A FemNorthNet Fact Sheet Series

Impacts of Economic Restructuring on Diverse Women in Canada's North – An Introduction

Fact sheets in this series summarize the findings of a review of existing literature on the experiences of diverse women in the North conducted by FemNorthNet in 2013. Other fact sheets in this series include:
- Economic Restructuring and Diverse Women's Access to Services in the North
- Resource Development and Diverse Women's Access to Services in the North
- Alternative Models of Development That Support Diverse Women in the North

What is Economic Restructuring?

Economic restructuring in Northern Canada is changing the economy and altering ways of living. Women are experiencing changes to family structures, types of work available, sources of income, and volunteer responsibilities as well as access to resources, services, and supports.

As the economy changes some people benefit – they are invited to make decisions about the future of the community, obtain high-paying jobs, are granted access to resources, and experience a sense of social belonging. Others face barriers to good incomes or to accessing needed services. This can limit the ability of people to make decisions for themselves, their families, or their community and sometimes may lead to feeling of social isolation. Economic restructuring in the North is driven by:

- the shifting of many responsibilities from the federal government to provincial, territorial, municipal and Aboriginal governments and the launch of *Canada's Northern Strategy* in 2009.
- economic development plans linked to resource industries, including *The Northern Trust Initiative* (BC), *Places to Grow* (ON), *Plan Nord* (QC), and *The Northern Strategic Plan* (NL).

Impacts of economic restructuring are felt locally and regionally but they are often set in motion by outside forces such as globalization, government cuts to public services, and policies that dismantle unions and destabilize jobs. Economic restructuring is met with resistance and proposals for alternative approaches that respect diversity, make everyone feel included, and produce an environment that is healthy and sustainable for all.

FemNorthNet and Feminist Intersectionality

The Feminist Northern Network – FemNorthNet – is a participatory action research initiative that connects a network of Northern community leaders, organizations, and government officials with researchers from within and outside of universities and colleges across Canada. Together, we are exploring how economic restructuring is affecting diverse women in Northern communities. This diversity includes Indigenous women, women with disabilities, immigrant women, women with children, women of various ages, and women from different language groups. Discovering the differences in women's experiences due to their diverse identities, histories, and cultural ties and interactions with systems and institutions of power is what we call feminist intersectionality. Our objective is to learn from Northern women and assist them as they prepare to address these economic changes, advocate for their needs, and lead their communities.

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Putting the North in Historical Context

Canada's North has been dramatically transformed by government policies over the past two centuries. Some legislation intended to assimilate Indigenous peoples and forced relocation. These have left permanent marks on the northern landscape as well as the people who reside there.

Where is the North?
FemNorthNet partners with and researches the experiences of women who live in both Canada's "near North" (the northern parts of the provinces) and "far North" (areas above the 60th parallel including parts of Québec, Labrador, and the Territories). Our research also draws upon studies and models from other countries within the northern circumpolar region.

1700s First European settlers arrive in the North	• Brought by the fur trade and gold rush. Métis people in the North trace their ancestry to marriages between these European settlers and Indigenous women. • The Hudson's Bay Company held much of the territory where the Northern Indigenous peoples lived prior to Confederation, when it came under the control of the Crown.
1870s Creation of the Métis scrip system	• Gave individual Métis men small parcels of land or money, instead of including them in treaty negotiations like First Nations people, and deprived them of their territory rights. • Métis rights as Indigenous peoples have only recently been recognized by government through Supreme Court decisions and Agreements in Principle with individual groups.
1876 *Indian Act* established	• Northern First Nations people were affected by the *Indian Act* and its predecessors. Inuit, Métis, and non-status Aboriginal people are excluded from the *Indian Act*. • Revoked land rights, restricted the ability to engage in cultural practices, imposed foreign governance structures, and forced children into residential schools where they were subject to horrendous abuses. • Introduced 'Indian Status'– a benefits entitlement label that continues to create divisions among First Nations people today. Until 1985, First Nations women who married men without 'Status' lost their own 'Status' and its entitlements.
1934 Forced relocation of Inuit and Labrador Innu communities begins	• Removed them from their ancestral territory and traditional hunting grounds to distant centralized settlements or remote outposts created by the government or missionaries. • Relocation was said to be 'voluntary,' and families were promised freedom to return if the program did not work out—a promise that was never kept. • The Inuit and Labrador Innu were placed on social welfare, replacing a long tradition of self-sufficiency, and faced terrible living conditions in the new settlements. • The federal government claimed the relocations were "due to deteriorating traditional harvesting, health, and social conditions," but evidence suggests they were linked to interest in laying the groundwork for northern resource extraction and asserting Canada's territorial claims in the Arctic.

