



ELEXETA EDETS'EÈDA

Strengthening Support for Tłchọ Mining Families

Itoah Scott-Enns
Jane Glasco Northern Fellow
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ITOAH SCOTT-ENNS



Jane Glassco Northern Fellow

Itoah Scott-Enns is a member of the Tłı̨chǫ Nation and was born and raised in Denendeh (land of the Dene) in the Northwest Territories. She graduated with Distinction from the University of Toronto with an H.B.A in Aboriginal Studies and Ethics, Society & Law. Before becoming the Director of the Arctic Funders Collaborative, Itoah worked with Indigenous governments and organizations including the Tłı̨chǫ Government, managing relations with the mining industry. She is passionate about building healthy and sustainable communities in the North, and finding ways to maintain cultural traditions in the modern day. She is working to learn and pass on the Tłı̨chǫ language to her daughter Setiya. She currently lives with her family in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

Fellowship Focus

Itoah's research explored the social impacts that the diamond industry is having on Tłı̨chǫ women who have spouses employed at the mines. She sought to understand how stories of the past from when Tłı̨chǫ families lived and worked together on the land could provide guidance for working towards strengthening support for Tłı̨chǫ mining families today.

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Masicho to two amazing women in my life:
my mother, Gabrielle Mackenzie-Scott, and my mentor, Ginger Gibson.

I am grateful for the strong Tłchq women who have shared their stories, experiences and knowledge including Rosa Mantla, Monique Mackenzie, Mary Rose Charlo, Angela Zoe, Shirley Campbell, Dehga Scott, and Leona Mackenzie.

Thank you to Tony Penikett, Alan Erhlich, Sara French, Tom Axworthy, Tom Andrews, John B. Zoe, Rebecca Hall, and the many others that offered invaluable support, guidance and knowledge.

And to all of my family for their endless support and love.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mining industry has become well established and will continue to be a critical element of the Northern economy for years to come. Challenges surrounding social impact assessment have resulted in deficient policies that fail to adequately mitigate and address social impacts from the diamond industry. As a result, Tłıchǫ families are impacted by the isolated work rotations requiring Tłıchǫ men to leave their home and families for extended periods of time. Transient demands on Tłıchǫ men are not a new concept for Tłıchǫ people, as men have historically traveled away from the family to hunt and trap. However, the social environment in Tłıchǫ communities has significantly changed from traditional times, and the social cohesion that once characterized Tłıchǫ bush camps has weakened. However, it is not too late to raise the standards for socio-economic impact assessment, mitigation and response, and Tłıchǫ traditional stories can guide efforts in the Tłıchǫ region.

Devolution passes responsibility for land and resource management to the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), creating an important opportunity to improve related regulations. The GNWT has an agenda that heavily promotes resource development and economic growth, but consideration for the resulting impacts on communities is necessary. Raising the standards for socio-economic impact assessment and mitigation in the North is vital to the health of our communities and future generations. Future Socio-Economic Agreements can develop and provide resources for community-based social indicators and impact monitoring in Indigenous communities.

The Tłıchǫ Government is a critical advocate for Tłıchǫ peoples in the regulatory regime to promote the mitigation of social impacts. Alliances with other First Nations groups can strengthen Tłıchǫ requests to regulators for greater socio-economic impact management. Further research completed in partnership between government and industry with Tłıchǫ communities can guide the development of programs and services that respond to existing social impacts.

The Tłıchǫ Government can seek to recreate the supportive environment found amongst women and families traditionally in the community. Community members and mining families have valuable insight to determine existing policy gaps. In light of the great resource potential within Tłıchǫ lands and surrounding areas, the Tłıchǫ Government should take initiative in addressing and mitigating further social impacts to communities. Strategic planning can help to determine goals for managing and responding to anticipated changes resulting from current mine closures, as well as the development of new projects.

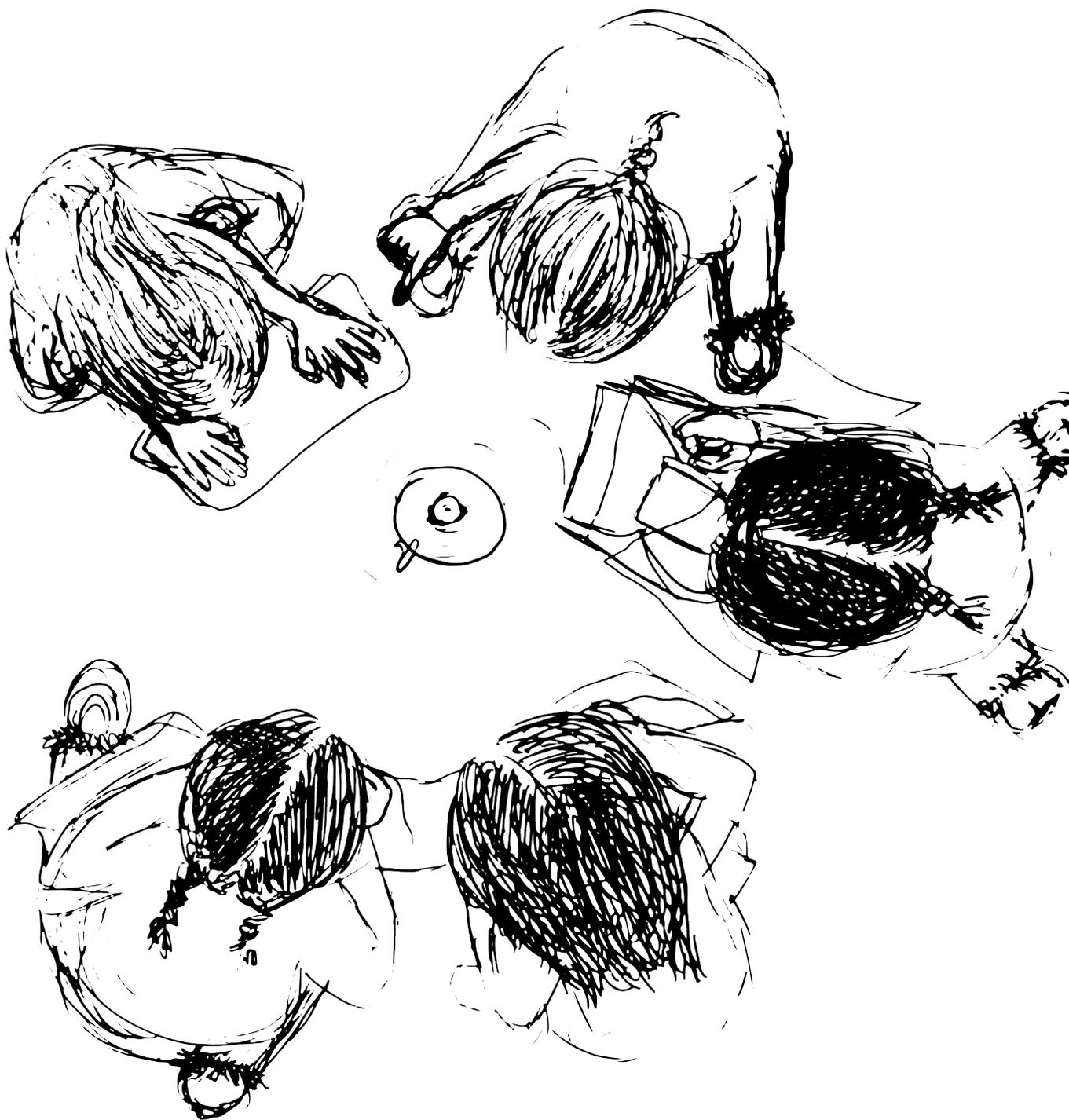
Industry maintains some responsibility for the social changes occurring as a result of their mining activities. By assessing current policies that indirectly or directly respond to socio-economic impacts on their Indigenous workforce, they can implement programs and services that better respond to the needs of Tłıchǫ employees. Creating access to culturally appropriate services for Indigenous employees can help to meet demands for impact management.

