Partnership Building for Sustainable Development: A First Nations Perspective from Ontario

P. A. Story[a]; F. H. Lickers[bc]

[a] The Eastern Ontario Model Forest, Canada [b] Department of the Environment, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, [c] Eastern Ontario Forest Group. Inc., Canada

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Partnership Building
for Sustainable Development:
A First Nations Perspective from Ontario

P. A. Story

F. H. Lickers

ABSTRACT. First Nations' approaches toward environmental stewardship have always been based upon partnership and a sense of belonging within the natural environment. The cornerstone of traditional community relationships is the three-pronged model of partnership building, known to the Iroquois nations as the "Zeal to Deal." The Eastern Ontario Model Forest (EOMF) was initiated as one of ten model forest sites across Canada, under a federal sustainable development initiative. The Eastern Ontario Model Forest was formed from people with many different viewpoints, ideals, tools, and ideas. A mixture of people holding local landowner values, native philosophies, and scientific knowledge were brought together to develop a working partnership at a community level. This presentation will analyze approaches in facilitating a partnership according to traditional knowledge of the Iroquois nations (University of Ottawa, 1994). This presentation will show an analysis of the working relationships of people and organizations according to tools developed and practiced by Aboriginal peoples of Eastern Ontario. These tools include the inclusion of each partner in the Eastern Ontario

P. A. Story is Project Coordinator for the Eastern Ontario Model Forest, Ontario, Canada.

F. H. Lickers is Director, Department of the Environment, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne and Director, Eastern Ontario Forest Group, Inc., Ontario, Canada.

149

Model Forest as a full partnership based on the "Zeal to Deal." The development of partnerships from the use of all three tools in this community-level organization will be analyzed. Challenges in the development of new partnerships, and limitations of partnerships according to naturalized knowledge systems will be analyzed. The strength of the EOMF organization based on its diversity will also be addressed. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: getinfo@haworth.com]*

THE EASTERN ONTARIO MODEL FOREST: LEARNING THE TOOLS

The Eastern Ontario Model Forest is one of ten working examples of "sustainable forestry" in Canada. The Canadian Model Forest Program was developed in 1992 by the Canadian Forest Service of the Department of Natural Resources (then called Forestry Canada). The Eastern Ontario Model Forest incorporates 1.5 million ha of public, private, municipal and aboriginal lands in the counties of Prescott, Russell, Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, Lanark, Leeds, Grenville, Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, and the Mohawk Community of Akwesasne.

The direction of the Eastern Ontario Model Forest is by an elected nine-member board of directors. Three directors are appointed, six are elected by a membership body. The three appointed positions are from the three "key" stakeholders: The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (Government Rep.), Domtar Specialty Fine Papers (Industry Rep.) and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne (First Nations Rep.). At all times, at least one representative at the Board of Directors level must be a member of the aboriginal community. This structure has allowed the First Nations policies, concepts and teachings to be a key part of the decision making body of the Eastern Ontario Model Forest.

One of the key projects in the Eastern Ontario Model Forest has been the "Akwesasne Partnership." This project has gone far beyond a traditional project with goals, objectives, tasks, results, and reports. One of this project's key mandates is to incorporate traditional knowledge into the decision making, policy making, planning, evaluation, and operating mechanisms of the program. The partnership is growing, and the lessons taught to the non-aboriginal

partners of the EOMF program are cornerstones to the operation of the EOMF as a whole.

Two key concepts and two key processes of aboriginal traditional knowledge or "naturalized knowledge systems" have been examined here in greater detail. These concepts and processes have been introduced to the EOMF organization and have been used in various places for the organization, planning, decision making, and technology transfer/education phases of the program.

The processes investigated further are:

- the *zeal to deal*: the process of solidifying working relationships between partners, and potential partners;
- decision making by *consensus* or mutual agreement, rather than a vote system.

The *concepts* investigated further are:

- *time*: Planning for the "seventh generation"
- *scale*: naturalized knowledge systems (aboriginal theory); matching the "scale of government" to the scale of the land area being managed.

The analysis of the EOMF using the concepts and processes is indicated by "successes" and "challenges." These concepts and processes have been used both successfully and unsuccessfully in decision-making processes, partnership building, planning, and implementation of projects.

