On-reserve First Nations Emergency Management and the Way Forward for INAC and the Canadian Framework

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Introduction

This study will examine various forms of literature to provide insight into the accessibility of Emergency Management (EM) resources to First Nations on-reserve communities and attempt to make comparisons to non Indigenous communities and their resource accessibility. To do so, it will examine Canada's various policies and frameworks for Emergency Management, and the international documents and agreements on which they are based. These frameworks shape the way in which collaboration, and communication is addressed by Federal, Provincial and Territorial EM planning and outlines the direction in which EM in Canada is headed. Indigenous peoples face a particular set of vulnerabilities from inter-generational traumas resulting from historic colonial practices that create unique obstacles to effective emergency management. These vulnerabilities are amplified by the reserve system and cultural difficulties toward beneficial municipal and provincial partnerships. By looking at existing EM practices through the principles of High Reliability Organizations, while bearing a sensitivity to the appropriateness to First Nations on-reserve communities we can develop a comprehensive and adaptable framework to Indigenous determinants of vulnerability and uncover assets within Indigenous communities that can improve the Canadian practices of EM in general.

1. The International Basis of Canadian Frameworks

The field of emergency management in Canada is conducted on many levels of private and public sectors, as well as a plethora of Non Government Organizations which lend support and resources in both times of response as well as in times of development to increase resilience. All of these governmental agencies, NGOs, groups and individuals play an important role in our understanding of, and response to hazards and risks in our communities, businesses and societies. The framework that has arisen from these collaborations is the Emergency Management Framework for Canada. A guide for the various ministries that establishes a skeleton on which to build plans and policies. It is intended to be an extension of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai Framework) and as such is the affirmation of the Canadian government to adhere to the articles of those documents (Emergency Management Policy and Outreach Directorate [EMPOD], 2017). So, to gain a full understanding of this overarching document for EM in Canada, the international basis of these goals should be first examined.
The Sendai Framework was created by the United Nations Office of Disaster Risk Reduction Organization (UNISDR) in a collaborative manner that combined the efforts and interests of many stakeholders coming together in Sendai, Japan. It has been developed from the previous Hyogo Framework to maintain relevance in the current paradigm of Risk Management over Disaster Management. The two terms, though seemingly similar, are far apart in concept. Disaster Management assumes the realization of risk, and devises ways to treat it, whereas Risk Management concentrates on the sources of risk, and their minimization in order to alleviate vulnerability to hazards. In the Sendai Framework, the UN has recognized many of the shortcomings of the dominant paradigm and has made many recommendations for change in the way EM is approached. It stresses the importance of collaboration between cultures and communities at all levels of governance and specifically, the knowledge and cultural assets that are offered by Indigenous peoples (Sendai, 2015. sec. 19-24). This recognition of the value of the knowledge and the strength of networks and social capital of Indigenous peoples is reflected in the Emergency Management Framework for Canada (Marteleira, 2017). It is a strength born of resistance to many centuries to colonialism, and has been adapted to modern times in a people's desire to prevent assimilation and the loss of their cultural heritage. From this resistance, much can be learned and applied to future EM planning methodologies. As we combine the pieces that make up an effective emergency plan, and use the frameworks put forth by the UNISDR and Canadian government we find that we can apply traditional knowledge with current practices in a format that can be used to protect all facets of Canadian society. We have many of the tools to do this in an inclusive manner at our disposal, but to complete the task, we must find a way to recognize the strengths in each other, and uncover meaningful partnership opportunities.

First Nations EM in Canada is the responsibility of INAC (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada) and the chain of authority is split between the newly formed ministries of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, and Indigenous Services. In times of emergency, First Nations on-reserve communities are required to find aid first from support agreements between themselves and provincial, territorial or “other stakeholders” and should that be inadequate, emergency assistance and funding can be made available through application through their Regional Directors (INAC On-reserve Emergency Management Plan, 2017). The process can be slow and often systems are not in place to follow through with their implementation, so government bodies step in and play a paternal role in EM rather than from as equal actors in partnerships.
Case studies throughout, have suggested that this paternal role is more often than not the situation that First Nations face, with reports that there is little to no civic engagement during crises. Although both Sendai, and the Canadian Frameworks recognize that there is much to be offered in First Nations partnerships, which are the mandate of INAC to facilitate, relations seem to be one sided rather than collaborative.

