

**Building Sustainable, Localized Communities -  
A Research and Constituency Report.**

June 2015

## **A Message from Dennis Bevington, MP Northwest Territories**

Throughout Canada, the gap between people who have and those who have not is growing. Cost of living is a main driver of growing inequalities in the NWT. This was the reason I undertook research in 2013 to:

- Identify the inequalities created by income and cost of living,
- Examine current responses to cost of living issues in the NWT, and
- Propose actions to deal with cost of living issues.<sup>1</sup>

The 2013 *Tackling Living Costs in the NWT* research found that even though the NWT's GDP increased dramatically over the past decade due to diamond mining, the distribution of incomes has become the most unequal in Canada. The NWT now has the poorest 20% and the richest 20% of households in the country. This tells us that an economy based on extractive industries is making our communities more unequal. Inequality hurts us all.

The 2013 research examined government and community responses to inequities. It concluded that a path toward sustainability, particularly with respect to food and energy, offers real options for reducing inequality and providing greater security for all.

In 2014, I launched an online survey on sustainable local economies.<sup>2</sup> I undertook this survey in conjunction with Bob Bromley, MLA Weledeh in Yellowknife. Among the 58 diverse individuals/organizations from throughout the NWT who participated in the survey, there were multiple and inter-related interests in sustainable community economies. Interests focused on food, renewable energies, harmony with the natural environment, community empowerment, and education and research. Survey participants also expressed a keen interest in participating in an NWT forum on sustainable local economies. To this end, I worked with Ecology North,<sup>3</sup> a charitable, non-profit organization to organize the first NWT-wide Building Localized Economies Gathering. The Gathering was held in Yellowknife on May 22-23, 2015. To a large extent, the Gathering built on my 2013 cost of living research and 2014 online survey. I am deeply appreciative of Ecology North's work to advance the conversation on sustainable communities.

As a precursor to the two-day Ecology North Building Localized Economies Gathering, I held a constituency meeting on May 21, 2015 to:

- share the results of the *Sustainable NWT Communities – Summary of an Online Survey* (2015), and
- host the Dene National Chief and Regional Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and
- learn from two British Columbia economists about sustainable community economies.

The constituency meeting was attended by about 50 individuals from Yellowknife, the Tlicho Region, and elsewhere in the NWT. I also participated in the Ecology North

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.dennisbevington.ca/pdfs/en/2013/Tackling\\_Living\\_Costs\\_in\\_the\\_NWT.pdf](http://www.dennisbevington.ca/pdfs/en/2013/Tackling_Living_Costs_in_the_NWT.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.dennisbevington.ca/pdfs/en/2015/Sustainable\\_NWT\\_Survey\\_Report\\_2015.pdf](http://www.dennisbevington.ca/pdfs/en/2015/Sustainable_NWT_Survey_Report_2015.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ecologynorth.ca/>

Building Localized Economy Gathering to gather ideas and direction from the some 100 northerners attending and the estimated 200 people following the Gathering online.

This report draws together the thinking shared in the 2013 *Tackling Living Costs in the NWT* and the 2015 *Sustainable NWT Communities – Summary of an Online Survey* with discussion at my May 21 constituency meeting and the Ecology North Building Localized Economy Gathering.



May 21 Constituency Meeting (photo Bob Wilson)

## What I Heard at My Constituency Meeting

The GNWT Bureau of Statistics reports that in 2013-14, the NWT's GDP rose by 6.8%, the highest growth of all Canadian provinces and territories.<sup>4</sup> This has generally been the trend over the last decade. While the NWT has been a leader in economic growth, more worrying trends have emerged with it.