The analysis is at the end of the explanation of each process or concept. Successes are marked with an "S" and challenges are marked with a "C."

PROCESS NUMBER ONE: THE ZEAL TO DEAL

This process is *the* most powerful concept in the aboriginal traditional knowledge taught to the EOMF. Basic aboriginal thought promotes the ideal that "cooperation is the only way to survive." Individuals must be committed partners in the cooperation of the care for our natural resources. The ideology of the "zeal to deal" is integral in solidifying relationships between potential partners.

There are three elements to this process: respect, equity and empowerment. These elements must be used in the proper order and in the proper proportions for a successful partnership process.

Respect

The process of working with First Nations communities requires that both cultures (aboriginal and non-aboriginal) must develop a basic respect or understanding of each other. Time must be taken for non-aboriginals to meet, learn and develop a friendship and working relationship with aboriginal community leaders. Concepts of environment, law, government, and society all differ radically from mainstream north American culture. These differences *must* be acknowledged, understood and respected. Only through the sharing of knowledge and experience can the aboriginal and non-aboriginal groups work together and successfully complete a project. Respect also includes the "principle" of inclusion, where all new projects and partners are given equal opportunity to present their ideas, and be heard.

Equity

After the initial introduction between cultures, "equity" will become an important next step. Equity can be defined as "anything that has value." Therefore, equity may be money, labour, time, materials, interest, support, etc. In western societies, equity usually indicates financial equity, or, simple dollars. It is important that we begin to value information, knowledge, and "sweat equity" (donated time) as equivalent contributions to a partnership project, as some community based, volunteer, or aboriginal organizations may not have true "dollars" upon which to build a partnership.

Empowerment

Empowerment has been defined as "the act of enabling" (University of Ottawa, 1994). This means, that any partnership with a "host" organization requires that the "host" organization must allow the partner to undertake and complete the project on its own terms, and with its own particular style. This is the hardest of all of the three concepts to implement, as it requires trust between potential partners. Without respect, and equity, trust cannot be built.

Putting Together the Deal

The three elements explained above must be put together in appropriate order and appropriate proportions. It is important to have all three elements involved in the process.

Figure 1 indicates the three elements working together, and the appropriate order, and proportion of the three elements to best generate the deal.

A Deal That Is Not Working

There are situations that can arise if only some of the elements are in place. A partnership built on respect only, will paralyze the potential partner, and maintain a type of "patronizing" approach. A partnership built without equity, will limit the potential partner's feelings about him/herself as an equal partner. It will also limit how much the partner is able to provide input and guidance to the partnership. A deal without empowerment will only maintain a "control" relationship, with the partner feeling disenfranchised from the decision-making and overall direction of the project. A deal without trust is also doomed to fail, as there will be a basic misunderstand-

FIGURE 1. Elements in the "Zeal to Deal," their appropriate order, and appropriate proportions for a successful deal.

RESPECT   EQUITY   EMPOWERMENT

TIME
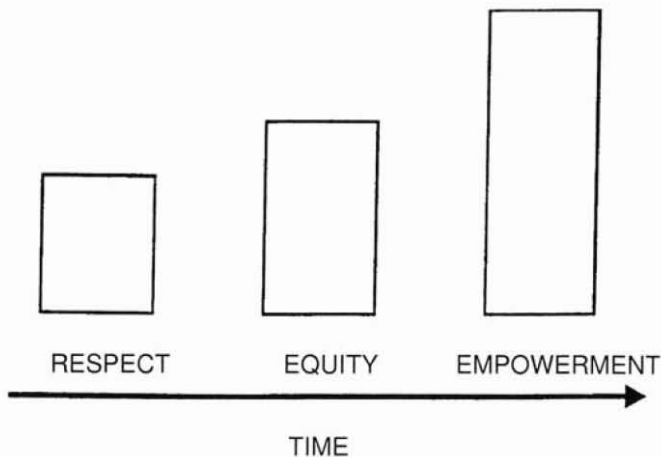
Source: University of Ottawa, 1994

ing of the potential cooperators, their interests, backgrounds, working styles, key issues, interests, and concerns. Disagreements, arguments, and other unpleasant working relationships often arise in attempted "deals" without respect.

