



First Nation Communities in Distress: Dealing with Causes, not Symptoms

By

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1. Introduction

Anyone with even a passing familiarity with First Nation communities is struck by their diversity in terms of, among other things, size, language and culture, geographic location (urban, rural remote), and levels of well-being. It is this latter dimension that is the focus of this essay. In particular we are interested in those distressed communities on the extreme end of the well-being continuum, communities that would exhibit many or all of the following characteristics:

- High levels of social pathologies (substance abuse, suicides, family violence, crime);
- High levels of dependency on social assistance (i.e. low levels of economic activity outside the public sector);
- Poorly functioning government services (education, health, policing etc.);
- Poor housing conditions;
- Run-down (premature rust-out of) public infrastructure (roads, public buildings, water and sewer systems);
- A governance system (chief and council and senior staff) that appears to be highly dysfunctional i.e. that is incapable of making and implementing decisions, that is marked by high levels of churn and that is in a chronic deficit position;
- Little in the way of cultural activities;
- No discernable pattern of progress over a two to three year time frame.

To state that individuals living in these communities experience conditions that are the very worst in Canada is hardly to exaggerate. Consequently, developing a strategy for helping these communities to deal positively with their situation should rank very high on this country's list of public priorities. The purpose of this essay is to stimulate reflection on this difficult challenge. In particular, we explore the following three questions:

- 1) Are there useful generalizations to be made about the developmental processes that distressed communities might adopt to deal positively with their situation?
- 2) Are there constructive roles for 'outside' parties to play in facilitating these processes?
and
- 3) What might be useful next steps?

We begin with section 2 by presenting several development models drawn from the literature. The first has been proffered by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development at the John F. Kennedy School of Government; the second, by an Australian researcher, Michael Limerick; and the third, by the Government of France's equivalent of CIDA, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (Section Two). We conclude this section of the essay by summarizing what one development expert, Robert Rotberg, also from Harvard's Kennedy School, has to say about the importance of leadership in the development process, based on a survey of African countries.

In Section Three, we develop our own IOG model, "on the path to well-being", based on the discussion in the previous section. Then, in Section Four, we turn to one approach used by an

international NGO, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, to develop trust and begin the peace-building process in fragile states in Africa. We then propose a pilot project based on a similar type of intervention for First Nations in distress (Section Five).

The principal theme of this essay is the importance of dealing with underlying causes of distress and not just symptoms. All too often the public response is to deal with the financial symptoms of distress by imposing third party management of the community's government or by shoring up its financial management capacity. Alternatively, funding is directed at individual healing activities. Neither of these types of initiatives, while laudable, get at the principal causes of dysfunction. To better understand these, we begin with a survey of some development models.

2. Development Models

2.1 *The Harvard Model*

The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development at the John F. Kennedy School of Government has done insightful research into Aboriginal economic development. Harvard researchers began with a puzzle. Why do tribes with the most successful economies not always have well-educated citizens, abundant natural resources and access to financial capital? After almost a decade of research involving more than 30 tribes across the United States, the Project had an answer: "Economic Development on Indian Reservations is first and foremost a political problem."¹

To illustrate this conclusion, the Harvard researchers describe two approaches to economic development. The first is what they call the "jobs and income" approach. The perceived problem is a lack of jobs. The solution is for an economic development officer to get some businesses going in the community. And the results, according to the research, are invariably disappointing. Businesses seldom last.

The second approach is what they call "the nation-building approach." While the perception of the problem is largely the same – a lack of jobs and income – the solution is more long-term and comprehensive. In essence it is to put in place "an environment in which people want to invest." Their definition of an investor is broad and includes a cash-rich joint venture partner, a community member willing to develop a new business, a newly trained school teacher willing to return to his or her community or a community member contemplating a job with the tribal government. In short, "an investor is anybody with time and energy or ideas and skills or good will or dollars who's willing to bet those assets on the tribal future."²

The principal actor in executing a nation-building approach is not the economic development officer but rather the community leadership, who focus their attention on establishing the

¹ Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt, "Sovereignty and Nation-Building: The Development Challenges in Indian Country To-day", Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, 2001, www.ksg.harvard.edu/hpaied/CornellKalt%20Sov-NB.pdf

² Ibid, p. 7

institutions, policies and plans necessary for sustained economic development. While no guarantee of success, this nation-building approach, according to the Harvard research, vastly improves the prospects of sustained development.

Table 1 below compares the two approaches.