- The NWT's population is diminishing as people move away and pass on.
- Poverty is increasing.
- Disparities between high and low income households are growing in NWT communities.
- Money is leaking out of community economies due to lack of business opportunities and non-local spending.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.statsnwt.ca/economy/gdp/2014GDP\\_APR.pdf](http://www.statsnwt.ca/economy/gdp/2014GDP_APR.pdf)

These factors are making our communities and society unsustainable even though we know that many people and communities are working to build sustainable economies. In fact, the 2013 *Tackling Living Costs in the NWT* research underscored that sustainable living is what northerners know about, do best, and are doing. The 2014 online survey added to our knowledge of the many ways that northerners are building sustainable businesses and lifestyles.

Healthy, sustainable communities are what everyone wants to see but all orders of governments need to support this vision. There is also the need for greater understanding and support for the inter-dependence of small and large NWT communities. “A healthy Yellowknife is dependent on healthy communities throughout the NWT.” “If small communities are strong so is Yellowknife.” Changing government policy and supporting inter-dependence are not major barriers. After all, “the NWT has very progressive cultures. There are not many places in the country where multi-culturalism is so widely accepted and celebrated.” Further, the NWT already has cultures and communities with a long history of practicing sustainability.

First Nations are leaders in sustainability and environmental protection. By upholding the values and principles of environmental stewardship and calling for sustainable practices, First Nations are honouring the ancestors and future generations, and the rights of all citizens. In the NWT, a relationship with the land and a healthy environment are cherished by all northerners. It is astounding that there is so little public dialogue both in the NWT and elsewhere in the country about sustainable practices.



Dene National Chief Bill Erasmus speaking at the May 21 Constituency Meeting (photo Bob Wilson)

Settling land ownership and stewardship questions in the NWT are essential to the stability of the NWT. An energy plan is needed that includes the Dene economy. An inclusive energy plan could be a model for others and move the NWT into a

sustainable future. Although it took years to achieve, the NWT has a net metering<sup>5</sup> system that is a foundational element of an energy plan that promotes self-sufficiency and sustainability.

The NWT needs to move from a 'boom-bust' economic model to sustainable enterprises and add value to them. For example, tourism creates solid economic opportunities but northerners aren't always being "good recipients of tourists." "We know that our (Dene) people are okay with tourism but First Nations need to be more involved, especially as operators," and link with other communities to maximize benefits.

## What Economists Think About the Prospects for Sustainable NWT Communities

**Diana Gibson** and **Dave Thompson**, principals with PolicyLink Research and Consulting in British Columbia, have done legal and economic work in taxation, trade, energy, health, and environmental policy and organizational development. Some of this work has been in the NWT. Dave and Diana have "always been impressed with the engagement of northerners" in matters that affect quality of life and the environment.

Dave and Diana were asked to connect the dots around climate, environmental, and political changes and ways to rethink priorities and draw on traditions of sustainable local economies to provide a path forward for this and future generations. No small task! They began by confronting the myth that northerners and Canadians have heard over and over - that there is no alternative to an economy based on extractive industry. Alternatives are possible; it is time to have a bigger conversation about them. No other jurisdiction in the country seems to be having this discussion so the NWT has a chance to lead the way.



*Dennis Bevington hosting Diana Gibson and Dave Thompson on May 21<sup>st</sup> (photo Bob Wilson)*

Connecting the dots among the factors impacting sustainable local economies requires a look at two significant threats to society – climate change and poverty.

### **Climate:**

Fossil fuel use and associated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are driving climate change. The impacts of climate change on the environment could end or irrevocably alter civilization. While people around the world are moving away from fossil fuels, divestment is only part of the answer. Changing the economic model is the other. To buffer the effects of climate change, broader society including the NWT, need to move from the global to the local.

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<sup>5</sup> A program called Net Metering, allows Northwest Territories Power Corporation (NTPC) customers who own small, commercially-proven, renewable energy generators to generate their own power and send any surplus onto the electricity grid in their community. <https://www.ntpc.com/customer-service/net-billing>



Local economies have a history of sustainability because people “lived off the interest not the capital. They didn’t undermine the foundation” of their economies. Local economies:

- Enhance rather than degrade resources with interventions aimed at increasing productivity and sustainability (e.g., controlled forest burns).
- Target the people who live in the community/area rather than transient populations.
- Take a bottom-up or grassroots approach, and
- Support diversity.