2. Leaning away from effective collaboration

In historic disaster situations, there has been a level of distrust between governmental responses and First Nations communities. For the most part, this is very much the result of colonial practices that forced Indigenous from their lands and into reserves that have often been the least desirable areas and those most vulnerable to natural hazards. That organizational behaviour is understood to be an obstacle to meaningful partnership in EM. In the case of the Red River flooding of 1997 in southern Manitoba, three communities in the flood plains were affected and required intervention from the Manitoba Emergency Management Organization (MEMO) in response. Two of the communities, Rosenort and St. Jean Baptiste were ethnically of European descent, while the third, Roseau River, was of the Anishinabe First Nation. Roseau River suffered from colonial underdevelopment, and the effects of this situation shed light upon the disparities between the various EM efforts. (Buckland & Rahman, 1999)

Generally, those surveys regarding the relationships between MEMO and civic agencies found a positive collaboration within the communities of St. Jean Baptiste and Rosenort, however no respondents from the Roseau River made such affirmations. Instead they found that MEMO played a more paternalistic role, enforcing mandatory evacuations, and removing agency from the inhabitants of Roseau River which led to severe distrust (Buckland & Rahman, 1999). This has been mirrored in such research works, as Marteleira and further research by Thompson and Ballard (2013 & 2014) (as cited in Marteleira, 2017, p.21) on the British Columbia flood plains of the Strait of Georgia.
The paternalistic approach that MEMO and other EM organizations have taken in response to crises on First Nations reserves have reflected a command and control means of response that echoes colonial distrust between governments (in this case provincial) and on-reserve First Nation communities.

3. Adaptations of Parallel Frameworks

The existing plans and policies that address EM at the Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Municipal level are very detailed and comprehensive sets of documents, outlining goals and ideals from the strategic, to tactical and on down to the operational levels of organization. Mostly, they concern themselves with the needs of their majority constituents, and create partnerships with like-minded organizations who provide mutual benefit in times of need. Many of these plans are not sensitive to the specific needs of Indigenous communities especially on-reserve First Nations communities. Indigenous peoples have a deep and spiritual connection to the land, and historically, have often been forced from these lands. Reserves are tracts of lands that have been allocated by the federal government in order to “benefit the band”. These lands are not owned by the bands who live in on-reserve communities, nor do individual members, in general, have ownership of their homes (Indian Act, 18.1 & 20) Because of this, land use for purposes of EM are limited, and the resiliency associated with home and land ownership cannot be applied. Also because of the connection to the land on a cultural level, they may be unwilling to consider evacuation as a viable option. Programs and policies need to be adapted to create appropriate frameworks upon which First Nations can create operational plans and policies. The adaptation process will not only create EM processes sensitive to the needs of Indigenous peoples, but also one which will be identifiable within non-Indigenous frameworks and improve collaborative efforts.

There is one very important international document that can be held up as an example of the adaptation to Indigenous needs. the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is the adaptation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (the Declaration). It interprets the articles of the Declaration through the lens of Indigenous Peoples around the world. This process was an important step in the realization of how the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous values and cultural heritage can affect the way in which we approach treatments of societies, and by extension the way in which we evaluate risk and create treatments for hazards. The process of adaptation was achieved through the campaigning of the International Indian Treaty Council, the efforts of various United Nations Working Groups of Indigenous Peoples, and partnerships with non-Indigenous NGOs and governments (Hartley, Joffe & Preston, 2010, p.18-95). By looking at the collaborative process that
created UNDRIP from the Declaration, we see a process that was refined over more than thirty years (Hartley et al, 2010) that can be applied to the adaptation of Canada's EM into something relevant to First Nations.

The process of adapting the Declaration to be cross-cultural began with the development of partnerships within Indigenous stakeholders, and parties with shared interests who worked to create UNDRIP. Its adoption has required the collaboration of stakeholders such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with governments to implement its articles. As put forth by University of Nipissing President, Mike Degagné, it is “reaching a state of common understanding. Not common agreement, but common understanding” (Degagné, 2014 & personal communication at HREQ1960 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Symposium, York University, 2017). This sentiment mirrors much of the research into increasing collaboration in the field of First Nations EM.