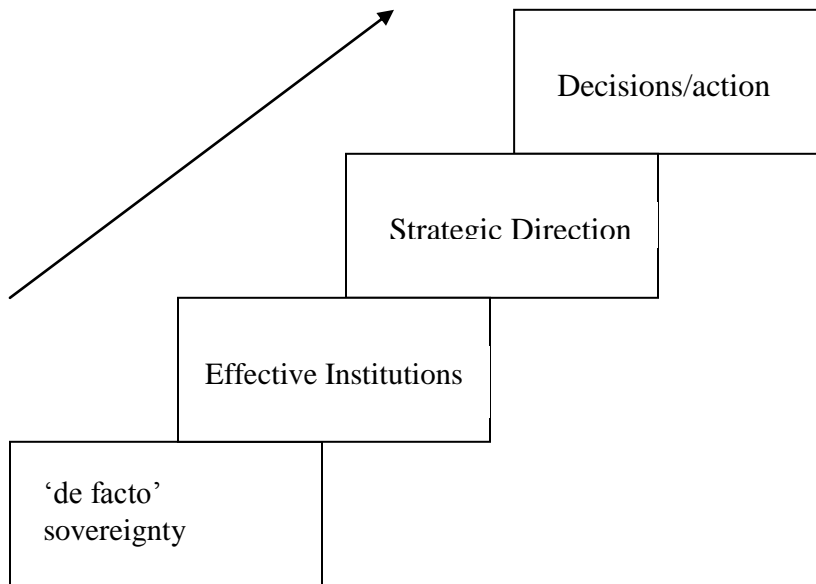
Table 1³
Two Approaches to Economic Development

<i>“Jobs and Income”</i>	<i>“Nation-building”</i>
Responds to anyone’s agenda (from the government or anyone ‘off the street’)	Responds to the community’s agenda based on a strategic plan
Emphasizes short-term payoffs (jobs and income now)	Emphasizes long-term payoffs (sustained community well-being)
Emphasizes starting businesses	Emphasizes creating an environment in which businesses can last
Success is measured by economic impact	Success is measured by social, cultural, political and economic impacts
Development is mostly the economic development officer’s job (EDO proposes and Council decides)	Development is the job of community leadership (they set vision, guidelines, policy; others implement)
Treats development as first and foremost an economic problem	Treats development as first and foremost a political problem
The solution is money	The solution is a sound institutional foundation, strategic direction, informed action

The Harvard researchers identify four “building blocks” to the nation-building approach: i) de facto sovereignty - the Aboriginal community has taken charge of determining its economic future and has the tools and capacity to act; ii) effective institutions; iii) strategic direction, and iv) decisions/action summarized in Figure 1 below.

³ This table has been slightly adapted from the Cornell and Kalt paper cited above.

Figure 1: Building blocks to nation-building.



In using the term “de facto’ sovereignty”, the researchers were not using the phrase in the international sense to signify a sovereign country. Rather, the meaning is on a more practical plane: who is in charge of realizing economic development for the Tribe. Who is the effective decision-maker? As the Harvard researchers note:

Making the federal government bear responsibility for improving economic conditions on Indian reservations may be good political rhetoric, but it is bad economic strategy. When tribes take responsibility for what happens on reservations and have the practical power and capacity to act on their own behalf, they start down the road to improving reservation conditions.⁴

The following table provides additional information on what determines effective institutions, the second element of the Harvard nation-building approach.

⁴ Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt, “Sovereignty and Nation-Building: The Development Challenges in Indian Country To-day”, Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, 2001, p. 29-30.

Table 2
Elements of Effective Institutions

Principal elements	Rationale
Stable institutions and policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investors need to know "the rules of the game" and that these will not change much even with new leadership. Otherwise they won't invest.
Fair and effective dispute resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investors need assurance that their claims and disputes will be settled in a fair, consistent and non-politicized manner. Otherwise they won't invest.
Separation of politics from day to day business decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Political leaders should set direction and policies; they should not be involved in decisions dealing with hiring, purchasing, operating hours, remuneration issues etc. Otherwise the business won't survive.
A competent bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attracting, developing and retaining skilled personnel is critical to governing effectively. Investors need to have confidence in the government.
Cultural match	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There needs to be a match between the prevailing ideas in the community and the governing institutions. Without this match the economic activities will lack the support of the community.

2.2 Michael Limerick and the Australian Experience

For his PhD research, Michael Limerick looked at the characteristics of a high performing, successful Aboriginal council in the state of Queensland, Australia. His research involved case studies of three Shire Councils.⁵ He began by addressing a fundamental question: Is good governance good because the right decisions have been made, or because the decisions have been made in what constituents consider to be the right way? By using the *community government performance*⁶ concept, he emphasizes outcomes over processes in the evaluation of governance.

⁵ Shire Councils in Queensland have similar responsibilities to those of First Nations in Canada with the notable exception of education.

⁶ Limerick defines community government performance as the extent to which a community government – in this case, an Aboriginal council – is achieving the outcomes desired by its constituents, taking into account the prevailing constraints (such as jurisdictional or resource limitations).

By taking this approach, he acknowledges the potential pitfall of dismissing the role of process as “an expression of cultural difference and a vehicle for building and affirming unique cultural identities.”⁷ To counter this, he adds that, if performance is measured in terms of whether a council achieves the outcomes desired by its constituents, then these desirable outcomes likely include how governance is practiced.

