

# Chapter 9

## *Sustainable Livelihood Approach to Achieve Food Sovereignty in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation*

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*In the contemporary colonial regime of Canada food sovereignty for First Nation people is a necessary struggle for socioeconomic and cultural survival. The marginalization process of First Nation and other rural remote northern Manitoba communities, by Canadian government feeds into undermining food sovereignty and sustainable livelihood. These communities do not have access to natural resources or control over their development. O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN) has been fighting against colonial and post-colonial state hegemony by holding on to significant parts of its traditional food system and livelihoods. To revive their traditional food culture and restoring its declining economy, they started a community based food sovereignty program, Ithinto Mechisowin (food from the land). This article explores Ithinto Mechisowin program (food from the land), through the lenses of indigenous food sovereignty and sustainable livelihoods approach. The study has applied community based participatory methods and First Nation OCAP principles for data collection and analysis.*

In the era of “contemporary colonialism” (Cornstassel, 2012), food sovereignty for Aboriginal peoples is a necessary struggle for cultural survival. In Canada, colonial and neoliberal policies have been detrimental to First Nation (FN) peoples’ livelihoods, as their traditional lands were taken over by settlers in the name of development (Ballard, 2012). These policies deprive and isolate them from land, culture, community, traditional food and medicinal resources (Anderson & Bone, 2009; Nue & Therrien, 2003). Access to natural resources and other assets are required for achieving food and livelihoods security but FN peoples are still being deprived access.

While Canadian policies are undermining FN access to natural resources, ongoing local community economic development to revive cultural knowledge and food access is increasing possibilities of restoring their livelihood assets (Thompson et al., 2011). In this article, we explore the role of the community-based country foods program in providing increased access to livelihood assets. We trace how past and contemporary colonial assimilation policies have damaged traditional livelihood security and created multiple and multi-generational socio-economic consequences. The sustainable livelihoods approach is applied to rural development worldwide yielding great insights. However, this approach has seldom been applied to consider food sovereignty in the context of Aboriginal communities in Canada. Sustainable livelihood and food sovereignty analysis is

undertaken for a country food program at O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN). OPCN is a remote northern Manitoba FN reserve community.

### **Food Sovereignty**

The Declaration of Nyéléni defines food sovereignty as: “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, 2007, p. 1). Food sovereignty connects people to land and challenges colonialism creating potential to provide indigenous peoples more cultural, social and political freedoms. A food sovereignty analysis looks at the agency and structure of local people in ownership over the food system in addition to considering whether they have sufficient access to local and culturally appropriate food (Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2011, p. 87).

The indigenous and peasant organizations initiating the food sovereignty movement prioritized protection of their territory and the need for land redistribution (Altieri, 2008; Holt-Giménez, Patel, & Shattuck, 2009). The movement considers land as a place where ecological and social reproduction takes place (Menser, 2014; Pimbert, 2009). Discussing food sovereignty Pimbert (2009) says,

Comprehensive agrarian reforms need to consider ‘territory’ as a more inclusive and important concept than mere ‘land’ and, with this, the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples in their territories. (p. 14)

The indigenous food sovereignty concept resonates with the “self-determination of indigenous peoples in their territories”. Actions and slogans of the British Columbia food system network and the Idle No More movement show the need and hope for indigenous sovereignty.

### **Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Well-Being**

Indigenous food sovereignty is integral to the indigenous food system, health and well-being (Corntassel, 2012; Indigenous Food System Network, 2014). While food sovereignty is peoples’ control over their food system (Wittman et al. 2011), indigenous food sovereignty depends on successful knowledge sharing about sustainable food systems (Turner, Ignace & Ignace, 2000). The Indigenous Food System Network (2014) identifies four distinct characteristics of indigenous food sovereignty, namely that: a) food is sacred, spiritual and a gift from the creator; b) food harvest is collective and participatory; c) consumption of locally harvested and produced traditional food brings ownership and self-determination; and d) valuable against colonial law and policies.

Indigenous food sovereignty is also based on the Aboriginal worldview that perceives land as living (Morrison, 2011). The Aboriginal worldview acknowledges land as a sacred, resourceful and shared space where people feed each other and pass on knowledge for a better future (Alfred, 2009). Land is more than a space to harvest and produce food for indigenous people— it is identity and something sacred. Land is shaped from freedom of democratic entitlement for a dignified life on earth. Land is not to be “stripped, taken apart or desecrated, nor should boundaries of property (ownership) be placed up on her” (Verney, 2004, p. 134). Rather than owning land, many indigenous peoples’ relationship to land is based on active stewardship and reciprocity (Corntassel, 2012).

