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Northern & Aboriginal Projects

Traditional Knowledge Sharing Issues

Northern aboriginal (indigenous) peoples and their communities are very concerned with the drastic changes occurring in their environment due to climate change and global warming. The impacts these changes are having on the communities affect the lifestyle of the people and all subsistence economy on which many are still relying for survival.

Aboriginal people overwhelmingly inhabit Northern Canada's communities. Arctic Observation projects directly impact local communities during the project itself and also through their findings: northern aboriginal communities are often the first to feel the impact of climate change and global warming and it is changing their life and communities. It is imperative that they be considered as participants and even partners in some cases in any Arctic research projects. As well it is crucial that they be informed on results of research projects so they can make informed decisions about their communities and lives. Sustaining Arctic research is the most important activity providing direct information on the changes affecting northern communities.

Of major concern for the communities is the use of Traditional Knowledge data – which is considered proprietary data belonging to the community - without permission, approval, acknowledgement or credit. Many communities are prepared to provide permission to use TK data for a specific purpose upon request and very few are ever asked.

The communities need to be:

- Informed – information exchange
- Consulted – consultation on projects' aims, locations, needs, etc.

Only through exchange of information can both parties be aware of all factors that may affect a research project. Consultation with the communities may uncover valuable information and data gaps for researchers. This does not occur often enough as researchers believe that by obtaining necessary permits from regulatory agencies is enough to trigger information and consultation with the communities – this is not always the case. A proper information and consultation strategy is necessary to reach the people directly affected by the project. As well a follow-up strategy to disseminate the results is also important to provide the communities with information critical to sound decision making in the face of a changing environment.

The communities also need:

- Agreement – communities' approval of project; formal agreement for use of TK data, etc.
- Participation – potential participation from community and individuals

Many communities are willing to allow TK data to be used in scientific research projects with proper controls in place – communities may provide permission for some data to be used and shared when they are provided with enough information to make an informed decision. Often times, communication is the stumbling block and proper communications may alleviate fears and distrust, allowing the data to be incorporated in a scientific research project. The integration of TK into research projects may assist in validating scientific findings and providing useful historical data unavailable otherwise.