A central goal of Limerick’s research was to identify governance attributes that determine Aboriginal council performance. He concludes that the following, many echoing the Harvard research, are critical:

- a *strategic orientation* based on *shared vision*;
- a clear *separation of powers* between politics and administration;
- respect for the *rule of law* through a commitment to impartially applying equitable rules and policies;
- an *effective administration* featuring a commitment to sound financial management, a stable workforce and human resource management practices that value, support and develop staff;
- appropriate *community engagement* in relation to those community governance activities where success is contingent on input of information from a range of interests, the motivation and commitment of the community or coordination with community-based agencies; and
- *strategic engagement* with government and other institutions external to the community.

While the contextual, historical and cultural factors are many, Limerick sought to identify those factors which explain why each council developed its particular configuration of governance attributes, whether successful or unsuccessful. Clear patterns emerged from the analysis to explain the councils’ different approaches to governance. Below are key factors that helped shape successful governance attributes.

- A resource base of *education and skills* within the community that matches the needs of the community government;
- A pool of community members who have had significant degree of *exposure to the outside world*;
- Strongly *egalitarian political norms* and a ‘*whole of community*’ orientation to governance;
- A commitment to *overcoming the historical legacy of dependency by taking responsibility* for community government outcomes;
- Other contextual factors including gender relations, social capital and financial and natural resources.

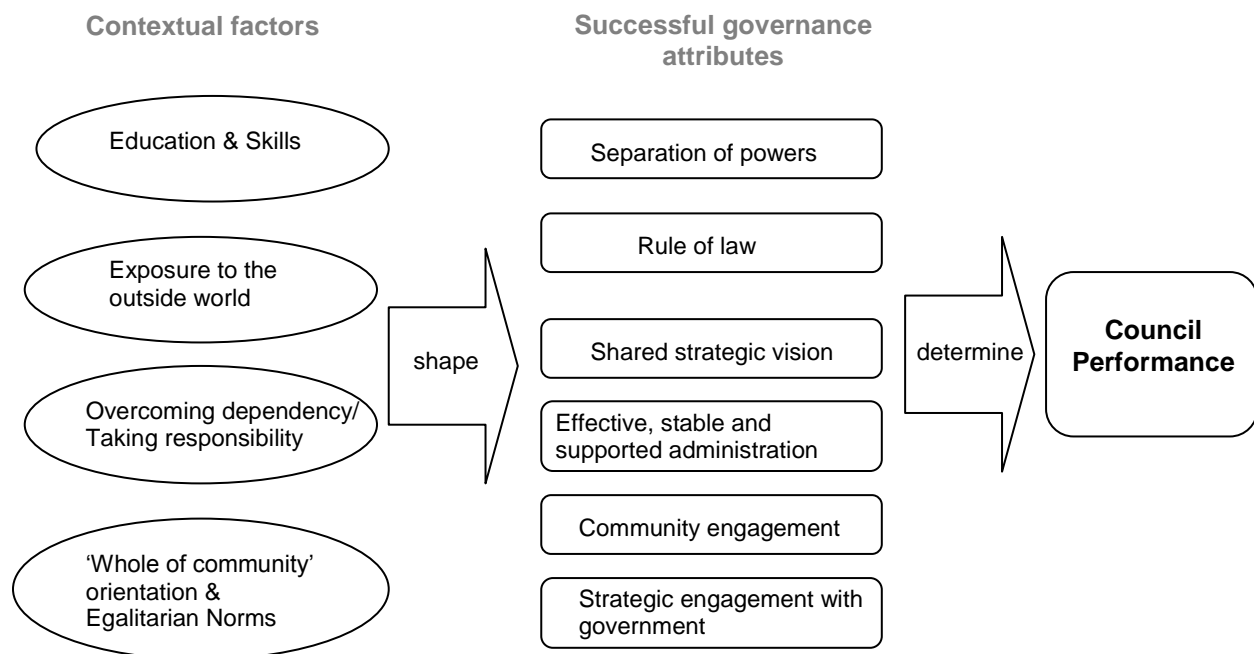
⁷ Limerick, Micheal. “What makes an Aboriginal Council successful? A report on PhD research into Aboriginal community government performance in far north Queensland”, August 2009, prepared for the Office of Local Government, Department of Infrastructure and Planning, Queensland p. 3-4. Available from Michael Limerick, mclimerick@gmail.com.

Of these, the third bullet focusing on “whole of community orientation’ is worthy of additional elaboration. Here is Limerick’s explanation:

The case studies indicated that the approach to governance that evolves within a council is significantly shaped by the degree to which leaders exhibit a ‘whole of community’ orientation to governance rather than a political orientation towards family and kin. While notions about the centrality of family and kin are fundamental cultural values in any Aboriginal community, including the cases in this study, it is notable that interviews with leaders and community members at Yarrabah [the high performing shire council] revealed strong community-oriented norms about governance. In contrast, a continuing strong orientation towards family dominated governance in [the other communities in the study]... A community-orientation towards governance appears to be an important precondition to institutionalizing successful governance attributes such as separation of powers and the rule of law and to developing a shared strategic vision. It is interesting to note that in research into another relatively successful Queensland council, [another Australian researcher] found only limited instances of self-interested and preferential behaviour by councillors and a system of “checks and balances” that ensured that decision-making was for the community benefit.⁸

Limerick presents his findings pictorially in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Explanatory model for Aboriginal council performance



In summary, there are some striking similarities between the Harvard and Limerick findings and conclusions but also some important differences. Limerick, for example, emphasizes several

⁸ Ibid, p. 22

more pre-conditions or contextual factors in comparison to the Harvard researchers, notably this whole of community orientation. In doing so he stresses the importance of a significant cultural shift away from family-centric governance.