In Canada, Aboriginal peoples' livelihood is built around their ability to manage, practice and access to land and land-based/country food resources. The process of their sustainable well-being is integrated to this food system (Corntassel, 2008). According to Corntassel (2008), every day practice of knowledge transmission is key to cultural continuity, which keeps the food system connected with individuals, households and communities. In other words, traditional livelihoods of Aboriginal people are sustainable when they are connected to land economically, culturally and environmentally. As Corntassel (2008) explains, sustainability is connected to "the transmission of traditional knowledge and cultural practices to future generations" and for maintaining traditional language, culture, family and livelihood, the constant connection to "natural world (i.e. gathering medicines, hunting and fishing, basket making, etc.)" is essential (p. 118). Indigenous scholars argue that it is the interconnectedness and inherent practice of maintaining sustainable food system that made indigenous people challenge the inequities of colonial policies (Corntassel, 2012; McDonald, 2000).

### **Colonization and Food Insecurity**

Aboriginal peoples in Canada were deprived of their rights to access culturally appropriate food by colonial policies. Their traditional culture and customs were undermined by the colonial government (Anderson & Bone, 2009; Nue & Therrien, 2003). With centuries of colonial oppression, the social, economic, educational and most importantly, health conditions of the FN population have become dire. This was not their situation in pre-colonization (Hungry Wolf, 1996). FN were able to lead a healthy and hearty life based on their sustainable subsistence economy, traditional knowledge and culture. FNs had access to natural resources. The land and water resources were renewable that fostered this economy applying the common property concept (Nadasdy, 2008).

Economic and ecological damage to FN communities are a result of institutional rules enacted through the Indian Act for the Canadian FN population and the "maldevelopment" (Shiva, 1989) that resulted in many industrial projects, including hydro development, on FN lands and resource areas (Mascarenhas, 2012). This process created a cycle of poverty and health problems in northern Manitoba FN reserve and non-reserve communities. The rise of colonial enterprise gradually expanding the capitalist mode of production by controlling fur trade followed by taking over land by treaty settlements and Indian Act sheds lights on gradual development of "institutionalized poverty" (Hungry Wolf, 1996, p. 79) through resource extraction (Anderson & Bone, 2009). Contemporary colonial enterprise continues the process. With the massive damming for hydropower, the FNs "life in harmony with nature" turned out to be "harder than ever to locate" (Hungry Wolf, 1996, p. 79). Kellough (1980) argues that colonialism is embedded within many kinds of colonial instruments, which were produced to hinder the natural subsistence economy of the local FN people.

Canadian Bill C-45, passed into law in 2012, can be considered as an addition to the Indian Act (Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013). The Bill has proposed changes to the Indian Act, involving changes to land and water resource management on FN reserves which will provide Canadian federal government more control over reserve land and water resources (Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013).

Indigenous food sovereignty justifies peoples' right to livelihood and country/traditional food. Sustainable livelihoods around food build the capacity of the community. In this context we apply the sustainable livelihood approach to understand how FN communities living under colonial policies can achieve well-being, reduce their vulnerability and challenge the discriminatory socio-economic situation imposed on them.

### **Sustainable Livelihood Approach**

Sustainable livelihood approach developed as a framework used as a means to identify the context and complexities of livelihood and well being of rural people (Davies et al, 2008). The concept is defined as “the assets, the activities, and the access to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by an individual or household” (Ellis, 2000, p. 10). This approach is described through four major factors. A sustainable livelihood approach:

- (1) Emphasizes that people live “within a vulnerability context” where they are “exposed to risks, through sudden shocks, trends over time and seasonal change” (Brockiesby & Fisher, 2003, p. 187);
- (2) Defines how individuals have a number of assets or capitals, which support them to compose their livelihoods. The assets are key to livelihoods are identified as natural, physical, human, financial, and social capitals;
- (3) Links these assets with people’s livelihood approaches which means the decisions and actions people take to fulfill or achieve livelihood outcomes;
- (4) Associates “policies, institutions and processes” responsible to shape “people’s access to assets and livelihood activities, as well as the vulnerability context in which they live” (Brockiesby & Fisher, 2003, p. 187). Overall, the approach examines that livelihood can be sustainable “when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base” (Chamber & Conway, 1992, p. 7).