To move economies from the global to the local and from the unsustainable to the sustainable, public policy needs to:

- Remove fossil fuel subsidies.
- Establish carbon pricing based on the ‘polluter pays principle’.
- Refocus the economic orientation on diverse local enterprises rather than extractive activities and a single industry.
- Replace the current economic model that relies on external investors with one that builds economies with local people in mind.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Poverty and Inequality:***

Poverty and inequality are harmful to the economy for all the obvious reasons related to peoples’ ability to fully participate. Poverty and inequality are growing throughout Canada and around the world. Scientific evidence,<sup>7</sup> citizen resistance to austerity policies, and government pandering to the privilege of the rich are creating greater awareness of the negative impacts of poverty and inequality. As a result, the issues of poverty and inequality are becoming part of mainstream thinking and beginning to influence public policy.

Taxation is one factor driving poverty and inequality, mainly because governments are not collecting the taxes needed to provide programs and services to all people. A trend is emerging to increase taxes on the highest income earners and corporations. “Canadians are really paying attention to the 1%.”

The NWT is one of many jurisdictions that still has an anti-tax bias. Northern governments have room to raise corporate taxes. Many examples from around the world can inform more progressive taxation



*Dennis Bevington with Julie Green of the No Place for Poverty Coalition (photo Ben Nind)*

<sup>6</sup> Diana Gibson described the current economic model as ‘smoke stack chasing’ rather than one of ‘economic gardening.’

<sup>7</sup> An example is *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* by Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett published in 2009 by Allen Lane. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/mar/13/the-spirit-level>

policy in the NWT. For example, Australia has a tax on mineral extraction. Norway not only receives a high return from the extraction of public resources but has invested resource extraction profits to ensure benefits of all Norwegians now and in the future. It also has an agreement with industry to transfer corporate technology to the state. The NWT has an opportunity to alter taxation policy so it is investing in sustainable economic infrastructure and social and cultural development. By doing so, NWT governments would be investing in local people and addressing poverty and inequality.

Homeless, globalized businesses don't attend to local needs. This is a reason that ownership is so important to addressing poverty and inequality. Public and cooperative ownership structures are ways to include local people and make sure that investment remains local. Collective ownership structures common among First Nations are also models for local economies.

Valuing non-monetary community strengths or attributes is another way to address poverty and inequality. Quality of life, community cohesion, and other elements of social capital are all important factors in sustaining communities and local economies. While it is challenging to positively impact these factors through public policy, a fundamental shift in investment and taxation practices to support these attributes is needed. Investment and taxation should be tied to things that people value and care about.

Constituents agreed with, and expanded on many of the points made by Dave and Diana. For example, cooperatives are a good economic model because they engender local participation, commitment, and benefits. The Yellowknife Old Town Glassworks workers' collective is a good



*Sara Brown, NWTAC, Doug Whiteman, Norman Wells, Adrian Nataway, Lutsel k'e and Walter Desjarlais, Lutsel k'e listening intently at the Gathering (photo Ben Nind)*

example. Cooperative approaches to food enterprises are the way to address persistent storage and transportation issues. Northerners need to look at the sustainable economic practices that are happening now, and explore and create markets for local products and services (e.g., "take them to the next level.") Many local businesses aren't packaging their products or linking with others in ways that make sense and have mutual benefits. For example, the best customers for local fisheries is the local tourism industry; and the best customers for locally grown potatoes is industrial camps.

In terms of dealing with high food costs, local bakeries are a very real possibility for reducing costs and creating jobs. The Nutrition North subsidy could be used as a micro investment to build local healthy food businesses.

People in the NWT also need to recognize that heating with wood is tax free and doesn't require a lot of capital investment.