The policy implications of this research, according to Limerick, are several:

- a focus on good governance training, resources and capacity-building for leaders and staff of Indigenous governments;
- support for Indigenous governments to develop a long-term vision, shared across the community leadership and reinforced with relevant strategic plans;
- measures to build capacity of leaders and staff of Indigenous governments to strategically engage with government and other external stakeholders;
- greater community engagement, training and support for Indigenous governments;
- support strategies to assist Aboriginal community residents to cope with the intense pressure they experience in taking on positions of responsibility within Indigenous community governments;
- a strong focus on HR management within any administrative capacity-building initiatives for Indigenous governments;
- support for Indigenous governments to develop long-term and strategic workforce development strategies, especially investment in education that is relevant to the community government's workforce needs;
- initiatives to increase the mobility of residents of Indigenous communities with a view to increasing their exposure to living and working in mainstream society;
- reforms to the governance environment for Indigenous governments to maximise their opportunities to overcome historical relations of dependency, exercise greater autonomy and assume full responsibility for community governance.

2.3 An International Perspective: Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Paralleling Limerick's insight on a 'whole of community' orientation as a pre-condition to good governance are several examples of international development research. We look at two such examples in this section.

The first is a paper done under the aegis of the Government of France's equivalent to CIDA, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), with the provocative title "Is Good Governance a Good Development Strategy?"⁹ The answer by the paper's authors is no, at least not in the short run. Here is a brief synopsis of their argument.

With the help of a new database (the 2006 Institutional Profiles database), Meisel and Ouald Aoudia, the two authors, show that there is a correlation between "good governance" and the level of development (per capita GDP), but there is no correlation between it and the speed of

⁹ Meisel, Nicolas and Ould Aoudia, Jacques. Is "Good Governance" a Good Development Strategy?, Agence Française de Développement, Policy Paper 58, January 2008, p. 24.

development (medium-to-long-term growth). They believe this is because it does not touch on the driving forces behind institutional, economic, political and social change.

In examining success stories of countries that have achieved rapid economic growth (examples include South Korea, Singapore, China and some European countries shortly after World War II), the authors state that these countries were able to create what they call a “governance focal monopoly” – the French Planning Office, the Economic Planning Board in Korea, the Industrial Development Commission in Taiwan – that “made it possible to regulate the interplay of interests in the economic and social field with the aim of actualizing “the most shared possible” interest.”¹⁰ They elaborate on the nature of these institutions as follows:

The governance focal monopoly has historically taken concrete form through one or more key organizations that co-ordinate - that “focus” – all relations between predominant interest groups at the various levels of society (international, national, local) [...]. The institution in a governance focal monopoly position has precisely the capacity, first, to bring together the specific interests that count most in the definition of a “common” interest and, second, to incite them to achieve this desirable common interest. It makes it possible to see to it that the focused and regulated operation of interactions between rival forces continually enables a common interest to emerge and be attained.¹¹