The original theory of sustainable livelihood was criticized for not being a people- and community- centered approach (Brockiesby & Fisher, 2003; Chambers, 1987) and defining well-being only through the lenses of “market production, salaried employment, and cash income” (Davies et al., 2008, p. 56). This approach has been defined as “ethnocentric” and “reductionist” as it does not acknowledge the different strategies people practice to achieve livelihood security for example, hunting, fishing, land ownership, etc. (Davies et al., 2008, p. 57). However, environmental sustainability, participatory approach to development allied with acknowledgement of local peoples’ knowledge and insights of sustainable well-being was discussed to broaden sustainable livelihood and resources management analysis (Davies et al., 2008).

The approach has been successfully used to understand poverty, rural development and environmental resource management in communities around the globe (Brockiesby & Fisher, 2003). Recently this approach was applied to food sovereignty and the community economic development context of FN communities in Canada (Thompson et al., 2012). Scholars have taken a historical approach to address the deep-rooted issues of colonization (Ballard & Thompson, 2013; Davis et al., 2008; Thompson et al., 2012). Studies have attested that livelihood analysis can be applied at the community and household levels to assess the policies causing poverty, food insecurity and underdevelopment on FN reserves (Ballard, 2012; Ballard & Thompson, 2013; Thompson et al. 2012). According to Sen (1983), food insecurity occurs when there are some changes in a person’s “endowment e.g. alienation of land, loss of labour power, ill health” or in “exchange entitlement (e.g. fall in wages, rise in food prices, loss of employment, drop in price of foods)” (as cited in Thompson

et al. 2012, p. 48-49). Referring to this quote from Sen, Thompson et al. (2012) argues colonial institutional structures and processes undermine FNs on multiple levels to alienate them from land and food resources.

Sustainable livelihood assets of FN communities differ greatly from those in other communities in Canada. The same year Canada placed number one on the Human Development Index (HDI), FN peoples' living on reserves ranked sixty-third on this same index (Cooke, Beavon & McHardy, 2004). This HDI, which is a composite analysis of life expectancy, education and economic indices intended to capture complexities of human capabilities and livelihood well-being, indicates the endowment sets or assets are very low in FN communities generally. This ranking alludes to Canada's FN people having poor living conditions and high food insecurity comparable to the Third World.

### **Methods and Study Area**

The study applied community-based participatory research (CBPR) guided by OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession) principles. Community-based participatory research is a research approach that inspires equal participation of research partners with "underlying goals of social change" (Castellano, 2004, p. 1394). OCAP principles, approved by Steering Committee of the FNs Regional Longitudinal Health Survey in Canada, are research guidelines set to enhance FN peoples equal participation in research process. The guidelines suggest common ownership and possession of research information conducted with FN people (Schnarch, 2004). Both CBPR and OCAP principles are adopted in indigenous research with positive reviews for its bottom-up approach where FN participants share equal control and ownership of the research (Castellano, 2004; Petrucka et al., 2012; Schnarch, 2004).

The country foods project was inspired by the findings of the research on food security (Thompson et al). The project was started when we received approval from the University of Manitoba Ethics Board, OPCN band council and the community in 2012. The first author began her fieldwork in May 2012 after ethics approval to August 2013. We started the participatory research process with a number of focus groups discussing the challenges of starting a community-based country food program. We conducted focus groups, semi-structured interviews and participant observation during community gatherings throughout the fieldwork. Interview questions were articulated in an open-ended style based on peoples' experiences of food insecurity, flooding and other socio-economic challenges.

### **O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation Background**

O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN), (South Indian Lake community), was formed as a community in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Waldram, 1988, p. 117). Situated by Southern Indian Lake (see Figure 1 below), peoples' livelihood in the settlement was established around hunting, fishing, trapping (Waldram, 1985). Wild game was used mostly for domestic consumption (Waldram, 1985, 1988). Starting in 1942, OPCN had a commercial fishery famous for quality fresh water fish (Hoffman & Martin, 2012; Waldram, 1988). The community was food secure and had an active healthy lifestyle. OPCN elder Annie Spence who is 98 years old in 2014, shares stories about how

before the flooding, the community was known for the high number of centenarians who lived a long life on land-based culture. With an abundance of natural resources, community members had flourishing subsistence economy and longer life expectancy.