Ultimately, the successful enhancement of social impact mitigation and response will require collaboration amongst industry, government, and regulatory authorities and communities. The need for

improved policies will become increasingly important as the impacts witnessed to date continue to accumulate with the growing mining sector in the N.W.T. The limited life span of current mines means the opportunity to partner with industry to address social impacts is limited. While government must take on a strong role in leading such changes, it is acknowledged that strengthening social cohesion in Tłıchǫ communities must be fostered from within. Stories of the Tłıchǫ traditional way of life serve as an important source of knowledge available to guide the changes that could improve supports for Tłıchǫ mining families.

**“ITS AMAZING NONE OF OUR HAIR BURNT BE-
CAUSE ALL OF OUR HEADS WOULD BE TOGETH-
ER AND WE WOULD ALL BE SEWING UNDER THE
LIGHT OF ONE CANDLE.”**

- MARY ROSE CHARLO



INTRODUCTION

Ełexeta edets'eèda in the Tłıchǫ language means “we work together.” In the Environmental Assessment process, this term is used to describe social cohesion.¹ This name reflects values about helping each other that is embedded in the heart of Tłıchǫ culture and that has helped our peoples to sustain themselves for thousands of years. This value has not been lost and can continue to lead us to overcome new challenges in modern society.

Tłıchǫ traditional territory, defined in the Tłıchǫ Agreement as Mǫwhì Gogha Dè Nıłłèè, currently has four major diamond mines that have come into operation since 1998: Ekati, Diavik, Snap Lake, and Gahcho Kue mines. Despite predictions by mining companies that the diamond mines would cause a variety of social impacts on Northern communities ranging from increased drug and alcohol abuse to a strain on programs and services,² very little has been done by industry, government and regulatory authorities to develop a management framework for such impacts.

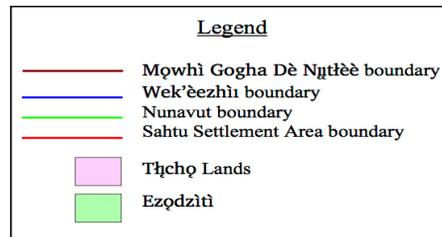
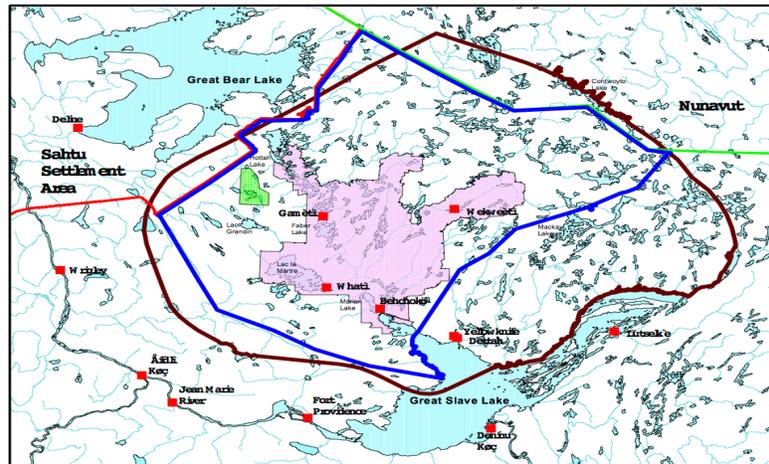
Many Tłıchǫ men are taken out of the community and away from their family unit to work at the mining camps for two weeks at a time, sometimes longer. While there are also Tłıchǫ women employed at the mines, the majority of the Tłıchǫ workforce at the mines is men, and so this paper has chosen to look at the affected Tłıchǫ women who must manage parenting, the home, work, and other responsibilities while their spouse is away at camp. The regular absence of the spouse and father from the family unit for weeks at a time creates many challenges for the mother and children left behind. While social impacts are both intricate and ambiguous in nature, and direct causal linkages are difficult to establish to mining activities, uprooting Tłıchǫ men from the home and community to work at the mines has clear implications. To understand what some of those implications are, research was conducted with a focus group³ made up of Tłıchǫ women with spouses who work at the diamond mines. They provided thoughtful insight and ideas into the challenges they face day in and day out, and the types of supports they feel would help them to overcome such challenges. A second focus group was also held with female Tłıchǫ Elders that have extensive knowledge, stories and experience living in a traditional Tłıchǫ camp on the land. They provided contextual information about the traditional social environment including stories of unity, strength and support that can guide Tłıchǫ people to overcome modern challenges.

1 Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board, *Glossary of Terms: Tlıcho*, last modified 2007, accessed April 2015, http://reviewboard.ca/upload/ref_library/Glossary-Tlıcho%20w2_1208465655.pdf.

2 Government of the Northwest Territories, *Communities and Diamonds: Socio-Economic Monitoring in the Communities of Behchoko, Detah, Gamèti, Lutselk'e, N'dilo, Wekweèti, Whatì and Yellowknife: 2013 Annual Report of the Government of the Northwest Territories under the BHP Billiton, Diavik and De Beers Socio-Economic Agreements*, last modified March 2014, accessed April 2015, http://www.itn.gov.nt.ca/sites/default/files/td_-_2013_communities_and_diamonds_annual_report_-_final_web.pdf.

3 Janet Smithson, “Using and analysing focus groups: limitations and possibilities,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 3 no. 2 (2000), 103-119, accessed April 2015, <http://www.sfu.ca/~palys/Smithson-2000-Using&AnalysingFocusGroups.pdf>.

MŌWHÌ GOGHA DÈ NĪTLÈÈ, WEK'ÈEZHÌ,
TĪCHŌ LANDS AND EZŌDZÌTÌ



Map Source: Tlìchŏ Agreement

Arguments in favour of the isolated mining camp work have attempted to draw parallels between the modern mine life and traditional Tìchŏ ways of life, living in bush camps. There is a perception that the two-week-in, two-week-out work rotation into mines is beneficial for Tìchŏ people, because they are accustomed to a nomadic lifestyle with specific transient demands on the men. While there is a commonality in that men were and are required to leave the family unit for extended periods of time, the social context surrounding the lifestyle and health of the social environment differ so drastically that these two ways of life are not comparable. However, stories of traditional times and bush camp life can provide important guidance for the regeneration of community unity and support networks amongst Tìchŏ women and families. The changes required to enhance social impact mitigation and management will require families, communities, governments, organizations, regulatory authorities, and industry to each take initiative for contributing to the greater well-being of the Tìchŏ community. Mining activities bring many benefits to the North and Tìchŏ communities. Jobs, business, contracts, revenues and funding programs are valuable opportunities that have come with the economic growth. This paper does not seek to diminish their importance, but is instead choosing to look at another piece of the story often ignored. Using information gained from the focus group and policy research, this paper seeks to provide a discussion of options, which different stakeholders can explore to work towards a stronger system of support for Tìchŏ mining families. A review of current policies is provided to indicate areas of opportunity, as well as draw out current successes. Many of the initiatives will require

collaborative efforts across different sectors and strong partnerships with Tł̓ch̓q communities. The paper will refer to the primary research conducted; however, a complete discussion of research findings can be found in Appendix C – Summary of Research Findings. From an in-depth analysis of options, a set of concrete recommendations for the various sectors involved will provide ideas for steps forward to strengthen harmony within Tł̓ch̓q communities.

“WITH THREE CHILDREN, YOU PACK ONE ON YOUR BACK, THE SMALLER ONE WOULD BE IN A BAG ON YOUR FRONT, AND THE OLDER ONE IF THEY COULD WALK, WOULD BE TIED AROUND THE WAIST”

– MONIQUE MACKENZIE



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Having men leave the family unit for extended periods is not a new concept for Tł̓ch̓q people. Just a few decades ago, Tł̓ch̓q people happily maintained a traditional lifestyle that required men to leave the camp for extended periods to hunt and trap, and women to maintain the camp and raise children during their absence. According to Tł̓ch̓q Elders, unity, physical and mental health, and strong support networks amongst women and families characterized the traditional social environment.

