

“Ecohealth & Watersheds in Northern BC” Knowledge to Action Project Executive Summary of June 18-19 Indicators Working Meeting

On June 18-19th 2013 The University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) hosted a working meeting involving local, regional, provincial, national and international project partners to collaborate on the use of indicators and integrated frameworks to address the connections between health, environment and communities, in order to improve intersectoral action, watershed governance and the determinants of health.

June 18, 2013 -Indicators Working Meeting Day 1 (8:00am-4:30pm)

At 8:45 am, the working meeting commenced with an introduction from Dr. Margot Parkes, Canada Research Chair in Health, Ecosystems & Society and Associate Professor, School of Health Sciences at UNBC, regarding the challenges related to improving health, ecosystems and equity in watersheds. She posed a guiding question as to what can be learned from working together to link knowledge of the health benefits of integrated watershed governance for the practice of health. Informed by the work of Val Brown and others¹ in applying collective learning to address complex problems at the interface of health and sustainability issues, the questions of **‘what should be’**, **‘what is’**, **‘what could be’**, and **‘what can be’** provided the framework that directed the overall flow of the meeting

Following this introduction, the meeting participants broke into small groups to discuss the guiding question and develop processes and principles for shaping a desired future. The main themes which emerged from this discussion were related to increased collaboration, requiring a shared understanding of needs, improved governance to link the land and people, and sustainability at multiple scales both socially and environmentally. The group identified key features necessary for these developments as: democratic processes, holistic approaches, accessibility, and evidence-informed decision-making grounded in the local context.



¹ See for example: Brown, V.A. 2010. Collective Inquiry and It's Wicked Problems. In *Tackling Wicked Problems: Through the Transdisciplinary Imagination*. , edited by V. A. Brown, J. A. Harris and J. Russel: Earthscan and Brown, V. 2007. Collective Decision-Making Bridging Public Health, Sustainability Governance and Environmental Management. In *Sustaining Life on Earth: Environmental and Human Health through Global Governance*, edited by C. Soskolne, L. Westra, L. J. Kotzé, B. Mackey, W. E. Rees and R. Westra: Lexington Books.

At 10:30am, the meeting shifted from group discussions to presentations about **"What is? Facts, Parameters, & Examples"**. The first presentation was given by Tatiana Koveshnikova, Ecological Goods and Services Project Coordinator at Credit Valley Conservation. Her presentation was entitled "Measuring watershed health and human well-being: the Quest for Indicators". She explained how many of the indicators in current **use only measure biophysical markers**. This leaves **gaps** -one of which is related to **community engagement and interest in the watershed**.

The next presentation was given by Sandra Harris, a member of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, and an expert in social-ecological sustainability from the Bulkley-Skeena Watershed, whose talk was entitled "Gitanyow well-being: an indicator framework project 2013". Sandra spoke about bringing an **indigenous lens** to **indicators frameworks** and the importance of **a community oriented, approach to health**. Sandra answered questions related to community engagement and provision of information, and explained the effectiveness of new media tools such as Facebook, and text messaging in order to reach the widest audience of community members possible.

After Sandra, Dr. Lorna Medd, a representative of the Cowichan Watershed Board gave her presentation, "Cowichan Watershed Board: Targets and public health". Lorna's presentation also focused on the need for **community involvement** and adopting a 'friendly' approach when engaging with stakeholders to solve environmental issues.

The series of presentations on innovations was followed by a 'response' from regional watershed partner Reg Whiten, planner, agrologist and adult educator, who spoke about the Kistkatinaw Watershed with a presentation entitled "Watershed Stewardship in the Peace: An interest-based approach". A brief group discussion took place after Reg's talk. Attendees spoke of some of the **challenges** they had faced gaining **attention for their work**, as well as challenges **finding a 'fit'** for their technical expertise. This concluded the morning sessions and participants broke for lunch.

Returning from lunch at 1:30pm, the afternoon began with a discussion of indicators and the art of 'zooming in and out'. This discussion was reflective of **"What Could Be? Ideas, Potential, & Design"**. The group brainstormed key principles for linking health and community, drawing on points and concerns that were raised during the morning sessions. The group debated the value of being goal-oriented and the importance of transferability of indicators. At 2:45pm Margot introduced the group to the use of integrated



frameworks, and profiled the examples of the Prism Framework and the Puget Sound Vital Signs Wheel. Dr. Karen Morrison, of the University of Guelph, profiled the ecosystems goods & services and determinants of health framework, while Dr. Pierre Horwitz, of Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, and Member of the Scientific and Technical Reference Panel of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, presented the Watershed Health Index.

This was followed by small group discussion surrounding the idea of zooming in and out to effectively communicate connections between watersheds, ecosystems, social systems, health and wellbeing. The groups decided to name specific indicators as well as discuss how indicator development should proceed to value both social and environmental concerns. At 4:00pm the entire group assembled to provide feedback from the small group discussions and discuss tools for integrated governance. The notion that indicators and processes are not static and must be flexible to accommodate changing needs and priorities was one of the primary ideas that developed during this discussion.

June 19 -Indicators Working Meeting Day 2 (8:00am-4:00pm)



The second day of the indicators meeting was focused on the theme of **"What Could Be?"** The morning began at 9:00am with a series of 'Ted Talks' with the goal of showcasing ideas and innovations from Canada and the world. Pierre Horwitz was the first presenter, with a talk entitled "Healthy Wetlands - Healthy People" which focused on the International **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**. Pierre outlined how this **international convention** could be used to **hold local governments accountable** for taking action through **invoking it at different scales**.

Karen Morrison was the next presenter with her talk "Healthy Communities, Health Watersheds". Karen discussed the process of collaboration that took place between conservation and public health organizations in Ontario. This coming together resulted in a very influential two page document entitled "Healthy Communities depend on Health Watersheds", and also a **greater understanding of the synergies** that result from **working together towards common goals**. Karen was asked questions about measuring indirect indicators and building connections between watersheds and everyday health and well-being. There was acknowledgement that current scientific knowledge is limited, and there is a need to move

beyond reductionist, linear thinking and **reframe questions related to human and environmental health**. We must acknowledge that humans are at the root of the current problems we face and redefine our collective narrative to reflect that.

At 10:30am, Pierre, Karen and Margot transitioned to facilitating a working discussion with the group. The intention was to communicate connections, to link with other tools, and to ask critical questions. The group identified challenges, potential indicators, and processes which could help facilitate connections.

Fragmentation and a **lack of capacity** to leverage available resources were viewed as **major challenges**. The group recognized that cumulative effects of many small processes can have large social or environmental impacts. Some **indicators include access to health food, green space and places for recreation**. **Processes** include **fostering** vertical and horizontal **working relationships** and **incorporating legal action** as necessary to confront environmental injustices.

After lunch Reg Whiten introduced the group to a tool for determining the levels of influence of different stakeholders and for the identification of supporters and antagonists, in order to strategically develop relationships

Finally at 3:00pm the meeting wrapped up with the group sharing final reflections. Participants placed value on infusing their **work with creativity** and striving to develop shared goals and languages across different scales. They suggested this requires explicitly connecting community well-being and the health of watersheds. Aligning policies with goals is an important consideration. The group also discussed how indicators must reflect the local context and the importance of recognizing the relationship between drivers of research and what indicators are subsequently measured. A desire for further exploration of available frameworks for indicators was expressed by several participants.