At present the settlement has a population of 767 (Statistics Canada, 2011). The community members are almost exclusively FN peoples. OPCN is about 130 km Northwest of Thompson and 64 km from Leaf Rapids by air. Like many other reserve communities in northern Manitoba, OPCN is deprived of adequate transportation, housing and health care services.

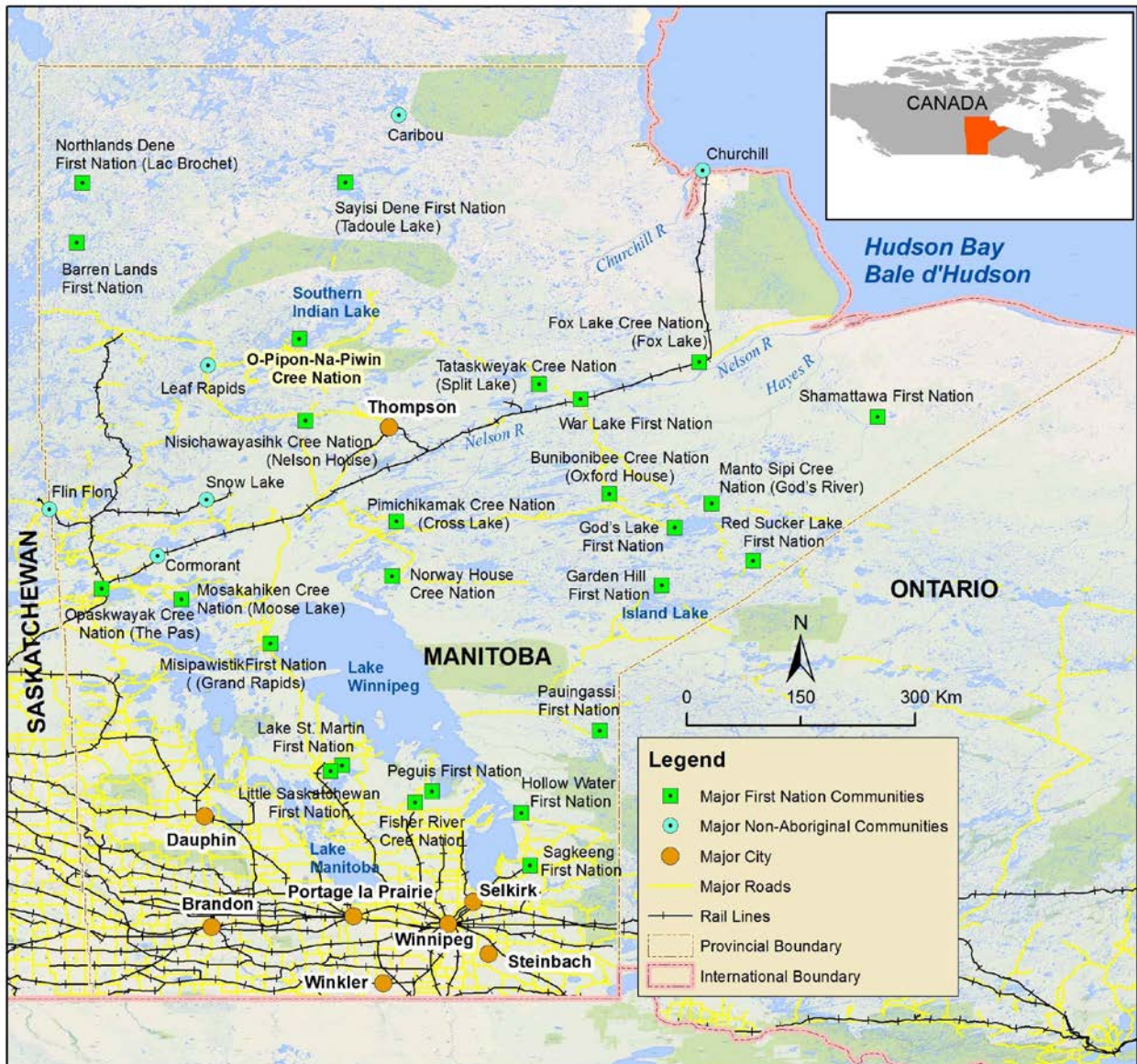


Figure 1. Study Area: OPCN.