It is commonly stated that the extractive economy is the same as the traditional economy, due to the fact that men are away for this extended period of time. Bush life was a challenging lifestyle and required hard work, but despite the commonality of men leaving for extended periods, the challenges were found to be drastically different than those facing Tł̓ch̓q mining families today. Tł̓ch̓q Elders Monique Mackenzie, Mary Rose Charlo and Rosa Mantla explained that challenges were mainly physical, because in addition to raising children during the men's absence, the women were responsible for tasks such as gathering wood, collecting moss, tanning hides, sewing clothes, raising dogs, setting fish nets and snares, and hauling water. Although the men would at times leave for months on end, strong support systems that existed within and amongst the families and the women contributed to a harmonious community. When asked specifically what challenges arose for the women while the men were away, Tł̓ch̓q Elder Monique Mackenzie responded, "There was no challenges. We shared everything. If one woman didn't have something, we would share everything. If a child got sick we knew what to do, or if there was a birth while the men were out the women would help each other with childbirth."

The women worked together and helped each other to complete the camp chores and raise all of the children. The men supported the women by gathering wood, setting fish nets and rabbit snares, and building food caches of meat before they left. The different families and camps would check on each other and share food and other resources when needed. When the men would return from hunting and trapping trips, their return was a joyous occasion for everyone. As Monique Mackenzie explains,

When the men would come home, they would be happy. Everything is fine and everybody is okay, they have everything. And the men would be happy too to come home to a warm happy place and everything would be taken care of. Everyone would be happy. There was no bad talk.

Strong cohesive family units were a matter of survival and stories of the traditional way of life are remembered fondly by those who experienced it. The historical unity and strength of the Tł̓ch̓q Nation serve as a source of aspiration for Tł̓ch̓q people today.

New challenges have emerged for Tł̓ch̓q families since the traditional way of life became a story of the past. In particular, the two-week-in, two-week-out work rotations imposed by the diamond mines are changing Tł̓ch̓q family dynamics. Tł̓ch̓q women lacking the necessary supports are being left to raise children and manage work and the home alone while their spouses are away at the mines. The mining industry and rotational work into isolated mining camps have become well established and will continue to be a critical element of the Northern economy for years to come. In the modern day, some of the responsibility to maintain social cohesion has been passed to government agencies such as the

GNWT, and the Tłchq Government and industry proponents, as initiators of social change, should assume some responsibility under current policies. Their policies and legislation will be explored to assess their effectiveness in addressing social impacts.

“LONG TIME AGO THEY SAID THE BACK
TOOK CARE OF THE LITTLE ONES WHO
WERE PACKED.”

-MONIQUE MACKENZIE



RESEARCH METHODS

A thorough review of policies related to social impact mitigation and response was conducted. Policies and legislation of the GNWT, the Tłıchǫ Government, the regulatory boards, and the mining industry, that directly and indirectly guide social impact mitigation and response were considered. Research on international efforts on this issue was also done to seek out additional data and best practices. Lastly, focus group research was conducted with female Tłıchǫ Elders and spouses of mine workers to:

1. Collect data that demonstrated the differing challenges that each group faced in the traditional and modern day;
2. Understand the circumstances surrounding the challenges that Tłıchǫ mining families struggle with today;
3. Learn about the supports that Tłıchǫ women and families need to overcome those challenges; and
4. Learn what lessons can be drawn from the traditional way of life, that can guide Tłıchǫ communities moving forward.



Two focus groups were held to collect information about what life was like for Tłıchǫ women when they lived a traditional lifestyle in bush camps. At that time, men would leave for extended periods to hunt and trap. Three female Tłıchǫ Elders were invited to discuss what the challenges were for the women and how they supported each other while the men were away from their families. The three women invited to participate were chosen based on their personal experiences and knowledge of living off the land. They were asked to discuss the following questions: When men would leave to go hunting or trapping, how long would they leave for? What challenges were there for the women while the men were away trapping and hunting? What kinds of things would the women do to support each other while the men were gone? Have you seen that type of support amongst women change over the years?



The second focus group consisted of spouses of mine workers of varying ages. A public call was made for Tłıchǫ women over 18 years of age with a spouse working at the mine. Four women participated and were asked to discuss the following questions: What are the challenges you are faced with when your spouse leaves to work at the mines? What type of support systems could help you to overcome those challenges?

The discussions were audio recorded, transcribed and thematically coded by three independent coders to achieve inter-cod-

er reliability. The themes that emerged from the codes included unity/disunity, support networks, challenges, and ideas to move forward. The analyzed data provided a sense of the challenges faced by Tłıchǫ families participating in mining activities, as well as their needs for stronger support systems in their communities.

The focus groups took place over the course of one day at a camp near Edzo/Behchoko in the N.W.T. The objective was to recreate the traditional environment of women working together and supporting each other, while accomplishing tasks. All of the participants were mothers and were encouraged to bring their young ones if they needed to. Four young children were present throughout the day. A variety of sewing supplies to make traditional crafts were provided for the women to use if they wished to work on a project during the discussions. Some of the women worked on making duffels or braiding strings.

An interpreter was present to encourage the use of the Tłıchǫ language, as all participants were fluent in Tłıchǫ except for one. The discussions flowed back and forth between English and Tłıchǫ. The Tłıchǫ Elders also made themselves available to offer support during the focus group discussions with the mining spouses. The discussions were unintentionally, but appropriately held on the birthday of the late Elizabeth Mackenzie, who was a strong Tłıchǫ leader who encouraged her people to be “strong like two people.” This phrase captures the need for Tłıchǫ people to adapt to the demands of modern ways while maintaining Tłıchǫ culture, language, values, and traditions. The day ended with a traditional “feeding the fire” ceremony, where offerings of tobacco, tea and sugar were made to a fire in Elizabeth’s honour.



“THE OLDER CHILDREN WOULD TAKE CARE OF THE YOUNGER ONES. IN THOSE DAYS THE CHILDREN LISTENED AND THEY WERE OBEDIENT. THEY LISTENED TO THEIR PARENTS.”

- MARY ROSE CHARLO

BACKGROUND

Tłıchǫ Government Policies

Impact Benefit Agreements

The Tłıchǫ Agreement requires Impact Benefit Agreements (IBAs), also called Participation Agreements, for projects within the Mǫwhì Gogha Dè Nıttłèè boundaries. IBAs solidify economic benefits for the Tłıchǫ in the form of preferential hiring, priority business contracts, and annual financial payments. During the agreement negotiation phase, the Tłıchǫ negotiators attempt to understand the character of social impacts, as well as attempt to build mitigation measures. The Tłıchǫ Government makes a variety of commitments that are meant to help mitigate social impacts. For instance, specific funding for cultural activities aims to help preserve Tłıchǫ Traditional Knowledge, which is challenged by the mine worker's inability to spend time on the land with his family.⁴ However, IBAs are only in effect for the duration of mining operations and therefore, can only be considered a short-term solution to long-term issues.⁵ Not only are the negotiation of IBAs unregulated by the GNWT and the Government of Canada, but IBAs signed by the Tłıchǫ Government are confidential documents making them difficult to assess and monitor for progress in mitigating and addressing social impacts.⁶

Government Policies

Until devolution, the Northwest Territories was Crown lands and the Federal Government maintained authority and legislation of the lands and resources including the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, 1998⁷ (MVRMA) and the independent environmental review board, the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board (Review Board). As a result of devolution, effective April 1, 2014, the GNWT inherited the powers from the Federal Government for land and resource management. The MVRMA remains Federal legislation, for which the GNWT will acquire responsibility to maintain.

Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act

In the Northwest Territories, the MVRMA governs the Environmental Assessment process, which is conducted by the Review Board. Section 115 of the MVRMA establishes guiding principles, which

4 V. Gibson, "Negotiated Spaces: Work, Home and Relationships in the Dene Diamond Economy" (Ph.D thesis, UBC, 2008), <https://circle.ubc.ca/bitstream/handle/2429/800/?sequence=1>; Shirley Tsetta et al., "Telling a Story of Change the Dene Way: Indicators for Monitoring in Diamond Impacts Communities," *Pimitasiwin: Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* 1 (2005), 59-69.

5 C. Fidler and M. Hitch, "Impact and benefit agreements: a contentious issue for environmental and aboriginal justice." *Environments* 35 no. 2 (2007), 49-69.

6 Ibid.

7 *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*, S.C. 1998,c.25.

give specific consideration to socio-economic impacts on the human environment, stating,

115. (1) The process established by this Part shall be carried out in a timely and expeditious manner and shall have regard to

- (a) the protection of the environment from the significant adverse impacts of proposed developments;
- (b) the protection of the social, cultural and economic well-being of residents and communities in the Mackenzie Valley; and
- (c) the importance of conservation to the well-being and way of life of the aboriginal peoples of Canada to whom section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* applies and who use an area of the Mackenzie Valley.⁸

The inclusion of socio-economic impacts in EA legislation in the NWT is considered a global benchmark.⁹ However, implementation requires more comprehensive policies to support the MVRMA.

Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Guidelines

To mitigate social impacts, the Review Board developed a comprehensive set of *Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA) Guidelines* that creates clear expectations for industry proponents. However, despite the inclusion of social impacts in the MVRMA, inadequate regulations prevent the SEIA Guidelines from being enforced and industry efforts in this area remain largely voluntary.¹⁰ This lack of enforceability and policy gap is a key challenge hindering successful socio-economic impact assessment, mitigation and management in the NWT today.¹¹ Amendments to the MVRMA coming into effect in 2016 will provide the Review Board with a new tool that should improve their ability to monitor and enforce socio-economic impact measures. The Review Board will acquire greater authority for enforceable development certificates, which can include measures related to socio-economic impacts.¹²

Socio-Economic Agreements

When the diamond projects first started in the 1990s, no Northern policies were governing the EA process or SEIA. An EA Review Panel reviewed the first two proposed projects until the MVRMA came into effect. The mining companies predicted socio-economic impacts in their Environmental Impact Statements. One prediction included impacts from isolated work rotations:

Absence from home for two weeks at a time could have an impact on marriages ... Stress caused by

8 *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*, S.C. 1998,c.25,s.115.

9 Alan Erlich (Review Board Staff), personal communication, April 2014; Gabrielle Mackenzie (former Review Board Chairperson), personal communication, November 2014.

10 Mary Tapsell and Alistair MacDonald, "The Awakening of SEIA in the Northwest Territories, Canada: The Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board's Experience," presentation to IAIA 2007, last modified 2007, accessed June 23, 2015, http://www.reviewboard.ca/upload/ref_library/s%20Experience_1186093586.pdf

11 Tapsell and MacDonald.

12 Mackenzie Valley Review Board, *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act Amendments: What's Different?* Reference Bulletin, last modified April 30, 2014, accessed April 2015, http://reviewboard.ca/upload/ref_library/MVRMA%20Amendments%20Reference%20Bulletin%20-%20April%2030_2014.pdf

13 S. D. Deleon and C. Ventress, "Diamonds, Land Use and Indigenous Peoples: The Dilemmas of Public Participation and Multi-National Diamond Corporations," *Public Administration and Management* 15 no. 1 (2010), 98-137.

*a number of factors – need for money, separation, suspected infidelity, are major causes of marriage breakdown. With a rotational work system, marriages are likely to experience some of the stress of separation.*¹⁴

The Review Panel responded to the socio-economic impact predictions by requiring a Socio-Economic Agreement (SEA) between mining companies and the GNWT as a follow-up program.¹⁵ This was the only measure or follow-up program that emerged pertaining to social impacts.

The SEAs secure territory-wide economic benefits by setting Aboriginal and northern employment targets for the mines, and business and sub-contracting priorities.¹⁶ The agreements established a set of socio-economic indicators to monitor changes in the communities.¹⁷ The GNWT reports on the impacts that can be monitored using readily available data from Statistics Canada and Vital Statistics.¹⁸ However, beyond this, communities must monitor changes on their own and the agreement lacks thresholds that trigger social impacts mitigation.¹⁹ The Tłı̨chǫ Government is not party to the SEAs and the GNWT's focus is to secure benefits for the entire territory. The 2014 SEA Annual Report, "Communities and Diamonds," demonstrates an increasing trend in single parent families;²⁰ however, the SEAs do not require any party to respond to such impacts witnessed to family dynamics.

Industry Policies

Industry's business interests naturally compete with the interests of regulators, but most mining companies follow the laws and policies in place. No social impact management plan has been required or implemented by any of the mines to date.

Each of the diamond mines offers a diverse variety of programs and facilities at their mine sites that indirectly responds to social impacts felt by Tłı̨chǫ employees. However, the services provided are not always culturally appropriate for Tłı̨chǫ workers. For example, there is no policy to provide culturally appropriate counseling services on or off site such as access to Elders for emotional support or traditional healing. The mines have offered programming aimed to support workers in different areas such as education and financial management; however, efforts are ad hoc and not under the guidance of formal policies designed for socio-economic impact management.

14 Government of the Northwest Territories, *Communities and Diamonds: 2013 Annual Report*, B-2.

15 Government of the Northwest Territories, *Communities and Diamonds: 2013 Annual Report*.

16 Tsetta et al.

17 M. Fonda and E. Anderson. "Diamonds in Canada's North: A Lesson in Measuring Socio-Economic Impacts on Well-Being," *Canadian Issues* (Winter, 2009), 107-111.

18 Government of the Northwest Territories, *Communities and Diamonds: 2013 Annual Report*.

19 Tsetta et al.; Fonda & Anderson.

20 Government of the Northwest Territories, *Communities and Diamonds: 2014 Annual Report of the Government of the Northwest Territories under the Ekati, Diavik and Snap Lake Socio-Economic Agreements : Socio-Economic Monitoring in the Communities of Behchoko, Detah, Gamètì, Lutselk'e, Ndilo, Wekweètì, Whatì and Yellowknife.*, last modified March 2015, accessed April 2015, http://www.itl.gov.nt.ca/sites/default/files/communities_and_diamonds_2014_annual_report_0.pdf.

International Policies

Internationally, Indigenous peoples experience related social impacts from mining activities. As with the Northern diamond mines, some Australian mining camps located in isolated areas inaccessible by road require mine workers to fly in to camp for two weeks, followed by two weeks at home. The Australian environmental review process also does not require the development of social impact management plans to address impacts on families and communities similar to the strains on family cohesion witnessed in the Tłıchǫ region.²¹ In 2012, the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government published a report on fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) work practices that demonstrates the importance of supports for mining families. The report found that

*work roster patterns and the availability of support networks for employees and their families are two key factors that play an important role in determining the extent that potentially negative effects of FIFO work practices are experienced at the worker/partner/family level.*²²