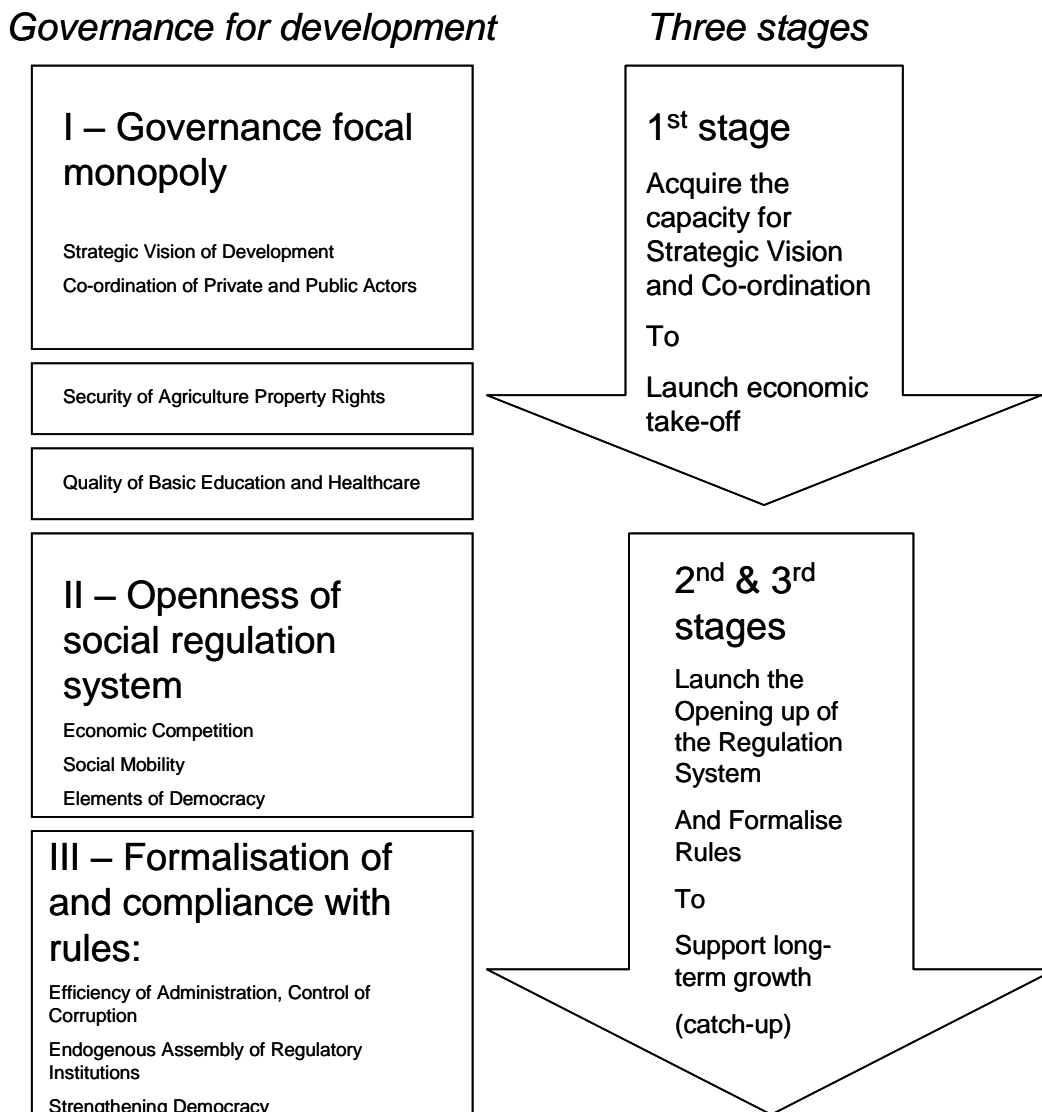
According to the authors, the formation of these organizations allows rapid economic growth to occur in a context in which the country has not yet moved from a social regulatory system which is informal and personalized to a system that is more formal and depersonalized, one that provides the basis for liberal democratic norms of good governance such as the rule of law and other forms of human rights. In short, “good governance” does not emerge as a priority for economic take-off. It becomes one later, along with the opening of the social regulation system when, having experienced sustained and lengthy growth, a country seeks to converge with developed countries. In other, non-converging developing countries, the priority is to build capacities for strategic vision and co-ordination among elites.

Figure 3 below summarizes the AFD analysis and proposes a three stage approach to understanding development.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 38

¹¹ Ibid, p. 38

Figure 3: Governance for development model



A recent OECD paper¹² that focuses on the legitimacy of the state in fragile situations has a number of themes similar to those in the AFD paper. Noting that a lack of legitimacy is a major factor contributing to state fragility, the paper sums up its major thesis as follows:

Donors tend to think about the state and state legitimacy in terms of a Western state model. They take for granted a central concept underpinning the western idea of statehood, namely the clear distinction between public and private spheres, and the fact that competition between holders of political and economic power takes place within widely accepted rules and impersonal relationships [...]. In non-Western states (although there is a huge diversity among them) state-society relations are more likely to be based on personal ties of kin and community; public goods are provided to one's own social

¹² OECD, "The State's Legitimacy in Fragile Situations: Unpacking Complexity", International Network on Conflict and Fragility, 2010, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/45/6/44794487.pdf>

reference group or supporters rather than on the basis of universal rights [...]. Distinctions between public and private spheres are blurred. It follows that people's ideas about what constitutes legitimate political authority are fundamentally different in Western and non-Western states.

The paper goes on to argue that states in the global South are in practice “hybrid” political orders – nominally liberal democracies that coexist with other, competing and more traditional forms of public authority. The challenge is “to understand how the two interact and to look for ways of constructively combining them.”

Among the paper's suggested practical steps for donors are:

- Seeking ways to better understand people's perceptions and beliefs about what constitutes legitimate political authority;
- Being more sensitive to how donor strategies impinge local state-society relations;
- Being more open to unorthodox political arrangements that encompass traditional aspects of legitimacy, and;
- Being prepared to work “with the grain” of existing interests.

2.4. The key role of Leadership

Effective leadership appears to be implicit in all of the development models canvassed in this essay and it is therefore useful to have a short, concluding sub-section on this topic as it relates to the development puzzle.