3.1 Adaptation through the principles of an HRO

High Reliability Organizations represent a segment of society that are greatly resilient. They are able to continue operations in times of crisis and evolve to increase their ability to respond to changing situations and the environment with which they interact (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). These HROs and the dimensions which are recognized to define them can elucidate for us some of the ways in which we might approach the field of EM and EM planning. It will provide a method that is inclusive of both First Nations and cognizant of the assets that they provide to future EM methodologies.

Weick and Sutcliffe identify 5 principles upon which HROs base their organizations and approaches to operations. First, Preoccupation with Failure, being aware of the cues and clues that may indicate failures, and having a system to monitor and recognize these potential hazards. Second, Reluctance to Simplify: the realization that by not treating systems in their complexity, they become vulnerable to blind spots in their process, or “tunnel vision”, and ignore potentially important issues. Third, Sensitivity to Operations: recognizing that the operational level of organizations will reflect problems in strategic and tactical levels or a disconnect between how the top levels wish behaviours to be conducted and reality. Commitment to Resilience is the fourth factor, which is well understood in theory in EM, but improvements can often be overlooked when an organization thinks that it has achieved resilience. Finally, Deference to Expertise: being able to recognize when your own experience and knowledge may not be enough to find solutions to issues and acquiring the proper expertise in various fields to address issues properly. These principles can serve as the vehicle for identifying shortcomings
and strengths in our current system, and identify ways in which First Nations can help improve it while adapting it for their own cultural requirements.

3.1(1) Preoccupation with Failures in Current Systems

The current framework in Canada is heavily based on the Sendai Framework developed by the UN and references it in its current incarnation. We rely on the work completed in Sendai, Japan to guide our actions and our future planning, and after ratification of Sendai by Canada, we commit to adopting it in our own EM operations. Sendai, also recognizes all of the shortcomings of the previous response-centred Hyogo framework and its failure to include social vulnerability in EM considerations.

It is an international preoccupation with failure that set off the reworking of the old frameworks into the new one, and Canada followed by example to redevelop the Emergency Management Framework for Canada into its current incarnation. It now recognizes the “whole of society” approach which it aims to inspire in Federal, Provincial, Territorial and First Nations EM programs and planning (EMPOD, 2017). Monitoring of cues which can indicate failures or points that require improvement or adaptation should trigger rethinking of relationships that government and response units have with one another and the people they seek to protect. Preoccupation with failure and the analysis of inadequacies can provide insight into how the Canadian Framework, or the way in which it is communicated to ministries such as Indigenous Services or INAC and various levels of government can be ameliorated. Much research, such as that of Marteleira, and that of Buckley and Rahman has gone into these shortcomings in how partnerships between First Nations and government response have manifested.

3.1(2) Reluctance to Simplify and the Dominant Paradigm

There exists still, a way in which Disaster and Emergency Management is approached that is framed by response based methodology. This makes the implication that little can be done to prevent catastrophe, and a shifts focus to engineering and structural solutions. It sees people as actors within a bounded rationality; who lack the full understanding and complete information needed to make well-informed decisions regarding their own health and safety (Thomas, Phillips, Lovekamp, Fothergill, 2013). This view is oversimplified however. It does not account for the complex human systems that interact with hazards and exist in varying levels of vulnerability to create the risk of disasters in the first place. The Vulnerability Paradigm (Thomas et al) takes a risk-based view of EM and accounts for the placement of people and societies within these complex systems. This reluctance to simplify the situation provides a basis for improvement and adaptation of our existing systems and follows more closely the intentions of the Canadian Framework as well as Sendai.
3.1(3) Sensitivity to Operations: Following the Frameworks

The Sendai Framework and the Canadian Framework stresses collaboration and partnerships between all stakeholders, suggesting that communities build resilience by networking with one another and supporting each other in times of need (EMPOD, 2017). But what we find from the work of Buckland and Rahman, and later in the research of Marteleira, is that First Nations communities often do not experience the collaboration and support seen in non-First Nations. This failure at the operational level of EM suggests that the upper tiers of government are not creating or not observing the failure to create, effective equal partnerships between stakeholders which are the main initial source of support identified in the INAC On-reserve Emergency Management Plan. INAC and the ministries that have responsibility for EM in First Nations communities (Indigenous Services and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs) are not able to ensure the support through this framework is appropriate and sensitive to Indigenous cultural requirements, but have the opportunity to liaise with the bands in creating these partnerships for future events.