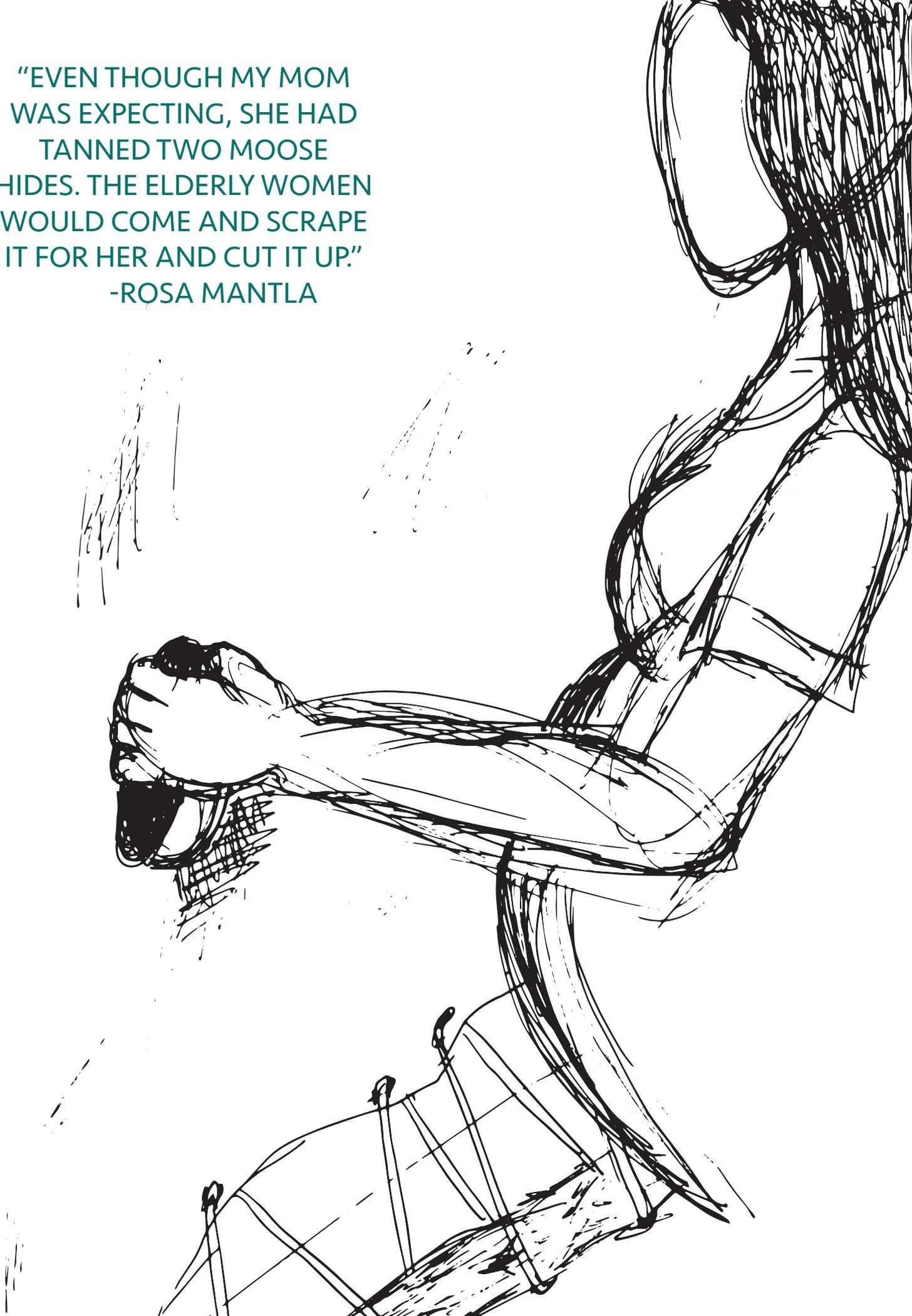
Regulatory deficiencies to effectively mitigate social impacts in the NWT and Australia increase the need to implement greater responsive measures.

“WHEN THE MEN WOULD COME HOME,
THEY WOULD BE HAPPY. EVERYTHING
IS FINE AND EVERYBODY IS OKAY. THE
MEN WOULD BE HAPPY TOO TO COME
HOME TO A WARM HAPPY PLACE AND
EVERYTHING WAS TAKEN CARE OF.”
- MONIQUE MACKENZIE

21 Robyn Morris, R.. *Scoping Study: Impact of Fly-In Fly-Out/Drive-In Drive-Out Work Practices on Local Government: Report for Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government* (Sydney: Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, University of Technology, 2012), last modified May 2012, accessed April 2015, http://www.ancelg.org.au/system/files/publication-documents/1336624408_ACELG_Scoping_Study_FIFO_May_2012.pdf.

22 Ibid., p.9.

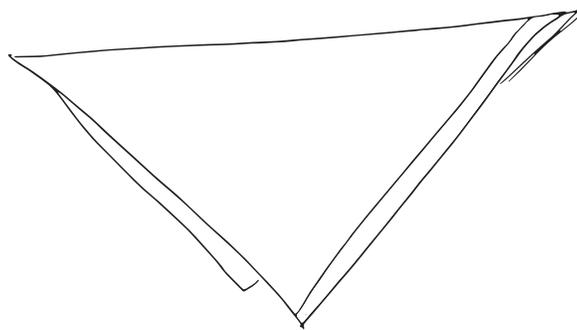
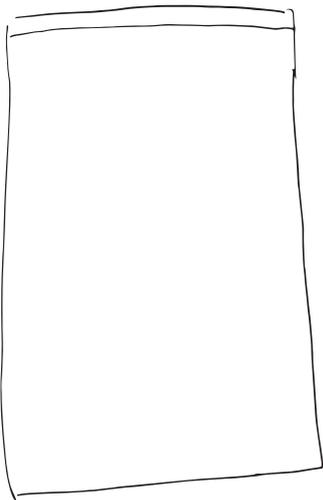
“EVEN THOUGH MY MOM
WAS EXPECTING, SHE HAD
TANNED TWO MOOSE
HIDES. THE ELDERLY WOMEN
WOULD COME AND SCRAPE
IT FOR HER AND CUT IT UP.”
-ROSA MANTLA



NECESSITY FOR CHANGE

Devolution grants the Northwest Territories the opportunity to implement their own vision into land and resource management. The GNWT inherited management authority for projects in the M̄qwhi region and will assume responsibility for related legislation. It is apparent that economic growth and development of natural resources is their priority. However, the GNWT retains a responsibility to serve the greater interests of families and communities in the T̄h̄ch̄q region through the T̄h̄ch̄q Community Services Agency (TCSA).

Likewise, the T̄h̄ch̄q Government is a key agent for services provided to T̄h̄ch̄q families and programs that reflect T̄h̄ch̄q values and culture. The T̄h̄ch̄q Government is a strong voice at inter-governmental tables and an important advocate for the holistic well-being of T̄h̄ch̄q families. The mining industry is a critical source of revenue for both the T̄h̄ch̄q Government and its citizens, but the aging lifespan of the current diamond mines leaves financially dependent T̄h̄ch̄q families, businesses and government in a vulnerable position. Policies to mitigate, monitor and manage social impacts will help to preserve the health of all Northern communities.



“EVERYDAY, THE ELDERLY WOMEN
CAME TO CHECK ON MY MOM. OTH-
ERS CAME JUST TO CHECK ON THE
REST OF THE FAMILY TOO. THERE WAS
A LOT OF SUPPORT THAT WAY AND
THAT’S HOW PEOPLE HELPED OUT
EACH OTHER, ESPECIALLY THE WOM-
EN AND THE CHILDREN. SO IT’S ALL
PART OF SURVIVAL.”

- ROSA MANTLA



DISCUSSION OF POLICY OPTIONS

From the policy and focus group research, policy gaps and possible solutions have been identified. With each problem statement, a possible response by each relevant authority is provided. An integrated approach is necessary for the successful enhancement of socio-economic impact mitigation and management.

Tłıchq Government

Problem Statement: There are currently inadequate systems in place to manage the range of social impacts that are being experienced by Tłıchq families.

Tłıchq Government Response:

- a) Place greater emphasis on the importance of social impacts during the EA process to achieve greater articulation and mitigation of impacts.
- b) Use IBAs as a tool to develop strong and effective joint development of social impact monitoring, measurement and programming.
- c) Offer programs and services designed to meet the specific needs of mining families such as changed parenting dynamics and fluctuating divisions of labour.
- d) Develop policies, programs and services that that recreate the supportive environment found traditionally in the community.
- e) Conduct strategic planning to prepare for anticipated socio-economic impacts that will emerge or be aggravated by either new developments or diamond mine closures.