## **Building Localized Economies Gathering**

The two-day Ecology North Building Localized Economies Gathering involved 36 speakers, 34 who are my constituents in the NWT. The speakers shared their experiences and advice for building sustainable localized economies. The speakers and discussion among participants echoed many of the issues raised in my *Tackling Living Costs in the NWT* research and the *Sustainable NWT Communities – Summary of an On-Line Survey*. I am proud to have participated in this event.

A summary of the main themes and advice offered is provided here.



*Building Localized Economies Gathering at the Tree of Peace Friendship Centre (photo Ben Nind)*

## **Food, the Heart of Localized Economies**

Seven speakers shared their experiences and advice for localized food production, harvesting, processing, storage, and distribution. The speakers were:

- Jackie Milne, Northern Farm Training Institute in Hay River,
- Fred Sangris, Yellowknives Dene First Nation,
- Doug Whiteman, Green Enterprises in Norman Wells,
- France Benoit, Yellowknife Farmers' Market,
- Sam Bullock, Bullocks Bistro in Yellowknife,
- Craig Scott, Arctic Harvest in Yellowknife, and
- John Colford from GNWT Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI).

Food systems are at the heart of localized economies and of food security for everyone. Reconnecting with, and linking the food system to the living ecosystem can help northerners deal with climate, infrastructure, costs, and the loss of wild food sources that are threatening the NWT's sustainability. Although diets may change, people in



the NWT can grow or harvest locally needed staple food and supplement them with imports. Northerners also have the opportunity to capture a share of the \$150 to \$170 million spent annually on food. Most of this spending currently leaks out of the NWT.

The 2013 *Tackling Living Costs in the NWT* research and 2015 *Sustainable NWT Communities – Summary of an Online Survey* identified a host of sustainable economic enterprises in the NWT. Speakers at the Gathering added more. Initiatives underway to build local food systems are as follows.

- People in N'dilo and Dettah are combining traditional foods like moose, ducks, fish, and beaver with grown vegetables. They have community and individual gardens, and are increasingly interested in the local fishery. Fred Sangris says he “love(s) gardening and it works with fishing – it’s a healthy way to live.”
- Norman Wells has a long history of agriculture including gardening, greenhouses, and potato farming. As well, Doug Whiteman is a local resident with lots of tips to share about farming in a sub-Arctic climate.
- Businesses like Arctic Harvest in Yellowknife harvest wild plants and birch sap and sell these products at the Yellowknife Farmers’ Market.
- The Yellowknife Farmers’ Market, now in its third year, has 200-400 weekly customers; 96 approved vendors (in 2014); and directly and indirectly contributes \$1 million to the local economy.<sup>8</sup>
- The Yellowknife Farmers’ Market is advancing the Yellowknife Food Charter which envisions a just and sustainable food system rooted in a healthy community where everyone has access to adequate and affordable nutritious food; more food is grown and harvested locally; and food production policies and infrastructure are in place to support an economically viable, diverse, and ecologically sustainable local food system.
- The Northern Farm Training Institute (NFTI) is a social enterprise with a farm in Hay River, a unique program, and a goal of producing \$1 million in produce, feeding 200 people, and training and mentoring northerners in local food production. It is part of the International Savoury Institute network and intends to be a resource on sustainable local food systems throughout the circumpolar world.
- Every NWT community has experts in harvesting and processing fish for domestic markets whether it be traditional smoking and drying methods or handling fresh and frozen fish for commercial



*Dennis Bevington and Fred Sangris (photo Bob Wilson)*

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<sup>8</sup>Gross revenue data are collected every week. Sales average about \$17,000 per week. A typical farmer’s market multiplier of \$3.2 produced for every \$1 spent is used to calculate overall economic impact.

consumption. Sam Bullock is one expert who is currently training an apprentice fish handler. Sam is also working on a curriculum for fish harvesting and processing.

