development of the Indian Act (Ottawa : Department of Northern and Indian Affairs, 1975, p59.

those discussions.

Firstly, Aboriginal women spoke about the contradiction statements made by Aboriginal leaders during the constitutional talks. On one hand Aboriginal leaders have stated that they are going to govern according to traditional laws. Yet, at the same time these leaders excluded the women from participating at the round tables.

What happened to Aboriginal traditional laws and principles? According to Aboriginal tradition gives women equal participant in all government structure.

Furthermore, the strength and well being of Aboriginal people were particularly important to the women, if we are to govern ourselves.

Many expressed concern over the social conditions in their perspective communities. More importantly, it was felt that in order to be self determining Aboriginal leaders should work firstly, building healthily viable communities. It was felt that the healing of Aboriginal people should be a priority in acquiring self government. The statement, " Too many of our people are still grieving over the lost of culture and identity", was made by many of the women. The healing process is, therefore, the key issue not only to improve the current situation, but more importantly to build a solid foundation for a better future. Some of the concerns the women felt were crucial to the recovery

process of assimilation were;

1. Gender based equality must to be included in self government.
2. Aboriginal women have to be guaranteed equal participation on all self government initiatives.
3. Aboriginal women must be given equal opportunity in all economic initiatives.
4. Protection of individual and collective rights must be guaranteed.
5. A protection policy must be developed for all Aboriginal women, elders, and children.
6. That all programs and services be protected from political interference by elected leaders.
7. Provincial mediation program should be in place to work in the area of dispute resolutions.
8. Provincial and National leaders be elected according to traditional principles - elected by the people.

9. The Indian Act be abolished or amended to promote Aboriginal self determination.

Among Aboriginal women there is a nagging doubt as to whether or not any scheme of self-government by whatever government is in power would significantly depart from the long-standing goals of government policy. Aboriginal women have expressed fears that self government in practice may only be a new form of integration, one that would throw Aboriginal people into mainstream society under the pretext of a self-determination to that promised by the White paper policy of 1969. ⁶

Many women felt that in order to become fully self determined. self government will require careful thinking and concentration on social repair and the control of anti-social destructive behaviour. The First Nations women expressed dissatisfaction with the present Band Council system. Whether it is intentional or not, Aboriginal women spoke of being discriminated against from certain Band Councils. It was felt that the Indian Act gave very little development room to those Chiefs wanting to return to traditional laws and principles. The Indian Act perpetuates the oppression of Aboriginal people by their

⁶ The white paper was rationalized as an attempt to end the discrimination of Aboriginal people within Canadian government enforced in the Indian Act. It was argued that this policy made Aboriginal society disadvantaged and promised to make Aboriginal peoples full and equal participants in Cultural, social and economic life of Canada. White Paper, pp 4-6.

leaders. Aboriginal women expressive fear of self government if it is to continue with the present Indian Act in place.

According to the women, the problems exist mainly because there is no code of conduct in place for aboriginal elected officials. Once elected leaders can do whatever they please.

Off reserve and Metis women were concerned with the lack of information on self government. These women would like more workshops on self government be delivered by Aboriginal women's groups, this would ensure that their participation would be welcomed.

Those women living off reserve would like to retain the benefits and obligations of belonging to an Aboriginal nation regardless of their place of residence. Presently, these women are not given voting rights in their communities, thus giving them an inferior identity compared to those who can vote in Band Councillors and the Chief in First Nation Communities.

CONCLUSION:

Mainstream society has long pointed out that we, as Aboriginal people, are different and yet we are forced to fit into mainstream systems and government which are not designed to meet our different needs and values. This is not logical but is the result of colonialization. In order to prevent the cultural genocide of our nations this new government will have to address the philosophical differences and build upon existing positive cultural traditions of Aboriginal nations. It is the contention of Aboriginal women within the South East of Manitoba that Aboriginal people are capable of developing and implementing self government initiatives. Aboriginal women want to do for themselves and want to be treated with respect and enjoy equal rights, due them according to traditional laws and principles.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. A National Conference on Aboriginal women and Self Government be held within a reasonable period of time.

The purpose of the conference would be;

- a. to facilitate dialogue,
 - b. to facilitate networking,
 - c. to facilitate co-ordination of projects, and
 - d. to increase awareness of the importance of involvement in the development of self government.
2. Consideration be given to accommodate regional and provincial conferences.
 3. Aboriginal women must be given funding to guarantee equal participation in self government development, both at provincial and regional levels.
 4. Aboriginal Women Self Government Committee be established to find solutions to existing problems.
 5. An Aboriginal self government provincial commission be established for Aboriginal people in Manitoba comprised of Aboriginal professional people and elders. This must;
 - be controlled by and for Aboriginal people,
 - develop policies, guidelines, regulations and a professional code of ethics for all people working for the betterment of Aboriginal people.

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