Maintaining the Deal

Over time, the deal must be re-introduced, and restrengthened. Time is required to make sure respect for the project, the partnership, and the partners involved continues.

Evidence the Deal Is Working

There are various signs that the "deal" is in place. Some of the most obvious indicators are: generation of new equity over time, increase in number of participants, a feeling of satisfaction and contentment with the progress of the project, increase in output, and general increase in interest in the partnership.

ANALYSIS OF THE EOMF USING THIS PROCESS

Increase in Equity

S   The EOMF has been successful in levering additional projects to increase the overall scope of the program. Four additional Green Plan projects, the Calakmul Model Forest twinning, and "Jobs Ontario" funding have elevated the financial equity of the EOMF partners and program.

S   EOMF partners have also been able to lever equity by their involvement with the EOMF program.

S   There is also an increasing interest in volunteering with the program. To date, we have three volunteers who have had an interest in helping with special events and projects.

Increase in Cooperation

S   Fifty projects have been initiated and are underway in the EOMF. Some have already been completed, or merged with others in the development of the EOMF.

S   Thirty-six projects are underway as of April 1995.

Inclusion

S All new projects and partners are welcomed to the table, and are encouraged to participate.

C Finding time for new projects, and financial limitations are sometimes a hindrance to allowing fair access to the program for all new ideas.

S Evaluation framework for the EOMF was developed with the help of a cross-section of partners, supporters, members and interested people. A two day seminar directed by a professional evaluator was hosted for these groups. A framework was designed from the compilation of ideas and opinions.

Maintaining the Deal

C Time is a limiting factor in maintaining the deal. There is not enough time to sometimes adequately maintain the deals already established. Some dissatisfaction sometimes occurs amongst the partners.

C Three projects have been discontinued due to a lack of respect and/or equity.

Project Organization

S The EOMF projects can be divided into these three elements of "respect," "equity" and "empowerment." Figure 2 divides these projects and shows how they interact. This process is interlinking, and feeds back upon itself to strengthen the deal, and hence strengthen the EOMF program as a whole.

S One committee, the EOMF Trails and Outdoor Education Committee, has been developed into a conceptual diagram (Figure 3) to show in detail how this process works. This committee is a working example of a successful "deal."

FIGURE 2. Sample projects/associated activites as divided into the three elements. These projects feed into each other, and back into the program.
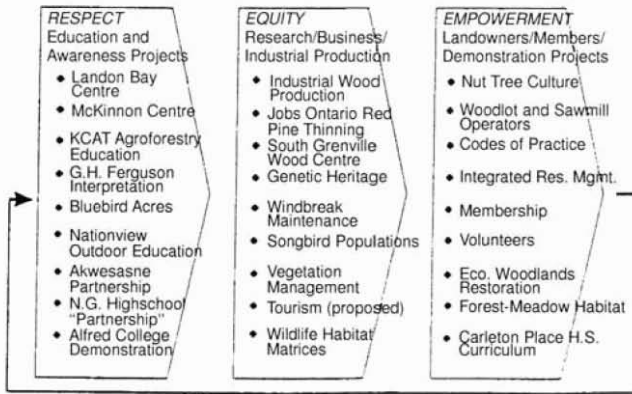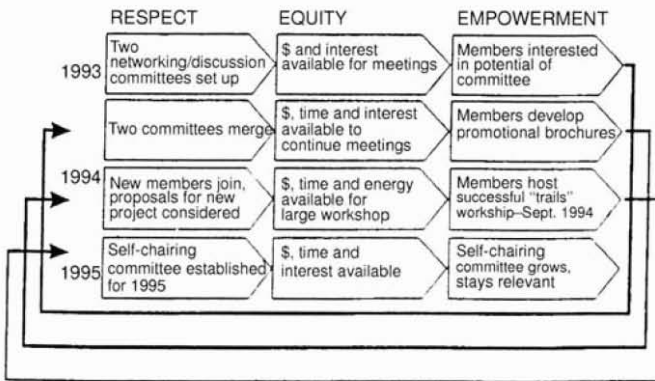

FIGURE 3. Trails and Outdoor Education Committee example.