To improve opportunities for local food systems, several barriers must be addressed. Northerners need access to:

- uncontaminated, good quality soil,
- agricultural land,
- training (e.g., ‘from the lake to the table’ fisheries training), and
- information on what food to grow and how to grow it.

Northerners also need:

- supportive policies and regulations to ensure practical, realistic responses to food safety and local food needs;
- a Nutrition North subsidy that does not undercut the sale of local produce; and
- support to facilitate inter-community shipping of locally produced and harvested foods.

### ***Generating Our Own Energy***

Nine speakers made presentations about the local and global movement to generate renewable energy. The speakers were:

- Dave Thomson, PolicyLink Research and Consulting,
- Remi Gervais, City of Yellowknife,
- Agatha Laboucan, Lutsel k’e Dene First Nation,
- David Krutko, Tetlit Gwich’in Council,
- Dwayne Wohlgemuth, Ko Energy,
- Mitch Dentinger, NWT Solar,
- Jack Van Camp, Stand Alone Energy,
- Nina Larsson, Energy North, and
- Sheena Adams, Arctic Energy Alliance.



*Dennis Bevington and Jack Van Camp  
(photo Ben Nind)*

Localized energy generation is growing rapidly around the world, especially in regions like the NWT where there is limited other energy infrastructure to compete with. Climate change, energy costs, and health are three of the main drivers of renewable energies. For instance, diesel exhaust contains benzene, arsenic, formaldehyde, and many other chemicals which are known human carcinogens and contributors to cardio-vascular and cardio-pulmonary risks. Governments and communities are also beginning to realize that compared to oil and gas, an investment in renewable energy is an investment in local jobs and businesses.

The NWT is a leader in biomass. The biomass industry is a success in the NWT due in large part, to GNWT policy support, investment, and subsidy programs. Communities are realizing significant cost savings and job creation benefits from biomass energy generation. Fort McPherson, Inuvik, Norman Wells, and Yellowknife are some of the communities leading the way on biomass energy generation.

There are lots of energy opportunities for the NWT, given that the full, unsubsidized per kW cost of electricity is \$.75/kWh. In many markets around the world, solar energy is at grid parity which makes it a very attractive energy source. Solar energy production is a growing industry in the NWT.

Solar, biomass, and wind are sources of stand-alone and hybrid energy systems. Examples in the NWT showing the benefits of renewable energy are:

- The City of Yellowknife's investment in renewable energy in public facilities has reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 25% and resulted in savings of \$650, 000 in 2013/14. The City is testing residential scale heat pumps; a 20 kW solar PV system for the field house; planning two large biomass installations; and putting LED lighting everywhere. The City is also considering more community gardens; using waste streams as energy sources; funding programs for efficient solar and biomass retrofits and installation; and EV charge stations.
- The Lutsel k'e Dene First Nation solar PV project is designed to sell 35 kW to the Northern Territories Power Corporation (NTCP) and reduce the amount of diesel used in the community.
- The Tetlit Gwich'in Council's biomass project uses pellets and locally harvested wood. The project has cut heating costs by 40% at the band office; created local jobs; and kept more money in the local economy. The project also provides



*Features of Dwayne Wohlgemuth's energy efficient home (from Dwayne's presentation)*

residual heat to the school with the understanding that savings are re-invested in the education of local children.

- Renewable energy businesses exist in many NWT communities. They offer access to technology, skilled staff, storage facilities, and the capacity to respond to the growing local market for renewable energy.

Northerners pursuing renewable energies are encouraged by the interest and support throughout the NWT. Community governments and local businesses are working hard to respond to local interest. While the rapid growth of renewable energies is encouraging, government policy and regulation have not kept pace. As a result, people seeking to replace fossil fuels with renewable energies are facing unnecessary barriers. Further, governments are slow to invest in, and ensure that northerners retain public or collective ownership of the energy grid which is an essential public service.