## **Food Insecurity in OPCN Caused by Manitoba Hydro**

OPCN lost its food resources and subsistence economy due to a flood caused by Manitoba Hydro (Hoffman, 2008). Manitoba Hydro, supported by the Manitoba provincial government, developed a hydroelectric dam called the Churchill River Diversion (CRD) generating station in 1966 (Hoffman, 2008). The CRD created more energy on the Churchill River through water storage on South Indian Lake and by reversing the flow of the Churchill River (Hoffman, 2008; Lienafa & Martin, 2010). The process diverted most of the water from Churchill River into the Burntwood and Nelson River systems and use it at Nelson River generating stations. In this way the project was cost effective for hydro since did not have to build plants on Churchill River (Hoffman, 2008). However, this resulted in the flooding of OPCN and other FN communities in the area.

Manitoba Hydro proceeded quickly with relocation, construction and then operation of water control structures and the Churchill River Generation station. In comparison, compensation and accommodation of OPCN people was much slower. Since OPCN was not recognized as an autonomous band during the flooding and were situated on Crown land, community members were vulnerable to the province's decision of forced relocation from traditional home/camping areas to a new settlement (Hoffman & Martin, 2012, p. 37). This new location lacked adequate infrastructure for housing, schooling or running water and sewage to their homes.

The CRD made fishing and transportation impossible for OPCN and surrounding communities (Linklater, 1994). Water control structures changed the direction of the rivers' flow and increased its speed of flow. It also caused massive debris due to flooding of wooded land, which made access for small boats to reach a road to gain access to other centres. As a ferry was not available until 1977, the lakes effectively cut off access to other communities. Like many other development projects in Canada, this project did not consider the long lasting environmental, cultural and economic repercussions to the indigenous communities living in and around the "target" area (Hoffman & Martin, 2012).

People suffered the property damage, destruction of their livelihoods and disruption of access to traditional diets and medicines. From the forced displacement to this day, OPCN suffers from housing shortages and lacks running water and sewage. The community currently has 155 houses for 767 people (Statistics Canada, 2011), with an average of 5.1 persons in each house. Compensation from Manitoba Hydro came 20 years after the flooding. Social, economic and cultural damages were severe by that time in OPCN (Hoffman, 2008). For 20 years in this forced relocation, the displaced community suffered tremendously without financial or other assistance to rebuild their lives and access their basic needs. The community's basic economy, their domestic fishing industry was damaged. Like many other flooded CRD communities in northern Manitoba, loss of livelihood, land, traditional food and medicinal resources resulted in a number of suicides in the community during this time. Research has found that the suicide rate in northern Manitoba flooded communities is ten times higher than the Canadian National average (Mikkelson, 2005).

The procedure for compensation and agreement was also not without bias. As Waldram (1984) states, "the legal representation of the affected community was either omitted or impaired through poor advice, funding restrictions, legal stalling tactics and the refusal on the part of the Government to disclose the necessary information to allow the communities to properly define their legal positions" (as cited in Hoffman, 2008, p. 121).

## **Ithinto Mechisowin (Food from the Land) Program**

### **OPCN's Food Sovereignty Movement**

As a community, OPCN strives for “empowerment and reflexive action” (Lienafa & Martin, 2010, p. 58). After the flooding, community food champions and elders returned to their traditional methods of intergenerational knowledge exchange; they taught youth to harvest food and medicines from the land, to a local food movement. Like many other FN communities in Canada, this best practice was culturally-appropriate and well-accepted as a way of celebrating life during all seasons in OPCN (Hoffman, 2008; Lienafa & Martin, 2010; Waldram, 1985). The CRD flooding disrupted this cultural practice and disconnected people from land and land-based food. Land was too damaged to sustain them. Since the sense of well-being and community was replaced by colonial intrusions and disrupted family and community life, the community needed a shift towards traditional health and well-being.

Kiwikapawetan (a summer food and medicine harvesting youth camp started in 2006), and Wassasihk (summer youth food and medicine harvest with a particular focus on traditional way of healing, started in 2005) are two major gatherings in OPCN that focusing on retrieving land-based culture and reconnecting with traditional food. Initiatives like these suffer because of costly transportation and lack of logistic support for hunting, fishing or trapping. For the revival of the lost traditional food economy, a year-round seasonal program was suggested by the community. Ithinto Mechisowin was proposed by community champions and University of Manitoba researchers based on this idea and considering that country food programs are effective at improving food security (Thompson et al, 2012).