PROCESS NUMBER TWO: CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

Consensus

Consensus, defined as "a decision making process where unanimous support is required," is a process long-used by North American aboriginal communities. In these societies, the traditional western confrontational style of decision making is considered inappropriate, and offensive. In the mainstream "traditional" confrontational style of decision-making, consensus style decision making is sometimes seen as "revolutionary" (Kerr-Wilson 1995).

The process is time consuming, yet not tremendously complex. Each member at the decision-making table is allowed or encouraged to speak his or her mind, and form an opinion on the topic up for discussion. Rationale behind the decision or the opinion is often sought from the other members. As opinions and ideas are put forward, often there is some dissent between two or more members. Further discussions into the rationale, background, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the dissenting persons are encouraged and explored. It is the responsibility of the group to encourage the information sharing, and to support the discussion where necessary.

Consultation with Others

Dissent is sometimes inevitable. In these cases, the issue is often brought back to the overall driving issue of the gathering. A reminder of the goal of the organization, and the decision making body is sometimes brought forward as a focus to steer the opinions and discussions.

Freedom of Information

The inclusion of a wide variety of stakeholders, partners, and individuals in the decision making process must be followed by the free dissemination of information learned from the process. The Eastern Ontario Model Forest has adopted a concept from aboriginal traditional thought: "knowledge has power only if it is shared."

ANALYSIS OF THE EOMF USING THIS PROCESS

Use of Consensus in Decision Making

C   Initial EOMF Board of Directors' meetings involved voting, confrontation, and dissent.

S   Board of Directors' meetings now operate on a consensus style of operation. (Board meetings can become very lengthy however!)

S   Some project management sub-committees are now using this approach.

C   Occasionally, dissent occurs, and some decisions are not always a true "consensus."

Consultation with Partners and Peers

S   Project management committees (subcommittees of partners, supporters, EOMF staff, board, and Canadian Forest Service representatives) are frequently consulted regarding information and issues on project management. Sometimes decisions are deferred until more information from those affected is gathered.

S   Informal committees for the management of Forestry Standards, Ecological Woodlands, Industrial Wood Production, Relative Density Guidelines, Volunteers, and Membership.

S   Formal committees are set up to deal with Forest Science Review, Finance and operations, Public Information and Education, Board of Directors Nominations, and Trails and Outdoor Education.

Freedom of Information

S   The current policy for information dispersal is to promote, disseminate, and share information discovered in each of the EOMF projects.

C   The western concept of "ownership of information" sometimes clashes with traditional aboriginal thought. Anything developed as an EOMF product is freely disseminated. Projects with cooperative funds, may cause some tension over the ownership and dissemination of project results.

CONCEPT NUMBER ONE: TIME

Traditional aboriginal thought includes the use of a time frame that is much longer than much of the "western" thought or planning scales. Aboriginal communities, have developed and lived by the phrase "planning for seven generations," which has come to be used more and more often in sustainable development of our resources, our world, and now into sustainable forestry.

The First Nation decision-making process requires a time frame upon which to focus. Consensus is the method of decision-making that is used when deciding upon a course of action, however, this is not the only consideration when making a decision. Acknowledgement of a time frame for decision-making is just as important as acknowledging the reasoning behind a particular choice. Aboriginal societies, particularly the Iroquois nations of eastern North America, have taken into consideration the future seven generations of humans that will inhabit the Earth long after the existing generations have passed on. Each successive generation is considered more important than the next, thereby a sustainable future for the yet unborn can be assured. This seven generation planning framework mimics natural processes such as the maturation of a forest, or the life of a tree. The idea of seven generation planning allows humans, who have a difficult time imagining a time frame beyond one's own existence, to begin to mentally grasp time frames of natural processes.

Today's society is built upon profits, short-term survival, and competition. In short-term planning frameworks, environmental destruction can be justified. For short-term financial sutainability, "pillaging" our forests, and quickly liquidating them into capital, ensures market sustainability, and operating profits for a corporation. As we all know, short-term thinking has caused much of the environmental destruction around us. Adoption of a long-term, seven generations planning framework is often foreign to many corporations, individuals, organizations, and political parties in today's western society.