Analysis of Tłıchq Government Options

a) Place greater emphasis on the importance of social impacts during the EA process to achieve greater articulation and mitigation of impacts.

Many of the concerns raised by the Tłıchq Government during the EA process are related to biophysical impacts that are quantitative. Biophysical impacts are simply easier to prove, measure and monitor, with clear thresholds. The complex nature of qualitative impacts make them difficult to prove and address. However, the focus group research has demonstrated that there are social impacts felt by Tłıchq families that can be attributed to the demands of isolated mining camp work.

OPPORTUNITIES

Alliances can be built with other First Nations to advocate as a collective. The Tłıchǫ have successfully worked with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and the Lutselk'e Dene First Nation on EA files to collectively address environmental impact concerns related to water quality, air quality, and wildlife management. A similar united approach could be employed for shared concerns over social impacts.

Effective mitigation can result in a decreased need for responsive Tłıchǫ Government-run programs.

CHALLENGES

Tłıchǫ Government requests have little leverage without GNWT imposed regulations to support requests for social impact management plans

Capacity issues and insufficient resources have required the Tłıchǫ Government to strategically prioritize their participation in the many regulatory files going through EA, or water licensing and land use permitting. Tłıchǫ participation is limited on certain files for this reason.

b) Use IBAs as a tool to develop strong and effective joint development of social impact monitoring, measurement and programming.

IBAs could be negotiated to include funding for community-based monitoring programs, as well as further funding for programs aimed at reducing the challenges faced by families as a result of the rotational camp work.

OPPORTUNITIES

Could leverage additional funds for the Nation

Can be tailored to the needs of Tłıchǫ families

CHALLENGES

Industry typically resists changes to precedence, especially if it requires increased resources

Resources may simply be reallocated from other areas

c) Offer programs and services designed to meet the specific needs of mining families such as changed parenting dynamics and fluctuating divisions of labour.

The focus group raised the challenges of completing essential tasks such as grocery shopping and bringing their child to the doctor while their husbands are at work. They shared stories of having to manage emergency home maintenance such as frozen pipes, while managing cooking, cleaning and caring for the children. Programs could be developed to respond to these critical needs of the Tłıchǫ mining families.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
<p>May improve Tłıchǫ employment success rate in industry</p> <p>Contribute to healthy families and greater unity in community</p> <p>Positive enforcements on one family unit can extend to the larger population due to the interconnected nature of Tłıchǫ families</p>	<p>Excludes Tłıchǫ citizens not working for industry, which may cause division and disunity between mining families and non-mining families</p>

d) Develop policies, programs and services that recreate the supportive environment found traditionally in the community.

The strong unity that once existed in Tłıchǫ communities has the potential to regain strength. Specifically, fostering support networks amongst women, families, Elders and younger generations, are feasible and do not have to be costly. The women emphasized the need for emotional and mental support for themselves, as well as guidance for parenting. Elders are extensive knowledge holders who could be better used by the community to offer such guidance.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
<p>Contributes to healthy families</p> <p>Promotes unity and strength in community</p> <p>Connects generations</p>	<p>Families and individuals must also take responsibility for contributing to unity in the community</p>

e) Conduct strategic planning to prepare for anticipated socio-economic impacts that will emerge or be aggravated by either new developments or diamond mine closures.

The Community Government of Whati hosted inter-agency meetings to plan and prepare for social changes anticipated if an all-weather road was to be built into the community. This type of pro-active strategy could be employed on a larger scale to plan for future development in the Tłı̨chǫ region, as well as at the community level.



GNWT Options

Problem Statement: The GNWT invests great efforts into supporting economic development, but must also invest greater effort into protecting the interests of families socially impacted by industry.

GNWT Response

- a) Continue to develop regulations that address shortfalls and enhance social impact mitigation and management.
- b) Use SEAs as a tool to mitigate social impacts and govern impact response. Open negotiations and seek input from Indigenous communities.
- c) Establish community-based indicators in partnership with Indigenous communities and fund and develop community-based monitoring programs.
- d) Include departments responsible for social programs in the EA process.
- e) Design programs and services to support the specific needs of mining families.

Analysis of GNWT Options

a) Continue to develop regulations that address shortfalls and enhance social impact mitigation and management.

Legislative reform means the GNWT could require project approvals to contain measures specific to socio-economic impacts. While imposing stronger accountability on industry can have impacts on economic development, the GNWT must balance community well-being with economic ambitions. Additional policy development may be needed to adequately enhance SEIA.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
<p>Reduce demand on responsive government run programs</p> <p>Long-term benefits for communities impacted by a short-term industry</p>	<p>Conflicts with GNWT’s agenda for resource promotion and economic growth</p> <p>Resistance from industry may deter additional resource investment in the North</p> <p>Lack of available data to support initiative and ambiguity of defining social impacts</p> <p>Costly</p> <p>Too late for mines already in operation</p>

b) Use SEAs as a tool to mitigate social impacts and govern impact response. Open negotiations and seek input from Indigenous communities.

SEAs have been deemed ineffective by First Nations groups. Opening up negotiations of SEAs and seeking input from Indigenous groups to develop a new framework for the agreements could improve their effectiveness.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
<p>Territory-wide social impacts exist that could be addressed</p> <p>Long-term benefits for communities impacted by a short-term industry</p>	<p>SEAs are not designed to address specific needs of one community or First Nations, but seek to address the entire territory</p> <p>Consultation would require resources</p> <p>Indigenous communities may not be interested in becoming involved with SEAs</p>

c) Establish community-based indicators in partnership with Indigenous communities and fund and develop community-based monitoring programs.

Research conducted in the Akaitcho region on community-based health and wellness indicators can contribute to social indicators for Tłı̨chǫ communities.²³ Partnerships between Tłı̨chǫ communities, regulatory boards, and government to fund and implement community-based environmental monitoring programs, such as the Tłı̨chǫ Aquatic Environmental Monitoring Program,²⁴ have been successful. A similar approach could be taken to monitor social impacts.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
<p>Creates capacity in Tłı̨chǫ communities</p> <p>Develops measurement mechanisms specific to Tłı̨chǫ needs</p>	<p>Could require significant resources</p> <p>Data could be challenging to manage</p>

23 B. Parlee and J. O’Neil, “The Dene Way of Life”: Perspectives on Health from Canada’s North,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41 no. 3 (2007), 112-133; Tsetta et al.

24 Tłı̨chǫ Government, “Tłı̨chǫ Aquatic Environment Monitoring Program,” *Tłı̨chǫ: As Long as this Land Shall Last*, last modified September 30, 2014, accessed June 23, 2015, <http://www.tlichoc.ca/news/t%C5%82%C4%B1%C-C%A8ch%C7%AB-aquatic-environmental-monitoring-program>

d) Include departments responsible for social programs in the EA process.

Only GNWT departments responsible for biophysical impacts participate in EA. The GNWT provides a significant level of input throughout the regulatory process, but GNWT departments responsible for social programs that respond to social impacts do not participate. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment, as well as the Department of Health and Social Services, have important knowledge and data surrounding the social environment of Northern communities that should be considered in the regulatory process.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
Increased internal collaboration within GNWT Creates better knowledge base for addressing social impacts	Requires additional resources Complicates the process

e) Design programs and services to support the specific needs of mining families.

The GNWT is the largest program and service provider in the Tłıchǫ region and is responsible for health and education programming through the TCSEA. With input from the Tłıchǫ community, health and education programming could better respond to the needs of mining families. For example, the women discussed the need for access to better counseling services for their families to help them overcome strains on spousal relationships, as well as parenting challenges that emerge while spouses are at the mines. The women also discussed the deficiencies of Social Services in providing required support, but also indicated some successes of the health centre in providing support for parenting-related issues.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
May improve support for industry May improve Northern employment success rate	Excludes the population not working for industry Requires resources

Industry Options

Problem Statement: Mining companies struggle to identify, respond to and mitigate social impacts resulting from their activities.

