



Community Summary Report #14

Location: Beardy's and Okemasis Cree Nation, Saskatchewan

Partner Name: Willow Creek Health Centre

Green Resilience Project Community Summary Report template

Community Partner name: Beardy's and Okemasis Cree Nation

Conversation date: Jan. 18 - Feb. 1

Contact: Kristen Schott - kschott@willowcreehealth.com

1. Introduction

A. Summary

Beardy's and Okemasis Cree Nation (BOCN) is clearly being affected by climate change, specifically through the extreme temperatures in the summer and winter months and the lack of precipitation all year. These environmental changes have made it more difficult to gather and grow food, which also impacts the community's cultural identity. We have some superficial supports in the community, but we need to think deeper. From these conversations, it is clear that we have to pull together as a community to tackle climate change instead of working on little projects in our own organizations.

B. About the Green Resilience Project

This community conversation was part of the Green Resilience Project, a Canada-wide series of conversations exploring and documenting the links between community resilience, income security, and the shift to a low-carbon economy. Working with a designated partner organization from each community, the Green Resilience Project aims to create spaces in which a wide range of participants can talk through the links between climate change and income security, and identify possible next steps to build or maintain community resilience in the face of these challenges.

This Community Summary Report reflects what we heard and learned in our community's conversation. Each Project partner organization across Canada will be producing a similar report. In March 2022, the Green Resilience Project will produce a final report summarizing findings across conversations, which will be available to the public and shared with Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Funding for the Green Resilience Project is generously provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada's Climate Action and Awareness Fund. The Project is managed and delivered by Energy Mix Productions, Basic Income Canada Network, Coalition Canada Basic Income - Revenu de base, Basic Income Canada Youth Network, national experts and local partners

C. About the Community Partner organization

Conversations were hosted by Willow Cree Health Services (WCHS), which is the health clinic in the community. The clinic offers a number of services including home care, immunizations, pre and post-natal care, diabetes care, and mental health services, along with food security initiatives including backyard garden programs, food bank runs, good food boxes, community kitchen classes, traditional survival camp, and a community potato patch. WCHS also received funding from Canadian Feed the Children to develop a food forest, and many of the questions in this project were applicable to the sustainability of that forest. Since

WCHS is the organization on-reserve that facilitates food security initiatives, it made the most sense that these conversations would be hosted by them.

D. Why this community was selected to have a conversation

Currently, 40% of BOCN members living in the community rely on income assistance. BOCN is also between two cities: Prince Albert, SK is 30 minutes away and Saskatoon, SK is 60 minutes away. The nearest grocery stores are Duck Lake, SK (5 minutes) and Rosthern, SK (20 minutes), and they've had to increase their prices due to transportation issues exacerbated by COVID-19 and limited food access due to poor growing conditions caused by climate change. Traveling to the larger cities adds at least \$100 to each grocery bill once fuel and childcare are taken into consideration.

BOCN has also been impacted by several environmental changes including extreme temperature changes throughout the winter and summer months and lack of moisture for the past five years, which have impacted local wildlife populations and community members' ability to grow food.

So far, the community hasn't taken any action to combat environmental changes. One change in housing is that all ready-to-move-homes brought into the community are now more energy-efficient than previous houses. The community is incorporating projects to increase community resilience, including a weekly Nehiyaw class offered virtually and in person, as well as cultural and land-based programming built into the school curriculum.

The community has several strengths and assets. Two of the major ones are a strong cultural identity, as seen by the continuation of traditional ceremonies and community activities even through the pandemic, and pulling together in a crisis, as seen by the active BOCN Helping Hands Facebook page that connects community members in need. BOCN has many key knowledge holders that are used regularly in all community programming. The community also has its own school system with a daycare/headstart program, an elementary school, and a high school; a radio station; and backyard garden and community garden initiatives.

E. About the conversation participants

of conversation participants: 32 (14 youth and 13 elders and 5 health clinic staff present at the elders gatherings)

We chose to have conversations with our elders because they are our knowledge keepers and know what the environment used to be like in the community. They are the best resources to document how the environmental changes have impacted the community.