Robert Rotberg paints a depressing picture of African leadership throughout the decades since independence. Each new wave of hope, the Museveni's, Zenawi's and Kibaki's, has resulted in disappointment. So much so, he estimates that 90 percent of sub-Saharan countries have experienced despotic rule in the last three decades.¹³ Under a veneer of good governance, where leadership discourse says all the right things, the actions of too many African leaders have equated to a kleptocratic clan mentality where the family benefits first while the rest of the country falls in disrepair.

There are some examples of good leadership that remain; one of the strongest being Botswana. Before it even discovered its potent national resources, Botswana had “demonstrated a knack for participatory democracy, integrity, tolerance, entrepreneurship, and the rule of law.”¹⁴ The country is not just democratic in discourse or spirit but also in form. What's made Botswana so successful?

Some say it is its homogeneity, others say it is the influence of the teachings of the congregational London Missionary Society or the presence of diamonds that has made it easier for Botswana to develop into a stable, democratic country. Yet, other nations have similar characteristics in cultural fabric, history and economy and are in a constant state of fragility.

¹³ Rotberg, Robert I. “Strengthening African Leadership”, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2004, p.14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Rotberg suggests we must look at the history of visionary leadership, especially in the years following independence to explain Botswana’s success.

When [founding President Sir Seretse Khama] founded the Botswana Democratic Party in 1961 and led his country to independence, he was already dedicated to the principles of deliberative democracy and market economy that would allow his young country to flourish. Modest, unostentatious as a leader, and a genuine believer in popular rule, Khama forged a participatory and law-respecting political culture that has endured under his successors, Sir Ketumile Masire and Festus Mogae.¹⁵

The examples of Mauritius and South Africa also point to the fact that inclusive and visionary leadership is one of the linchpins to establishing strong democratic countries.

To build on the positive leadership examples, prominent past and present African leaders have established the African Leadership Council, promulgated a Code of African Leadership, issued the Mombasa Declaration promoting better leadership, and proposed a series of courses to train their political successors in the art of good government. This is an ambitious project that, according to Rotberg, goes beyond any other proposal (from NEPAD to those of the African Union) to tackle the democratic deficit in Africa. And, as a “Made in Africa” solution, this innovative endeavour is a promising, dramatic, and necessary, step forward.

3. Towards a Synthesis: A Proposed IOG Model

There are a number of common strands or themes in the four preceding sections that are worth highlighting. The first is a rough consensus in all four sections about what constitutes good governance, that is, those attributes that we normally associate with liberal democracies: rule of law; human rights; stable, politically neutral and competent public services; citizen engagement; lack of corruption; and a societal consensus on the basic direction of the state or community.

A second important theme is that there are critical preconditions before a fragile state or distressed community can move in these directions. The Harvard model posits *de facto* sovereignty (overcoming dependency and taking responsibility for collective action) coupled with sufficient capacity to exercise it as an essential starting point. Limerick builds on the Harvard pre-conditions by adding several more – including what he calls a ‘whole of community’ orientation. This concept can also be linked to the AFD’s “governance focal monopoly” or institutional arrangements that encourage a convergence of interests among factions to prevail over divergences for the greater good of society. This system of coordination among actors is thus a necessary intermediate step, prior to moving towards more liberal democratic norms. The OECD paper also suggests the need for ‘hybrid’ models to emerge, resonating with the analysis of the AFD authors.

The Rotberg article on leadership, in which he uses words like “deliberative democracy”, “inclusiveness” and a “participatory culture” to describe the values and styles of successful leaders, fits with the development models by pointing to the role of leaders in bringing contending factions together and moving away from simply rewarding family and supporters.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