Industry Response

- a) Partner with impacted communities to collect baseline data on social impacts using community-based indicators.
- b) Continue to collaborate with other mining companies to respond to cumulative social impacts.
- c) Evaluate policies, services and programs currently offered to employees to enhance program effectiveness.
- d) Offer more culturally appropriate services to mine employees at site.
- e) Establish funding to support initiatives that respond to social impacts.

Analysis of Industry Options

a) Partner with impacted communities to collect baseline data on social impacts using community-based indicators.

A lack of qualitative data on the socio-economic impacts of the diamond industry means that, without the evidence, there is no basis for them to develop mitigations or management plans. However, industry is expected to collect, provide, and monitor data related to biophysical impacts and great resources are made available to do so. Equivalent resources should be provided to assess, monitor and manage social impacts and impacted communities should be consulted in the process.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
Contributes to development of social impact qualitative database	Costly Qualitative data is challenging Cumulative effects are an industry wide responsibility

b) Continue to collaborate with other mining companies to respond to cumulative social impacts.

The focus group represented spouses from all four mines, Ekati, Diavik, Snap Lake and Gahcho Kue, and the experiences and challenges they face are common across the industry. The impacts are cumulative and existing mining companies can pool resources and collaborate to address existing impacts. Recently, Diavik, Ekati and Snap Lake mines partnered to develop a financial literacy course in response to community concerns.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
Avoid duplicating work	Action requires resources Dynamics may be challenging to manage amongst industry competitors

c) Evaluate policies, services and programs currently offered to employees to enhance program effectiveness.

Existing mines offer benefits packages and develop programs for employees. Many of the women expressed concern over the lack of awareness of the available programs, as well as their efficiency. Extended health benefits such as the Employee Assistance Program provide access to counseling services for mining families. However, the women felt that the program lacked cultural awareness and failed to address their needs for family treatment.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
Ineffective and underused programs could be eliminated or replaced with improved programs May improve employee well-being and reduce turn over rate	Evaluation could be costly May need to be on-going to remain relevant

d) Offer more culturally appropriate services to mine employees at site.

The well-being of the mine worker has direct impacts on the family at home. Research on T̄h̄ch̄q experiences at the diamond mines has found that many T̄h̄ch̄q workers experience marginalization and feelings of isolation, as the mines are colonialist institutions.²⁵ Counseling services, as well as educational and cultural programming designed for the T̄h̄ch̄q population should be offered at site. Many of the miners' spouses felt that better supports for their husbands at site could have a positive impact on their families overall.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
Reduce employee turn over rates Increase T̄h̄ch̄q employment success rate Improve community support for industry	Requires resources

e) Establish funding to support initiatives that respond to social impacts.

Each of the mining companies make funding available for community development initiatives and have policies to guide funding criteria. Focus tends to be on initiatives important to IBA beneficiaries such as cultural activities, language, and education. While many of these naturally respond to social impacts, a conscious effort to invest monies into community initiatives that provide support to mining families should be considered. The T̄h̄ch̄q, as well as other IBA beneficiaries, should be consulted.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
Improves industry's corporate social responsibility profile Strengthens relations with communities	Requires additional resources otherwise resources may simply be reallocated from other areas

25 Gibson.

Review Board Options

Problem Statement: The Review Board lacks authority to enforce adequate measures that require mining companies to mitigate, monitor and respond to social impacts in the regulatory process.

Review Board Reponse

a) Demonstrate the need for enhanced social impact assessment thresholds, targets and outcomes that are enforceable.

Analysis of Review Board Options

a) Demonstrate the need for enhanced social impact assessment thresholds, targets and outcomes that are enforceable.

The Review Board has established a comprehensive set of SEIA Guidelines that contain the information necessary to improve SEIA by industry. However, the lack of enforceability means that efforts by all parties are limited.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S	C H A L L E N G E S
Improves EA process and outcomes Devolution serves as an opportune time to recommend changes	Requires resources Too late to have impact on mines that have already completed the EA process

26 Mackenzie Valley Review Board, Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Guidelines, accessed at “Guidelines,” *Mackenzie Valley Review Board*, last modified March 2007, accessed April 2015, http://reviewboard.ca/process_information/guidance_documentation/guidelines.php.

“THERE WERE NO CHALLENGES.
WE SHARED EVERYTHING.”

-MONIQUE MACKENZIE

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the Tłıchǫ Government

1. Ally with other First Nations to present a strong advocate voice for greater emphasis on social impacts during the Environmental Assessment process. A united collective voice will send a message to the GNWT that concerns for social impacts need regulatory attention.
2. Send a joint letter to the GNWT, as well as the Review Board, that outlines inadequacies of the current EA process and regulations for social impact mitigation and management. Request a review of current policies to initiate amendments that will enhance policies and best practices.
3. Conduct research in partnership with Industry in Tłıchǫ communities to assess the needs of Tłıchǫ mining families. While not all families are employed at the mines, the well-being of families has impacts on the larger family unit and it is probable that each family has if not an immediate, then an extended family member employed at the mines.
4. Negotiate for future Impact Benefit Agreements to secure funds for programs and services that respond to the support needs assessed out of Recommendation #3.
5. An assessment of public and confidential negotiations should be conducted to determine if substantial benefits may exist by taking steps to transition into public IBAs for new projects. A policy should be developed to outline Tłıchǫ expectations for future IBAs negotiations for new projects on Tłıchǫ lands and include stipulations for open or closed negotiations.
6. Support initiatives that recreate the supportive environment found amongst women and families traditionally in the community. This does not necessarily require great resources and could be founded upon or enhance existing programming. Ideas presented by the focus group include: a. create space for women and female Elders to connect regularly to share experiences, stories and guidance; b. create space for regular talking circles for women where emotional support networks can be fostered; and c. make current spaces and activities family-friendly environments where children are welcome, to prevent the isolation of families.
7. Conduct strategic planning sessions to determine community goals for managing and responding to anticipated changes resulting from current mine closures, as well as new developments.

Recommendations for the GNWT

8. Develop a new framework for future Socio-Economic Agreements in partnership with First Nations groups to achieve a more effect tool to mitigate and address social impacts. Efforts to develop this framework should not be initiated in response to a new project proposal, but before so that new standards can be communicated and expectations established for future mining projects.
9. New frameworks for SEAs can include the development of community-based indicators in partner-

ship with First Nations communities, and secure funding for the development and implementation of community-based monitoring programs.

10. Include the Tłıchǫ Community Services Agency in the Environmental Assessment process of future projects to provide input on the social impacts on Tłıchǫ families and the consequent demand on programs and services.
11. The Tłıchǫ Community Services Agency should design programs and services to support specific needs of mining families determined from the research emerging from Recommendation #3. Such programs may include specific supports for the parent left at home to manage raising children and home maintenance.

Recommendations for Industry

12. Mining companies should continue to collaborate with each other to support programming that responds to industry-wide social impacts. The Tłıchǫ Government and communities should be consulted to determine programming needs and research emerging from Recommendation #3 could provide essential guidance,
13. Dominion Diamond Corporation, DeBeers and Rio-Tinto should commission an independent evaluation of the services and programs currently offered to employees. Input from Indigenous employees should be collected to develop programs and services that are more culturally appropriate.
14. Dominion Diamond Corporation, DeBeers and Rio-Tinto should create an Indigenous Wellness and Support Position at site to provide emotional and mental health support to Indigenous mine employees. The person employed in this position should be of Aboriginal ancestry, and have knowledge of northern Indigenous cultures and traditional healing.
15. Industry should revise community development funding criteria to include initiatives that demonstrate a contribution to the development of community support networks for Tłıchǫ mining families. The Tłıchǫ Government and Tłıchǫ Community Services Agency should be consulted on proposed criteria.