We also chose the grade four class who have land-based education incorporated into their curriculum because they expressed interest in being a part of this project.

Due to covid-19, there were many participant groups absent from our conversations. No public programming is being done in the community except for the bi-monthly elders

gathering due to the pandemic. These responses do not reflect the opinions of parents, young adults, two-spirit members, and members receiving income assistance.

F. The Community Conversation

We had two different conversations - one with the elders' group and one with students. The elders' group conversations were incorporated into their bi-monthly gatherings (we had two conversation sessions). The students' conversation was incorporated into their regular school day and consisted of one grade 4 class (chosen because they were one of the few classes interested and they are currently trialing land-based components into every subject).

Both the conversations with the elders and students were structured similarly, they consisted of a short presentation on food security and what is currently happening in Beardy's and Okemasis Cree Nation, and then we discussed the questions provided by the Green Resilience Project. Only minor wording changes were made to the questions to ensure the conversation flowed nicely and all questions were answered. For example, "how are the changes to our community's environment and economy affect you?" was separated into two questions: "how does our community's weather, climate, and environmental changes affect you?" and "how do changes in our economy affect you?"

2. What We Heard

A. How are the changes to our community's environment and economy discussed in the introduction affecting you, your family, or the community as a whole?

Many participants agreed that extreme weather changes in the winter and summer months and extreme drought has impacted the community the most. These changes have caused other effects, including an increase in severe storms and wildfires. They have also caused changes in local wildlife, including a sharp decrease in frogs, crickets, and bees, but a sharp increase in ticks, grasshoppers, and wasps. One participant who lived by the lack brought up concerns with ducks and chickens: "this year many baby ducks and chickens died because they were born too late in the fall and they froze to death."

These environmental changes have had a huge impact on both gardening and wild foods. One participant stated "black knot fungus has ripped through the wild chokecherries. This used to be kept in check by fires - controlled or wildfires - and now that we're in a drought, we can't do controlled burns and this fungus is running rampant."

The prices of everything have also increased. There are no houses available in BOCN so people are living in overcrowded conditions or moving from place to place. Food, gas, and rent prices continue to increase with no increase in income assistance.

B. How are these environmental and economic changes related to each other?

Many participants saw the connection between environment and economic changes, specifically the connection between decreased garden yields and increased food prices. One participant stated “our growing ability is affected because it’s dry, no rain or snow, and no bees. This means higher prices for food. Higher prices mean less food on the table for us.” Another participant noted “There’s no water so our potatoes are small and don’t go as far, so we have to buy potatoes but their prices have gone up too so we can’t buy as much.”

Other participants focused on transportation. Since they can’t grow as much food, they have to be more reliant on vegetables and fruits from the store, which are more expensive. Local grocery stores have increased their prices so the best deals are in the bigger cities, but that increases transportation costs.

One student summed the relationship between environment well by saying “less water makes everything more expensive.”

C. What are some possible solutions to the challenges we’ve discussed that will help the community respond to climate change and create income security for all community members?

Possible solutions ranged from individual actions to government actions. For individuals, possible solutions were hunting more to combat high meat prices, trying to raise cows, chickens, buffalo, ducks, etc. for meat and milk, planning and implementing your own garden, sourcing water by including more rain barrels in yards, and reducing moisture lost by putting a canopy over gardens and including a lot of mulch.

For community actions, the health clinic could offer more initiatives and support to establish gardens and farms as well as events to go hunting and snaring. The community garden could focus on the essentials like potatoes and onions so there would be less variety but more food to give away in the fall. The community has a radio station currently housed in the arena for weekly bingos, but the station could be moved to the youth centre and could be a youth initiative. Community events and activities could be advertised on the radio station as well as flyers put up in the gas stations.