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1949 Newfoundland joins Canada	• Under the Terms of Union, Innu and MI'kmaw people living on the island and in Labrador are not granted 'Status' under the *Indian Act*. • Members of the Innu Nation are not recognized as Status Indians until 2002.
1960s 'Sixties Scoop'	• Refers to the mass placement of First Nations children into state care in the 1960s. • This placed further strain on families and communities already dealing with the legacy of residential schools and previous assimilation policies.
1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples	• Documented the negative effects of assimilation tactics for Canada's Indigenous peoples. • Effects include: deep mistrust between Indigenous people and the Canadian state; trauma as cycles of violence and substance abuse have been passed between generations; and helplessness as people were denied access to traditional knowledge and forced to depend on government assistance for survival. • Later initiatives like Sisters in Spirit have brought the issue of violence against Indigenous women to greater public attention.

Non-Indigenous people in Canada's North include settlers who arrived in Canada generations ago as well as more recent migrants from all over the globe and other parts of Canada. People began moving north in larger numbers as economic opportunities emerged, such as the establishment of RCMP outposts, military bases, fishing and logging industries, and oil and mining projects. Many non-Indigenous Northern people formed strong connections to the land and established distinct local or regional cultures. Non-Indigenous people of the North have also experienced resettlement pressures as industries bust and as services are centralized. Economic uncertainty has left many vulnerable to poverty, violence, and other social issues.

In spite of many hardships, Northerners advocate for the wellbeing of their peoples and communities:

- Indigenous groups have established programs to help their people cope with past trauma and reconnect with their culture and history in a positive way. Those who experienced abuse at the hands of authorities are taking their claims to court, receiving compensation, and putting policies in place to ensure future protection and safety.

- Communities have negotiated Impact and Benefit Agreements and pushed for social and environmental assessments to ensure the negative effects of resource extraction, power generation, and other megaprojects can be mitigated, and that locals will benefit from associated economic opportunities.

- Places like Thompson, Manitoba, are working on economic revitalization plans to ensure their region continues to thrive once mining and other resource extraction operations shut down.

Northern women play a large role in leading these efforts, yet we know very little about their diverse experiences.

Figure 1: The community of Makkovik is part of the Inuit territory of Nunatsiavut and has been a trading post, Moravian mission and resettlement site in the past.

What Do We Know About the Experiences of Diverse Women in the North?

Indigenous Women: The experiences of Northern Indigenous women are being documented by women's organizations such as Pauktuutit, the Native Women's Association of Canada, Qulliit Nunavut Status of Women Council, and the YWCA of Yellowknife. These groups track experiences that are detrimental to Indigenous women's wellbeing including poverty, homelessness, and lack of access to a fair justice system. Federal government studies have not analyzed experiences unique to Northern Indigenous women and have been criticized for failing to recognize the diversity amongst Indigenous women and ignoring their concerns and agency in the past. PARO, which assists Northern women entrepreneurs, is an example of a culturally-tailored program for Aboriginal women with the goal of developing individual talents.

Migrant and Immigrant Women: The experiences of migrant and immigrant women in Canada's North are largely invisible, in part because of an assumption that immigrant women to Canada tend to settle in the South. However, in response to expanding resource industries and rising service demands, there has been a growing influx of migrant women workers to the North. FemNorthNet found that over 200 Filipino women were present in Happy Valley – Goose Bay as temporary foreign workers. While women's experiences have not been widely documented, temporary foreign male workers in Northern Alberta have noted experiences of workers' rights violations, poor access to settlement services, social isolation, and stress caused by the low likelihood of receiving permanent residency. It is likely women face similar challenges.

Women with Disabilities: We know very little about the experiences of women (or men) with disabilities in the North. Many people with disabilities leave the North to gain access to support services, education, accommodating jobs, and accessible housing, transit, and public buildings that are not available in their home communities. Some, especially many Indigenous people with disabilities, remain in the North to stay close to social and cultural networks. Some hub communities, like Thompson, Manitoba, have local supports like the Juniper Centre to help those with disabilities to remain in the community.

Women of Diverse Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities: The experiences of lesbian, bisexual, two-spirited and transgendered women are absent in most of the research on the North. Service providers may limit access to services for these women through discriminatory or alienating practices.

Young Women: We know that young people frequently leave Northern communities, however the motivations for leaving differ by gender and across locations. Indigenous communities in the North tend to place high value on youth input into community development, but the specific role of young Indigenous women is not well articulated. We know young women are vulnerable to many risks in the North, including homelessness, but their experiences of Northern living and economic restructuring are missing.

Intersecting Experiences: Many of these groups of women overlap with each other and we know very little about those intersecting experiences. These could be young, migrant women, Indigenous girls with disabilities, two-spirited Indigenous women, disabled immigrant women or others.

[1] Makkovik sunset by Verne Equinox is licensed by CC BY 3.0

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