### ***Taking Our Power Back***

Nine speakers made presentations about the interdependent relationship of community governance, local economies, and wellbeing:

- Diana Gibson, PolicyLink Research and Consulting,
- Arthur Tobac, Ne'rahten Development Ltd.,
- Andrew Cassidy, Town of Hay River,
- Mark Heyck, City of Yellowknife,
- Danny Bayha, Deline Land Corporation,
- Suzette Montreuil, No Place for Poverty Coalition,
- Paul Cressman, Cressman Consulting,
- Deneze Nakhek'o, Dene Nahjo, and
- Rosalind Mercredi, Down to Earth Gallery.



Joe Hanlon, Arthur Tobac, Danny Bayha and Mark Heyck (photo Ben Nind)

Government policy should support local economies, communities, and residents. Without good government, there is no economy. Local economies exist everywhere but they are not always recognized or supported in public policy, nor are the elements that make local economies work, recognized. On all measures, local economies deliver better than those based on outside investments. For example, independent local businesses recirculate more than 2.6 times as much revenue in the local economy than chains like Walmart or Canadian Tire.<sup>9</sup> Local economies:

- Create small, local businesses;
- Deliver more jobs;

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<sup>9</sup> <http://locobc.com/2013/02/19/civic-economics-release-bc-study/>



- Better distribute income;
- Improve wellbeing for more people;
- Are more inclusive; and
- Have the biggest impact on poverty reduction.

Wellbeing is both a cause and effect of a healthy community and local economy. People and businesses are attracted to communities with healthy workers who are well housed, educated and skilled; social and family cohesion; and overall quality of life. Governments should be investing in people and social infrastructure. For every \$1 government invests in growing healthy workers and community environments the return is more than double.

First Nation land corporations in the Sahtu Region and local governments elsewhere in the NWT are playing an important role in building localized economies. They are localizing economies through a focus on families, good communications, partnerships, and working with local champions.



*Mayor Andrew Cassidy participating in the Gathering via Skype (photo Ben Nind)*

- In Fort Good Hope, a planning exercise showed that a local economy is more sustainable and has fewer barriers for local people than an economy based on an extractive industry. To this end, the Land Corporation purchased a mobile unit to facilitate local meat and fish processing and storage; supports community gardening, annual geese harvesting, community hunts, and moose hide tanning; and is finding ways to promote the much sought after Fort Good Hope arts and crafts, traditional and cultural events, and a local tourism industry.
- Partnerships have enabled the Town of Hay River to expand its capacity to host events and bring in funding and work on living costs and building food production capacity.
- Yellowknife's efforts to build a local economy include: social media campaigns and partnerships to promote local spending; downtown revitalization efforts such as supporting different business models, and tax and business improvement districts incentives; a tourism destination marketing campaign and distinct tourism strategy; and continuing to foster the use of renewable energies through for example, local improvement incentives. The City supports local food production and is planning to develop its own agriculture plan and policies. It also is looking at ways to derive as many local benefits as possible from the mining sector.
- The Deline Land Corporation has a vision of community-based businesses and active harvesting activities. It works from a business model that puts priority on creating and sustaining local employment and services rather than being solely

profit driven. It also uses tools available to the community such as a land use plan and the recently signed self-government agreement. The Land Corporation builds local capacity by offering scholarships and bursaries and looks to traditions and the land to address high living costs.



*Lois Little, Suzette Montreuil, Paul Cressman, Deneze Nakhek'o and Rosalind Mercredi (photo Ben Nind)*

It is promoting tourism and examining the possibility of a run of the river power installation on the Bear River.

- The Tlicho Government supports wilderness therapy programming through programs like Tlicho Imbe and Wilderness Safety which are paths to wellbeing, a strong local economy, and to being 'strong like two people.' Tlicho Imbe develops leadership skills, self-esteem, and cultural and community connections. The Wilderness Safety program certifies outdoor experts; reinforces the value of traditional knowledge; and builds essential wellness, job, financial literacy, tourism, and small business skills.