For government actions, participants brought up initiatives like establishing a community trout pond, re-introducing bison to the north pasture, offering more education opportunities to pursue fields like agriculture, food security, and climate change, establishing beehives in the community, and creating a summer student program where the students could maintain gardens at elders’ houses and the elders could share their gardening knowledge with the students. One student also stated “chief and council should just lower food prices,” which made all the adults in the room chuckle!

D. How do you think these solutions can be achieved to build, maintain or strengthen community resilience? Who is responsible for these changes—individuals, community groups, governments or a mix?

Participants were quick to observe these solutions need to have everyone involved. One elder stated “I really believe that all people should be learning our old ways of food conservation to help themselves. As long as there are programs giving info, people can’t say there was no info or help.” Another elder noted “the biggest hurdle we have is getting people interested in helping each other outside of a crisis. They are there when it comes time to hand out potatoes, but they don’t help planting or weeding or digging up.” One student stated “a mix of groups would be better than working separately. Work together and create initiatives that will benefit us when we grow up.”

3. What We Learned

- Please summarize your perspective on the key points you listed in section two. Why were they important? Were they brought up frequently, met with contention, surprising to you or your facilitators, etc.? Was there a strong consensus on any of the key points? You are welcome to expand on any key points you find especially interesting.

From our conversations, participants were very quick to come up with environmental changes impacting the community, and everyone agreed that the extreme swings in temperature and the lack of moisture had the biggest impact on growing, harvesting, and buying food. As facilitators, we found it surprising how detailed people were when discussing wildlife issues, for example that they noticed baby ducks were being born too late in the season. There was also a strong consensus that this has to be a community issue instead of an individual or health clinic issue, although it was difficult to come up with solutions that all members would participate in.

- To what extent do you think your conversation built wider and deeper understanding of the links and synergies between community resilience, livelihoods, income security and the low-carbon transition? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so
- 4
 - The knowledge keepers that participated in our conversations reminded elders of the environmental and economic issues the community is facing. We saw a lot of “ah ha!” moments for participants as they realized how climate change is related to community resilience, food security and income security. It was also interesting to receive feedback from students - a group you may not think could see the links between the environment and income.

- To what extent did participants demonstrate increased awareness of climate change and their own capacity for climate action? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so
- 3
 - Most of the participants were able to quickly identify how climate change is impacting their life. It was more difficult to understand their own capacity for climate change, as many elders felt there was nothing they could do at this stage in their life and many students felt like they didn't know enough.
- To what extent were new relationships between community partners and conversation participants created and fostered? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so
- 3
 - The partnerships created were primarily connecting participants to services the health clinic already offers. Many elders were not aware of the gardening services the health clinic offers, so many people were connected to those initiatives through these conversations. Unfortunately we didn't have band staff from multiple departments or community members working in the agriculture sector participate in our conversations, so we didn't make any connections to other organizations or departments.
- To what extent did your conversation create opportunities to foster ongoing discussion of solutions related to climate change, income insecurity and community resilience? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so
- 4
 - Many participants indicated they felt inspired by our conversations and wanted them to continue. They are looking forward to future conversations with more community members to brainstorm solutions to the climate impacts the community faces.
- In your opinion, what does the community need to do next in order to build or maintain resilience in the face of climate change and rising income insecurity?

- Chief and Council need to make it a priority in their strategic plan. They are the ultimate say in what kind of projects can take place in BOCN, and they are the gatekeepers to bigger, more sustainable

4. Next steps

The most important next step is to get the rest of the community on board. Participants suggested including this conversation in Chief and Council's annual planning and to include some of these questions in the annual community-wide survey, followed by a series of community engagement sessions. From there, we can tackle projects head-on as a community.

As the partner organization, we plan to hold quarterly events to highlight topics explored in these conversations, especially as we try to get the rest of the community on board. These events will consist of an evening meal, a presentation, and an opportunity for discussion. We are also going to bring our conversations up the monthly inter-departmental meetings, which consist of all band departments. We are excited that we had the opportunity to participate in this process because it helped us create a plan going forward!