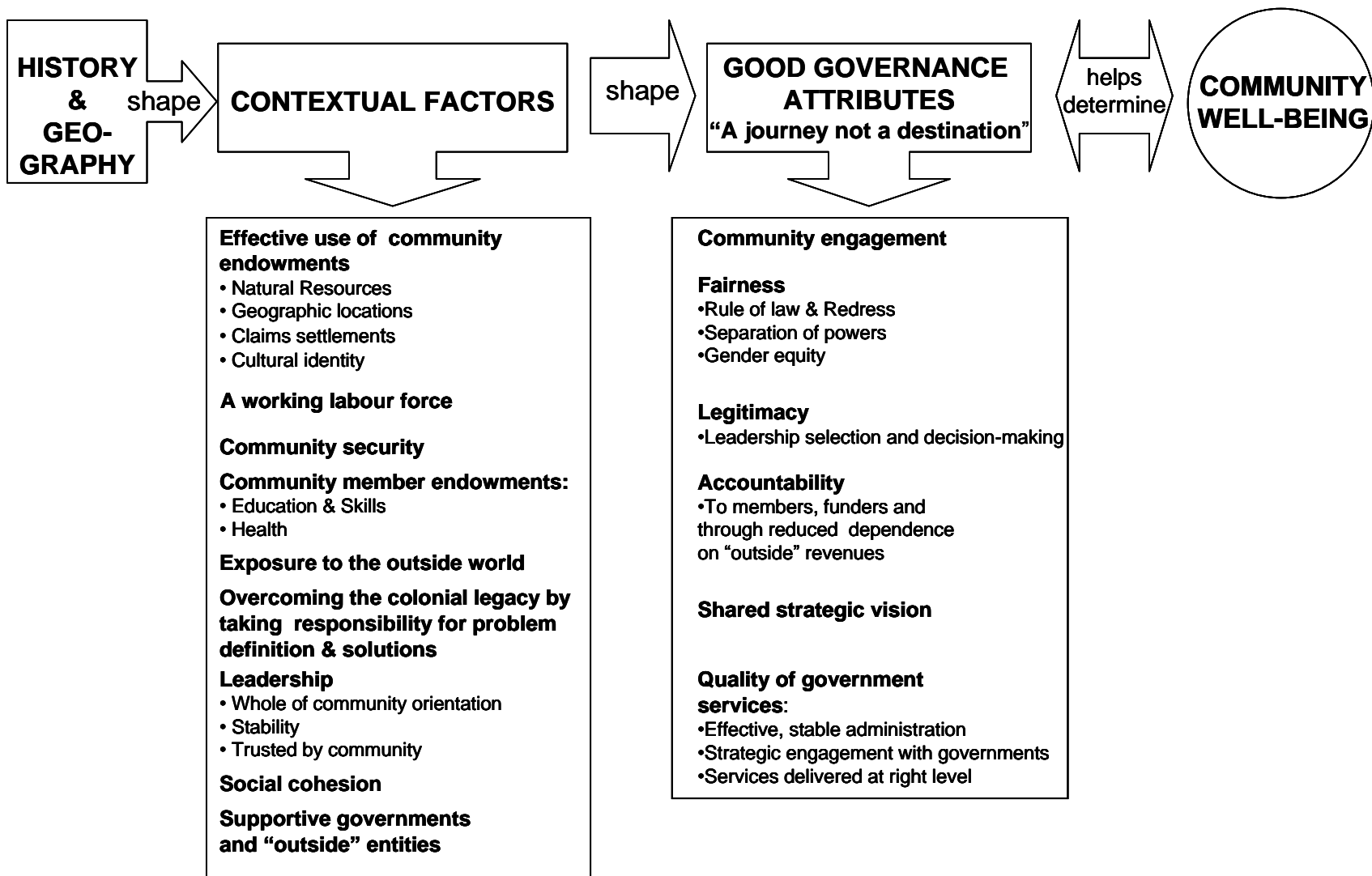
Finally, all of the authors claim implicitly or explicitly that the required strategies for development have to be generated and implemented internally. Imposed prescription from outside agencies will not work. Furthermore, progress will take time to materialize. One paper notes southern countries can not be expected to accomplish in a few short decades what western countries took hundreds of years to realize.

One notable pre-condition that is not mentioned in the three models is having a basic level of physical security in the community or state. Restoring some semblance of safety in a distressed community, especially for children and women, would appear to be a crucial starting point for any developmental process. Some basic level of trust or social cohesion in the community also appears to be a necessary pre-condition before development can take hold. And finally, the intervention literature concerning fragile states suggests a final important pre-condition: a co-ordinated set of outside actors with a common understanding of the history and existing conditions of the country.

All of the above suggest a variation on the Limerick model that we have developed and illustrate in the page that follows.

In the next section of this essay, we examine an approach developed by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars for use in fragile states in Africa, an approach that appears compatible with the IOG synthesis model and is worthy of emulation in Canada.

Understanding the path to community well-being: A tentative model



4. Building Trust as a Precondition to State-Building

A central theme of the above sections is the importance of dealing with a number of preconditions before attempting to establish the attributes of good governance. But what does this mean in practice for distressed communities and what are the implications for governments and other outside parties? How, for example, does a community develop leaders with a ‘whole of community’ orientation? And how can these leaders enhance social cohesion or utilize effectively the strengths within the community?

Answers to some of these questions in the context of fragile states are beginning to emerge. One example is the work of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (WWCIS). Based on its work in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the WWICS concludes that a central problem in rebuilding war torn states is “shifting leaders from a zero-sum mindset to one that recognizes interdependence and the importance of collaboration.”¹⁶ Echoing the work of Michael Limerick and the Agence Française de Développement canvassed above, the Center notes that leaders in these countries tend to trust only themselves and their immediate families or perhaps their ethnic-based networks. The Center has designed a type of team-building program that it has applied in both Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Here is a brief description of the Burundi approach:

The program consists of a series of interactive workshops where facilitators help Burundi leaders to develop the skills needed to guide Burundi’s recovery and transition to democracy. The core training features simulations, role-playing, and other interactive exercises designed to strengthen skills in negotiation, communication, the analysis of conflict, group problem-solving, and strategic planning. Following their initial workshop-retreat, the participants repeatedly reconvene for further training.¹⁷ A diverse cross-section of Burundi leaders – from government, the army, former armed rebels, and civil society – have been strategically chosen for this initiative, which aims to work across traditional lines of ethnic, regional and political division to forge a sustainable network of leaders who can work in a cohesive and collaborative manner.¹⁸

Based on its experience, the Center envisions this type of leadership training as a key element of a broader strategy for moving from peace-building to state building. Such a strategy would consist of the following:

- A joint analysis undertaken by the main actors and international donors of the opportunities and obstacles for development to arrive at a common view of the principal obstacles and constraints that prevent progress being made;
- Engaging the key leaders in the priority areas identified by this joint assessment in the type of collaborative-inducing training described above;

¹⁶ “Breaking Down Barriers in Burundi”, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org>.