Volunteer groups and cooperatives are also working on building healthy communities and local economies.

- The No Place for Poverty Coalition has successfully lobbied the GNWT for the NWT Anti-Poverty Action Plan and support for community-based anti-poverty efforts. But much more work is needed. The Coalition continues to advocate for more society-wide buy-in and meaningful, sustained support to address poverty; greater priority to early childhood and equality of education for First Nations children and youth; and income security including a living wage.
- Dene Nahjo is focusing on land based activities and building relationships with elders and indigenous mentors, all of which are necessary for people to have a sense of place and identity. Dene Nahjo is also looking at setting up a cultural centre as a way to mentor and promote Dene skills, knowledge, and culture.
- The Down to Earth Gallery is a collective that sells art made in the north by about 90 artists, as a way of making and facilitating art, and ensuring that artists get a fair return for their work. The Gallery is also a source of support for supplies, mentorship, and promotion and an important player in the "huge art-based cottage industry in the NWT."

While there are many local government, voluntary, and cooperative efforts to support local economies, initiatives are often challenged by the lack of:

- local capacity for example, to manage and respond to regulations related to food production.
- local enterprises that embrace land-based skills and knowledge.
- public policy that supports cooperatives.
- appropriate public policy to support residential investment in renewable energies.
- appropriate policies that encourage job sharing and part-time work.
- pride and celebration of the mastery of local artists.
- concerted public support to ensure that traditional skills are not under-valued and are marketed properly.

### ***Breaking the Mould***

Ten speakers made presentations about reshaping the economy, reclaiming citizenship, and taking back control of the Commons or public spaces:

- Bob Bromley, MLA Weledeh,
- Erin Freeland Ballantyne, Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning,
- AJ Sanders, Arctic Green Energy,
- Paige Saunders, SOS/ZJYK Academy/Edge,
- Giselle Marion, Tlicho Online Store,
- Amos Scott, NWT Professional Media Association,
- Joe Hanlon, Sahtu Renewable Resources Board,
- Stephanie Poole, Lutsel k'e Dene First Nation,
- Dahti Tsetso, Dehcho First Nations, and
- Larry Innes, International Boreal Conservation Campaign.

Globalization is threatening the health of the natural world and civilization. Local control has been diminished by a globalized economy and homeless transnational corporations. The destruction of local economies and the Commons is leading to dangerous climate change, and people being unsafe in their homelands. Rebuilding human relationships and connections to the natural world offers opportunities for northerners to reclaim control of the Commons and develop a “living wealth economy”.<sup>10</sup> Indigenous knowledge can help set the NWT on a path toward balance



*Bob Bromley and Erin Freeland Ballantyne (photo Ben Nind)*

<sup>10</sup> <http://liveingeconomiesforum.org/real-wealthliving-wealth>

and diversity that serves both the natural and human worlds. But the significant disconnect between government priorities and policies, and human values and aspirations is a situation that needs correction. Northerners can (re)imagine a better world and the kind of government needed to get there. In fact, many are already moving along this path. More northerners are recognizing that “if we love the land and take care of it, we can be stronger and better off individually and in our families and communities.”



*Jerney Flatt, Paul Cressman, and Deneze Nakhek'o (photo Ben Nind)*

Several northerners are among those leading the way to a living wealth economy.