ANALYSIS OF THE EOMF USING THIS CONCEPT

S   EOMF has adopted the motto "a forest for seven genera-
     tions" to help guide the direction, leadership, and method of
     thinking regarding project progress, and project approval.
S   The EOMF has initiated a long-term strategic planning com-
     mittee to identify long-term potential for the group, a long-
     term strategy, and funding considerations to extend the hard
     work of the EOMF to date to an indefinite time into the
     future.
C   Funding, reporting and project management runs on a
     12-month, fiscal year basis. Projects require visible results,
     and must have a cleared budget every 12 months. The entire
     Model Forest program currently has a five-year mandate.
     Development of "sustainable" forestry efforts requires a
     much longer time frame. This generates a lot of pressure for
     groups to come together and produce valid results.
C   Current funding of the program is heavily reliant on public
     funding. Most government initiatives operate on a four-year
     mandate. As much environmental programming, opera-
     tions, and research is government funded, research and op-
     erational activities and personnel for forestry programs
     often change with a new government party. This makes it
     difficult to truly plan for that seventh generation.

CONCEPT NUMBER TWO: SCALE

A growing body of research in both anthropological and environ-
mental circles is the development and promotion of what has been
termed "naturalized knowledge systems."

"Naturalized knowledge systems" refer to the conceptual para-
digm of hierarchies, social structures, levels of knowledge, and
governance from indigenous societies. The word "naturalized" re-
fers to the natural, original inhabitants of an area, who hold a wealth
of knowledge about their traditional homelands. A vast amount of
this information, that many consulting firms, research organiza-
tions, government programs, and university level studies are seek-
ing, may be known or enhanced by traditional knowledge of indige-

P

nous peoples. Much of this information is in a verbal, or oral tradition, and as such, cannot be researched through traditional European written histories.

One of the central ideas in this naturalized knowledge system is the idea of "scale." An organization to manage environmental systems, for example, would attempt to manage at a level appropriate to the ecosystem unit. The level of "community" is appropriate for this type of management. Other levels of concern in the aboriginal naturalized knowledge system include the subcellular, cellular, individual, group, nation, confederacy and spiritual realm. Each of these has special areas of emphasis for governance and management. Figure 4 compares these scale levels.

The Eastern Ontario Model Forest has been referred to as a "grass-roots" community forestry program. The entire Canadian and International Model Forest program is attempting to manage forests for a variety of competing interests for a long-term. The scale unit of community level management is appropriate here.

ANALYSIS OF THE EOMF USING THIS CONCEPT

S   EOMF uses the community level approach to forest management. Important players in the EOMF are the private

FIGURE 4. Scales in the Naturalized Knowledge System.
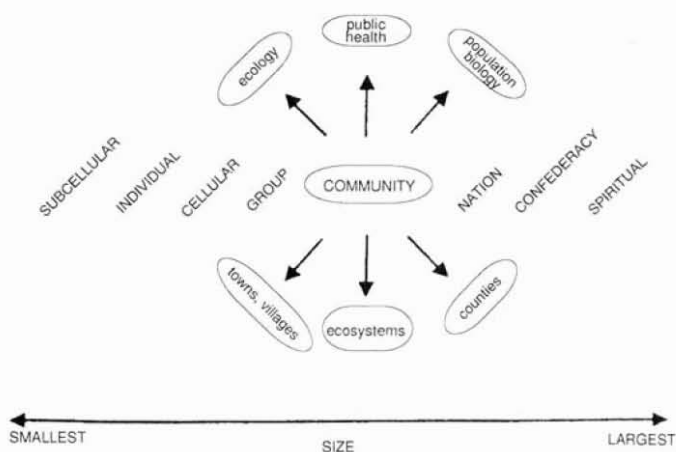
landowners, and associations that support private landowners in the local area.

C   The EOMF program sometimes has conflicting areas of influence with some Natural Resource organizations that manage on a national scale. Mandates sometimes conflict with the Provincial Ministry of Natural Resources.

S   Community groups fit well in the EOMF concept. Some of the most powerful results in EOMF projects are from cooperative community groups.

S   Like an ecosystem, the EOMF strives to be diverse in its approach to forestry. The more diverse an ecosystem, the more healthy the ecosystem. The same approach has been taken with the strength of the EOMF program for managing multiple values.

REFERENCES

University of Ottawa, 1994. First Nations–Environmental Knowledge and Approaches to Natural Resources.

Kerr-Wilson, John. 1995. Personal Communications.