### **Community Strategy for Livelihood Outcomes**

Ithinto Mechisowin program trains youth on traditional food harvesting. They participate in hunting, trapping and fishing workshops. These workshops are guided and supervised by elders and food champions. Food collected from the workshop is distributed to single mothers, low-income families and elders who suffer the most in regards to health and food access. Also, a youth gardening program, managed through the school in nearby community Leaf Rapids, is collaborating and teaching the community on hands-on gardening skills. The community school, health complex<sup>1</sup>, community band/local government, Fishermen's Association, Trappers' Association and community Aboriginal diabetes initiative (ADI) program have supported the program by providing in-kind resources.

From May 2012 to June 2013, the program completed its planning (assessing available resources), operationalizing (preparing food handling area as per Health Canada regulations and apply for funding) and implementation (schedule and start workshop, hire coordinator and start workshops and food distribution) phases. Food collected during the workshops is labeled and stored

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<sup>1</sup> The community health complex is a major contributor of the program since its inception. All components of Tommy Thomas Memorial Health Complex and community care have been providing in kind support to training activities, particularly the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (ADI) Program. Besides the committee members, program finances and workshops are being supervised and evaluated by the health director of community health complex.



in freezers purchased for the program. This program prioritizes elders' needs and prepares smoked fish/meat or any other traditional food requested by the community elders.

Storytelling and knowledge sharing is an essential part of these workshops. During the workshops, elders shared stories to teach participants about respecting the land and the ways of life before flood. For example, elder Ross said during a beaver snaring workshop that, "our stories teach our children about respecting animals, land, trees, water and they listen. We tell them [that the] beaver works hard to stay alive. You need to work hard too. We teach them [that] beaver meat is medicine for your body". Community food champion and fisherman Steve, organizes muskrat trapping workshops in spring. He said, "Each food harvested from the land has a story that teaches something to us".

Food from the program is distributed to single mothers, low-income families and elders. Each household gets four fish fillets, four fish heads or two kilos of wild meat and seasonal berries and medicine if available. The program started distributing food in June 2013. From June to September the number of families receiving food from the program has grown rapidly from five families to 390 families. This indicates that program has been successful, is providing healthy food to food insecure people and giving them access to resources which they of which they were otherwise deprived.

Ithinto Mechisowin's collaboration with OPCN's Oscar Blackburn School is noteworthy. In 2009, OPCN's Oscar Blackburn School created a course called the Alternative Life Skill Class that teaches students about traditional diet, arts and crafts and other skills of land-based culture. The course incorporated the Ithinto Mechisowin's traditional food harvest trainings into the Alternative life skills credit program. For successful completion of the course, a student needs to take 55 hours of outdoor training with Ithinto Mechisowin. At present, 12 students from grade one to grade eight are participating in the course. This credit program has enrolled new students for 2014.

The community is taking ownership of the program as it creates a positive environment for the youth and the elders. Hilda Dysart, community elder and northern food champion said, "It teaches our youth to be happy and active, stay close to the family and serve the community responsibly. And harvest only what you need from the land."

In 2014, Ithinto Mechisowin scheduled many seasonal food-harvesting workshops (hunting, fishing, smoking meat or fish, berry and medicine picking etc.) The program also accumulated financial resources to hire a youth coordinator for the summer and teach youth about the traditional perspective of sustainable harvest.

## **Discussion**

The Sustainable Livelihood approach is applied to analyze the effect of flooding and displacement and how that has impacted on loss and revival of livelihood assets and food sovereignty in OPCN. The status of the five sustainable livelihood assets in OPCN is:

- (1) Human capital comprises of to the abilities of well-being, knowledge and health of the people considering productivity of labour and physical capacity important for livelihood strategies. In OPCN human capital is low. Compared to most areas in Canada OPCN suffers from lower education attainment, high unemployment and disease rates (Statistics Canada, 2011). In 2009 a household food security survey

found 100% food insecurity rate OPCN which is higher than the rest of the Canadian population (Thompson et al., 2012);