3.1(4) Commitment to Resilience: Indigenous Networks and Social Capital

Resilience is a very important topic, especially with a shift from the Dominant Paradigm to the Vulnerability Paradigm approach to EM. A full commitment to resilience requires the acknowledgement and use of the strength of Indigenous Networks and their high social capital (Thomas et al, 2013 & Marteleira, 2017). Various systems are proving to be effective in Canada which take a view of Risk Management over Disaster Management, such as the Resilient-C program in British Columbia, which has been used to effectively identify and partner communities with one another based on a “similarity approach” to vulnerability called Hazard Vulnerability Similarity Index (HVSI) (Chang, Yip, van Zijll de Jong, Chaster, & Lowcock, 2015)

HVSI uses a series of criteria (as demonstrated in the table below) to calculate a community's vulnerability, but not to rank it according to needs as the more standard Social Vulnerability Index which identifies those in greatest need for the purpose of allocating resources. The goal of the HVSI is to provide communities with the identification of others with a high similarity who might have great interest in partnership creation, and from whom communities can learn. Much of the criteria used by HVSI are not useful for First Nations, however it provides a framework that can be adjusted to suit the needs of any cultural criteria.
To address these needs for assessing resilience and vulnerability, the Justice Institute of British Columbia has created the *Aboriginal Disaster Resilience Planning* program, which is a set of guides and tools to assist First Nations in developing comprehensive and appropriate plans. Within this guide is the Aboriginal Resilience Index, a calculation tool similar to HVSI to identify areas of needed improvement and vulnerability within a First Nations community.

These tools for increasing resilience and identifying vulnerability in ways appropriate to Indigenous values is key to the creation of partnerships and collaborative efforts in EM.

### 3.1(5) Recognition of the Value of Indigenous Assets and Expertise

HROs have the tendency to defer to expertise when faced with complex problems outside of their own realms of experience. This deference shows a state of self-awareness of an organization that can increase resilience and ensures that information used in decision making comes from the highest sources. In cases of Indigenous Peoples, there is an already recognized strength in their network, and social capital. These assets can provide an increased measure of resilience, and when it has been observed in non-Indigenous communities such as Rosenort in the face of the Red River flooding of 1997, they showed a “vigorous response” and fared much better than their
counterparts (Buckland & Rahman, 1999). The expertise in social networking seen in many First Nations communities can be relied upon in times of crises to pull the responders together more tightly and effectively. Partnering with these communities of high social capital can distribute resiliency throughout the system and provide improved response.

4. Meaningful Collaboration & Moving Forward

There already exists the framework for effective Emergency Management in on-reserve communities for First Nations, however, there is a heavy reliance on prior partnership agreements between these communities and other stakeholders at various levels of government by INAC. INAC is required to facilitate or even create these partnerships, and in many cases it seems to be non-existant, or one-sided in its relationship. Agency and self-determination in Indigenous communities is of great importance, so these relationships with other stakeholders in the planning or response stages need to maintain a balance in power and even international documents such as Sendai stress the importance of empowerment of these communities. What has tended to occur is a paternal form of response, such as in the command and control structure of MEMO in response to the Red River Flooding.

In recognition of this importance of empowering communities, the current EM programs can guide planning and determine appropriate resources and support systems for First Nations, but they must be adaptable to their specific needs. Forms of this adaptation of documents through an Indigenous lens have proven very effective not only for the community affected, but also in creating an understanding in non-Indigenous stakeholders. UNDRIP, as adapted from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was a twofold success, first in adapting this document into one sensitive to the specific requirements of a marginalized people, but also in bringing to the foreground, issues of power imbalance that had driven the actions of many governments for many centuries. An adaptation of dominant EM practices at operational levels would have this effect if approached in a similar collaborative manner. Partnership forging at an integral level could be achieved during these adaptations and recognition of what each community can offer the other would occur.
The frameworks are in place, and systems such as HVSI are easily adapted. With the information available from the Aboriginal Disaster Resilience program, and further research to determine criteria for use in these equations, new plans can emerge, and opportunities for meaningful collaboration within First Nations and between them and non-First Nations communities, can be discovered. Future research would require study into focus groups, and surveying communities and individuals to complete a similarity index of Aboriginal Vulnerability.

This meaningful collaboration would help to fulfill the responsibilities of INAC and the ministries governing the relationship between Canada and its First Nations and provide us a launching ground for new improvements in the field of Emergency Management on all sides.
References:


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