- Arctic Green Energy is building carbon neutral, biomass district energy systems to serve the local market. The benefits of a domestic biomass industry include local employment, maximizing energy efficiencies, energy self-sufficiency, lower living costs, a smaller carbon footprint, and opportunities for partnerships. The company plans to move away from wood pellets to locally harvested forest fire killed trees. Building a forestry industry is a necessary first step for this to occur.
- EDGE is a vibrant web design company that serves an under-served niche market. It is an example of a company that is reconnecting northerners and stimulating new ideas.
- The Tlicho Online Store<sup>11</sup> is a cutting edge business that is preserving, recreating, and celebrating the NWT's cultural heritage. It connects the land, culture, and artists with people around the world who can learn about and experience Tlicho and northern culture. It is planning to expand into tourism so that people can buy authentic products and also experience authentic Tlicho

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<sup>11</sup> <http://onlinestore.tlicho.ca/>



culture. The Online Store is strengthening local economies and connections with the natural world locally and around the world.

- Much of the work of the 106 individuals in 24 companies who make up the NWT Professional Media Association, is focused on telling northern stories. The industry has a significant place in the NWT economy and contributes \$9.7 million to the GDP. The media industry has the potential to grow and to use multi-media to tell unique northern stories that focus on indigenous knowledge.
- The Sahtu Renewable Resources Board and its sister co-management authorities function with the understanding that the region has a mixed traditional and industrial economy. To this end, the Board has been conducting research and on-the-land work to examine health and climate change adaptation within the context of traditional economies and community action planning that links to the traditional economy (e.g., eco and cultural tourism).
- The Dehcho First Nation has organized internally to protect the land, especially heavily used traditional areas. In keeping with living wealth economies, land protection is founded on three principles: 1) the central place of language to Dene culture and understanding of the land; 2) implementation of Dene laws, values, and principles; and 3) the relationship of elders and youth. In other words, youth need to be on the land with their elders learning Dene ways and laws. Being on the land in the Dene way according to Dene laws, protects the land. It also builds local economies.
- The Lutsel k'e Dene First Nation is establishing the Thaidene Nene Protected Area within its traditional territory as a way to carry on the work of the ancestors to protect the land for future generations, use indigenous knowledge, and create local jobs and tourism opportunities. Thaidene Nene is expected to create 17-18 part-time jobs and five full-time jobs, as well as up to 30 seasonal and 20 year-round jobs through spin-off activities.
- The International Boreal Conservation Campaign (IBCC) is working with northerners to find ways to improve sustainability in the mining sector, better support environmental stewardship capacity within indigenous governments at the local level, and reduce environmental liabilities. In its early stages, IBCC's work suggests that mines, communities, and the NWT economy as a whole are



*The Dehcho First Nations' approach to caring for the land (from Dahti Tsetso's presentation)*

better off when resource extraction is done in ways that respect the environment and local communities.

These are just some of the examples of ways that northerners are reconnecting to the natural world and building local economies through these relationships. But like other efforts to build localized economies, they are hampered by lack of appropriate public policy, programs and plans. For example, the biomass industry requires an assessment of NWT forestry capacity and a management or industry plan. While Fort McPherson has a forestry plan that guides its biomass industry, no plan exists for the NWT. Another example is public government resistance to communities seeking to develop land based economies while protecting traditional territories.



Dahti Tsetso, Stephanie Poole, Joe Hanlon, and Larry Innes (photo Ben Nind)

## Concluding Thoughts

This report shows consistent themes and findings as I identified in the 2013 *Tackling Living Costs in the NWT* research and 2015 *Sustainable NWT Communities – Summary of an Online Survey*. Northerners want healthy sustainable communities and economies. They expect their governments to work with them to achieve these aspirations. But this isn't always happening.

Northerners have several ways to move the NWT economy from a focus on extractive industries to sustainable localized economies.

We can:

- Use our voices in upcoming elections to elect leaders who support local economies and healthy, sustainable communities.

- Continue to lobby existing governments for appropriate public policy and program support.
- Organize in our communities to continue to build local economies.
- Link to efforts elsewhere such as the International Savoury Institute.
- Just do it, like the elders in the Dehcho Region who say “we need to be who we say we are.”

As MP for the Northwest Territories, I am committed to working with northerners on all of these fronts. I also intend to keep connected to Ecology North as they plan for a second gathering of northerners building localized economies.