- (2) Social capital means social resources (network, associations, relationships). It contributes to cooperative action and builds social ties supportive to livelihood strategies. OPCN's history of collective living and the present day community activities is built on cultural and social bonds. However, the colonial and existing discriminatory judicial policies, lack of human capital and increased racism create challenges towards social resources and weakens the ties (Ballard, 2012; Thompson et al., 2011);
- (3) Natural capital is peoples' access to and everyday practice of natural and land resources that helps resource flow to make useful for sustainable livelihood. OPCN has lost most of its natural resources due to hydro flooding. Besides like many other northern Manitoba reserve communities they do not have any regulatory rights to their resources from water and land (Ballard, 2012; LaDuke, 2002; Thompson et al., 2011). Continuous flooding by Manitoba Hydro, settler controlled development in the community are causing depletion of natural resources.
- (4) Physical capital means basic infrastructure and production equipment in a community. As a community OPCN suffers from housing shortages, unpaved roads, clean drinking water create additional barrier to peoples' livelihood and food security system.
- (5) Financial capital refers to people's access to the savings and credit, wages or income in a community. The loss of fishing industry in OPCN took a heavy toll the economy. People have lost their subsistence economy and more people are living on social welfare (Waldram, 1985). Additionally, OPCN reserve housing and land being Crown property, local people do not have right to leverage these resources to create credit or develop business (Ballard, 2012).

OPCN's Ithinto Mechisowin program applies an indigenous lens to achieve food sovereignty and increase livelihood assets. This program is a step to regaining sovereignty over FN resources and land by revitalizing traditional food and community responsibilities. The program success assures that the Sustainable Livelihood framework is an asset building approach that inspires community development in FN communities in Canada (Thompson et al., 2012).

The five key assets that were improved achieved after the Ithinto Mechisowin program in OPCN are:

- *Human capital*: Through the program, youth, elders and adult food champions are getting opportunities to practice land-based food harvesting and preparation skills, which is strengthening their traditional livelihood. The Ithinto Mechisowin program creates institutional support for sharing transferring indigenous knowledge. The vision for the program has been to strengthen knowledge transmission, through existing resources and institutions rather than building upon a new model. Table 1 shows the number of different capacity building workshops organized by Ithinto Mechisowin program. Both youth, elders are coming out in great numbers.

Type and number of workshops	Youth	Volunteer	Elder
Fishing (15)	55	11	9
Smoking (10)	20	6	6
Hunting (9)	14	4	6
Gardening (12)	31	10	3
Berry Picking (5)	13	2	0
Medicine picking (1)	10	2	1

Table 1. Number and Types of Workshops in the Ithinto Mechisowin Program

- Physical capital:* This program contributed to build a country food program house and centre with equipment (cutting boards, meat cutting machines, knives etc.) for program participants to harvest food from the land. As well as this centre established smoke houses, freezers to store food and community gardens for fresh produce during summer. This involved upgrading an existing building to provide a commercial and public kitchen space allowing for country food distribution. The space may be further modified to include a small restaurant and breast feeding centre – to provide much needed healthy food and a meeting place in the community, as well as support for breast feeding mothers.
- Social capital:* Harvesting food from the land creates community bonding and challenges the colonial ways of living. The success of the program heavily relied on the fact that key community members came together to teach land-based culture. The workshops provided through the program created knowledge transmission between elders and the youth. The program benefited from the collaboration between community institutions and non-indigenous outsiders, in this case the University of Manitoba.
- Financial capital:* The program started without any funding in 2012. The success, community bonding and networking with the University of Manitoba resulted in a partnership with interested non-governmental organizations who contributed funding to this project. Right now the project has sufficient financial resources to run many workshops throughout the different seasons of the year. The program is also creating employment opportunities for the community. Program members are training themselves to write proposals and produce deliverables, etc. However, generally most settler funds and programs are not accepting of wild meat and do not fund fishing. More advocacy is required.
- Natural capital:* The program provides opportunities to pay attention to local food production. The program started workshops for youth to know traditional methods of wildcrafting - tracking moose footprints and other wildlife, art of picking medicines and preserving the growing area etc. As a result their management and ownership to resources in their territories will become more pronounced. Regular and seasonal workshops are already starting to give people more access to land-based

food, Table 2 shows the amount of country food distributed from the program from June to October 2014.

MONTH	HOUSEHOLD	FAMILY MEMBERS	AMOUNT DISTRIBUTED 4 fish, 4 fish head, 2-4 KG meat per pack
JUNE	5	20	10
JULY	27	351	55
AUGUST	30	390	66
SEPTEMBER	35	385	63
OCTOBER	26	286	49

*Table 2.* Country Food Distribution in OPCN

An essential part of indigenous food sovereignty is cultural integrity (Morrison, 2011). Through the Ithinto Mechisowin program, OPCN has cultivated its strength of cultural identity and gained a community focused resurgence alternative to Canadian state hegemony. The community's desire for cultural integrity provided the possibility for the food sovereignty platform in OPCN. However, natural assets and wild food supply are still being undermined by lack of control over the land and water in their territory. Many people complained about Manitoba Hydro controlling water levels to maximize its revenue, against natural cycles. The fish eggs are exposed when Manitoba Hydro reduces water levels every spring during spawning season. This destruction of fish eggs reduces fish populations and thus food supply.