¹⁷ According to the Director of the program, it is meant to be a long-term process: “We hope and expect the [training] participants, for years to come, will collaborate with one another in stabilizing the Burundian transition and in guiding the country’s post-war economic, social and political reconstruction.”

¹⁸ Ibid.

- Following this training, having these leaders break into more focused working groups to tackle issues and develop concrete plans in areas that they identify as having high priority to making progress;
- Having the international donors indicate a willingness to fund those plans that relate to national priorities and having the diplomatic community urge the host government to support this work and thus assume responsibility for implementation, and;
- Publicizing the initial successes at resolving conflict to achieve a multiplier effect through encouragement of others to emulate this work in other spheres.

According to the Center, such a strategy resonates with some central themes prominent in recent development work: the importance of leadership commitment to any state-building reforms; local ownership of the critical problems facing the country and solutions; placing a premium on cohesion and collaboration rather than political competition; a whole of community approach that draws together all of the key actors in the country; and a co-ordinated approach among donors with a common understanding of the barriers and challenges facing the particular country coupled with a commitment to support peace-building initiatives arising from collaboration among the key players in the country.

In the final section of this paper, we look at how this approach developed by the WWICS might be applied, with suitable modifications, to First Nations in a distressed state.

5. Implications for First Nations in Distress: Next Steps

The first step in applying the themes of this essay in a First Nation context would be to form a steering committee within a provincial context consisting of the central ‘players’ that have a significant impact on distressed First Nations. Obvious federal departments to include are Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Health Canada, Public Safety, and perhaps the RCMP. These would be combined with relevant provincial departments and agencies (Aboriginal Affairs, the police, perhaps departments relating to education and social services) along with some First Nation organizations. In some provinces – for example, Québec - these groups already exist.

Central to the efficacy of such a steering committee would be the development of its mandate to include a common understanding of its intervention approach, how it might be funded and the roles of each of the participating bodies. Likely the mandate of this steering committee would be both preventive as well as reactive to communities clearly in distress.

The committee’s work with a distressed community would be conditional on two important factors: i) the commitment of the community’s leadership to work in partnership with the steering committee in developing new approaches to deal with conditions causing distress; and ii) the willingness of the current leadership to having an inclusive process that would mean the active involvement of other members of the community, even if they were political opponents.

The next step would be the appointment of a third party facilitator, acceptable to the steering committee and the community leadership. Further, this third party should have credibility with all factions within the community.

The initial task of this neutral facilitator would be to develop a joint analysis of the community's current obstacles and their causes and to highlight the assets and opportunities that the community has to deal with these obstacles. This analysis might then be followed by a set of team building exercises similar to those employed by WWICS with the aim of shifting the mindset of the various factions within the community from a 'zero-sum' orientation to one emphasizing the importance of collaboration.

Following these team-building exercises would be a facilitator-led approach to identify the critical issues facing the community and then generating some possible solutions using a number of task teams. Demonstrating some early successes would be important to the building of momentum to tackle more complex problems.

All of the above implies a long term commitment on the part of the steering committee members. There will be no easy fixes to some difficult and longstanding problems. Indeed what might be ultimately at stake is a revamped approach to how the community makes its collective decisions so as to continue the emphasis on collaboration and not divisive competition. This raises the difficult issue of what to do about periodic elections mandated either by the Indian Act or by the custom election rules of the First Nation. Such elections could become a significant barrier to building community cohesion to deal with the conditions causing distress. (This issue of elections is very much relevant in the fragile state context as well.)

Conclusions

The international evidence in effecting governance reforms is not encouraging. According to successive reports of the World Bank, despite billions of aid funding devoted to governance reform, the overall quality of governance world-wide has not improved over the past decade. The principal themes developed in this essay suggest why this record is so dismal; there are some significant contextual factors that need to be taken into account before governance reform can be sustainable.

And so concentrating in distressed communities on what appear to be obvious reforms – developing financial management skills, orienting Chief and Council about their roles, developing a community plan, attempting to separate political from administrative functions, crafting Codes of Conduct – may not have long term payoffs if leaders have a narrow family orientation or if the level of community cohesion is low or if there is considerable churn in political leadership. Similarly approaches that deal with individual healing without taking into account deep divides within the community may also not bear significant fruit.

In sum, fresh approaches seem called for, approaches that deal with community-wide causal factors and not symptoms.