Recommendations for the Review Board

16. Request an alternatives analysis from projects proposing to use fly-in, fly-out or drive-in, drive-out work practices that isolate workers from their families for extended times, but where other options are possible.
17. Respond to demands from Indigenous groups for greater social impact mitigation and response (Recommendation #2) by outlining current deficiencies with the regulatory regime. The GNWT should be made aware of such correspondence ■

APPENDIX A - ACRONYMS AND TERMINOLOGY

EA – Environmental Assessment

FIFO – Fly-In Fly-Out Work Practices

GNWT – Government of the Northwest Territories

IBAs – Impact Benefit Agreements, also called Participation Agreements

MVRMA - Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act

M̄w̄hì Region - M̄w̄hì Gogha Dè N̄ìtlèè boundaries as defined by the T̄h̄ch̄ Agreement

NWT – Northwest Territories

Review Board – Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board

SEIA – Socio-Economic Impact Assessment

TCSA – T̄h̄ch̄ Community Services Agency

APPENDIX B - SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Surviving on the Land

The challenges discussed by the Tłıchǫ Elders focused primarily on the physical demands of bush life. There were several mentions of bush life being a “hard life” due to the physical work required to survive. The harsh winter climate of the North added to the challenges, requiring the women at times to scrape caribou hides in temperatures of 60 degrees below Celsius. In addition to raising children, the women would complete physical tasks such as gathering and hauling wood, collecting moss, tanning hides, sewing clothing, raising dogs, setting fish nets and snares, and hauling water. Tłıchǫ families were in good physical health as a result.

In contrast to challenges discussed by the focus group of miner spouses, the Tłıchǫ Elders did not make reference to challenges arising specifically from the men leaving their families to hunt and trap. Even though men left for extended periods ranging from a couple of weeks to months at a time, the women instead highlighted the support that was shared amongst the women and families left behind to tend to the camp and mind the children. When asked specifically what challenges arose for the women while the men were away, Tłıchǫ Elder Monique Mackenzie responded, “There was no challenges. We shared everything. If one woman didn’t have something, we would share everything. If a child got sick we knew what to do, or if there was a birth while the men were out, the women would help each other with childbirth.”

“AT THE TIME THOSE FAMILIES REALLY WERE ACTIVE, PHYSICALLY HEALTHY, EVEN THE WOMEN, THE MEN AND THEIR CHILDREN. THEY ALL WORKED TOGETHER.”
- ROSA MANTLA

Working Together on the Land

One of the key elements that emerged from the stories of bush life was the strong unity and support that the women, family and communities maintained. The women worked together and helped each other to complete the camp chores and raise all of the children. The men supported the women by gathering wood, setting fish nets and rabbit snares, and building food caches of meat before they left. The different families and camps would check on each other and share food and other resources when needed.

Raising children was a key topic for both focus groups. During traditional times, the demanding bush life style meant that every person had contributions to make to the greater community. Older children were given responsibilities such as gathering wood, watching the younger children, maintaining the fire, or checking the fishnets. The Elders each discussed the obedience and respect that children had for the parents. Strong cohesive family units were a matter of survival. The raising of children was a community responsibility and women would work together in the men’s absence to ensure the children

were cared for and everybody had what they needed. There was no discussion regarding the relationship dynamics between the men and the children, except that young men would also accompany the men on hunting and trapping excursions.

Stories from the Tł̥ch̥q Elders portrayed a strong sense of unity that existed amongst communities during traditional times. The community unity was representative of the health of the Tł̥ch̥q population when they lived off the land. Mental health was not discussed as an issue and the women told stories about supporting each other during what would be considered still emotionally challenging times such as giving birth and grieving death. The women spoke of the past fondly and discussed the health of the community mentally and physically while describing the active demands of camp life. There were no references by the Elders to relationship challenges arising from the departure of the men. Instead, when the men would return from hunting and trapping trips, their return was a joyous occasion for everyone, as Monique Mackenzie explains:

When the men would come home, they would be happy. Everything is fine and everybody is okay, they have everything. And the men would be happy too to come home to a warm happy place and everything would be taken care of. Everyone would be happy. There was no bad talk.

Mining Life Challenges

Many of the challenges discussed by the spouses of mine workers related to the struggles to maintain unity as parents as a result of their husbands' work rotations into the mines. Maintaining cohesive relationships between spouses, as well as between parents and children, is challenged by the regular isolation of the men from their wives and families. The blurred divisions of labour were also discussed as challenges resulting from the men's absence. The women are required to fill roles commonly associated with men such as home maintenance and repairs, and the men are sometimes expected to take on primary parenting roles when at home. In addition to the regular absence of the men, other issues resulting from or aggravated by the mining economy were discussed such as financial management struggles, substance abuse problems, and diminished mental health and wellness.

**THEY HELPED EACH OTHER
TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHERS
KIDS. IF SOMETHING HAPPENED,
IF A WOMAN GOT SICK, THEY
WOULD HELP EACH OTHER.**

- MONIQUE MACKENZIE

Changing Family Dynamics

The women described life as a spouse of a miner working two-week rotations into one of the four diamond mines in the Northwest Territories. All the women were mothers, and many of the discussions focused around family dynamics and the challenges associated with parenting and spousal relationships. The regular absence of the men has blurred the divisions of labour, as the women have had to take on tasks such as home maintenance and repair while the men are at work, and the men as primary child care while home from work.

Many of the women felt that no support existed. Despite many references to their being “no support,” the women did discuss some of the support networks they have turned to in the past. Immediate and extended families seem to maintain a critical role in supporting mining families, as the parents and grandparents of the women were discussed as important providers of emotional support. Additionally, community and government agencies such as Social Services, the health centers and the schools have served as points of support for the women while struggling with parenting issues. The deficiencies of these agencies in addressing the support needs of the women and their families were also discussed. Elders, friends and neighbours have been providing some emotional support to some of the women. Additionally, there were stories of members of the larger community making unexpected efforts to support the women in times of need during their husbands’ absence. The women all expressed concern for the lack of available supports for the men at work. All of the women felt that this was an important gap that was contributing to current challenges.

Maintaining mental health and wellness represented the greatest challenge for the Tłıchǫ women and mining families. The perceived lack of support seemed to be contributing to feelings of isolation for the women, who felt that they were facing the challenges alone. Additionally, the strains on spousal relationships remained constant as the mine workers’ return and departure seemed to bring different relationship challenges. The men struggle with feelings of jealousy while separated from their wife, but the women felt that the men were not engaged while at home. The two weeks off from work while home, the regular disengagement from parenting and home responsibilities while at work, and the influx of income were also discussed as contributing factors to struggles with alcohol and substance abuse. While there were many challenges discussed relating to relationships and mental health and wellness, there were also many earnest attempts and strong will described to overcome these challenges.

Strengthening Social Cohesion

The spouses of mine workers offered many suggestions, which they believed could help their families overcome the challenges that mining life has brought into their homes. To overcome challenges relating to relationships, mental health and wellness, as well as parenting challenges, the women thought that better counseling services could offer the necessary healing. Counseling services for the women themselves, the men at site, for the children, and for the family as a whole were discussed as a primary support need. The women also talked about the need for better awareness of existing programs and services. The extent of services offered by the mining companies to the employees and their families was not known. While government-offered programs and services seemed to be well used, they were described as having important deficiencies, such as Social Services not responding to inquiries for help. Having a space to share experiences with other mine spouses was a desire expressed by all and having the “outlet” to talk was appreciated. The women want more opportunities to connect with Elders and other women so they can share experiences, stories and advice.



**WALTER & DUNCAN
GORDON FOUNDATION**

Suite 400, 11 Church Street

Toronto, ON M5E 1W1

Phone: 416-601-4776

Fax: 416-601-1689