To reduce people's vulnerability, the Sustainable Livelihood framework suggests capacity building and gaining wide support networks. OPCN's Ithitno Mechisowin program benefitted from support from many sources (school, University of Manitoba, health complex). This program shows the success of the local food sovereignty and community economic development program is conditional on thoughtful planning, resource assessment, resource accumulation and the wise selection of allies in indigenous and settler communities. With the colonial power undermining community resources, through repeated flooding due to hydro-electrical dams (Ballard & Thompson, 2013) for example, support to rebuild community inspired plan for a collaborative project from settlers is required. However, capacity is important that their participation and political realization comes out of the lived realities of a remote, food-insecure FN community. As settlers they need to understand the existing privileges sustained at the cost of FN land and food resources. This process can help bring institutions to engage in community and to use social and political capital.

## Conclusion

The Ithinto Mechisowin program is a community program formed through collaboration with many different OPCN organizations and the University of Manitoba. This program was created to improve food security, sustainable livelihoods and food sovereignty. This case study explores the potential of the sustainable livelihood approach as a means for participatory engagement of researchers, with local people and deepened perception of the subtleties of local socio-economic systems through a food sovereignty program.

Analysis of indigenous food sovereignty and sustainable livelihood indicated that the land-based harvesting program built capacity and assets in the community (Ballard & Thompson, 2013; Thompson et al., 2012). Community economic development based on traditional land based food harvesting practices produced sustainable livelihood assets, which is building capacity for future generations. Activities around country food program by distributing food to people in need is increasing food security and creating community bonding and knowledge transmission for all participants.

The Ithinto Mechisowin program has developed a local food economy that is alternative to the Canadian state hegemony and global food economy. OPCN's desire for cultural integrity resulted in the Ithinto Mechisowin program and food sovereignty platform in the community (Morrison, 2011). Here, this culturally-appropriate food program played the role of the mediator influencing all five livelihood assets. Following cultural traditions resides at the heart of the indigenous food system and contributes to the contemporary analysis of sustainable livelihood approach (Davis et al., 2008).

By linking to existing institutions and expertise, this food program is considered sustainable over the short term. However to be sustainable over the long term – the FN has to gain control over natural resources and land management in its territory. OPCN, which is heavily impacted by the Manitoba Hydro water control structure, should have the defining voice in determining the water levels of the lake it lives by. Manitoba Hydro is controlling water levels to maximize energy production and its revenue. Changing water levels every spring during spawning season reduces fish populations when fish eggs are exposed, negatively impacting the food supply and the community's fishing economy. Despite the detrimental effects, Manitoba Hydro's plans for the creation of new dams in northern Manitoba are continuing, exclusively for export purpose (Birnie, 2014; Kulchyski, 2013). A proper "mitigation" plan is required for the hydro flooded communities in northern Manitoba (Kulchysiki, 2014). Communities should receive equal revenue profit and be part of every decision making process concerning any mitigation plan to reduce destruction of natural resources and should be informed and consent to the development prior to its implementation.

The community based participatory research approach allowed the first author to learn about the value of land-based food from OPCN elders. Besides witnessing as a researcher, she helped with proposal writing, advocating, and worked towards approvals from Manitoba Conservation and Public Health Inspectors for this program. The collaboration involved advocacy, which was needed to obtain resources for OPCN and access to country foods. Most importantly, this collaboration witnessed, documented and created awareness of the acute socioeconomic discrimination of FN people in northern Manitoba (Thompson et al., 2011). The collaboration strengthens social capital and supports OPCN community economic development plan.

This research shows that programming in indigenous communities, when community inspired and reflective of their traditions, can be successful. Non-indigenous people have a role in building capacity where needed based on community goals. However, by settlers working as partners towards community goals, a small step would be made to return the freedoms that have been stolen and to use social and political capital more effectively to build support for FNs in settler society. The participation and political realization in community life by settlers should acknowledge that their benefits have been at the cost of FN land and food resources and is unjust. Future research and dialogue is needed to have FN peoples' right to land and water resources restored to ensure food sovereignty. Sustainable livelihoods and indigenous food sovereignty analysis can contribute to the required institutional change.

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