Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Food Insecurity: The Need for Action-oriented Research (NAR).
Saturday, Nov. 15, 2014

Key Messages from presenters:
Jackie – Eskasoni – Started workshops with women. Questions for women put on flipcharts. Started slow but slowly progressed to an open discussion level. They knew the issues were in community but were never given the forum to voice them. 1 week left with chart paper all over the walls. Had answers to all the questions. Sat as an elder commissioner for Indigenous murdered and missing women. Feedback she got from community was amazing. They compiled the information. Had 21 issues and did an action plan. We wanted to make sure something was done with study. I.e. If issue was bullying. Identified and then developed an action plan for individual, community etc. There is a booklet and launching is in February 2015. Child youth strategy. Went into break out sessions that put everyone on same level. We need to go to communities and ask them what they want. We got to stop going in their with plans already developed. Land based activities- where we get our connections to our families, everything is tied to land. We get our education from land. Colonists said we were uneducated. But we knew how to read the land, stars seasons. We are not uneducated. We knew how to use the plants and everything but we were forced to put everything underground. Families were united and worked as a team on the land. There was no division of labour. Wakishig FN. Gave everyone a potato barrel and instructions on how to plant them, traditional cultural approach – we need to get involved in the reciprocity teachings. Using everything from the animal. Learning from the animals. Treating everything with respect. Healing comes from the land., traditional hunting, traditional hunting – communities on James bay shut down their band offices and they go on a goose hunt. Hierarchy doesn’t exist on the land. I sit on the Eskasoni Women’s council and we don’t have a hierarchy and having circles around food as well, feasts and leaving out food for creator, plant treks, identifying the plants, minnigan, medicine made out of bear grease, bees wax. And community: grassroots know the answers we just never take the time to ask them the questions. They know what the needs are in the community. They don’t visit each other but they have this knowledge. Lots of elder knowledge in community, very valuable, berry picking, traditional gatherings. Getting families to prepare for winter season, canning foods etc.Having winter feasts to celebrate the winter harvest. Why are we not celebrating the winter and spring solstice. Hire horticulturalists. Record and film these activites because if we don’t we are going to lose it. Mapping everything. Community based programming. Thunderbay 7 kids killed. When kids go to city they are disconnected from their lands. Incorporate gardens. Community at their level can see what their needs are. Action-based research: respectful reciprocal relationship. Worked with food activists. The community is fully informed by what you want to look at. Looking at a grant (sirk) looking at this group and having research questions coming out of that – What are those questions to look at that larger question. People brought stories of their families members who died when working with Hudson’s Bay company. Signed documents within Hudson Bay Companies. 100 year leases some of them were paying $25 dollars a year and they got reimbursed and all the resources. Researchers capacity to address some of those underlying problems. In general we have outside solutions that come, researchers perpetuate those problems in some cases but some do it in a respectful way. Indigenous/Non-indigenous worlds coming together. Power and
profit coming together in that type of context. Don’t work together. The expression of that over time, i.e., land use mapping... before the govt came in and did mapping and didn’t inform the community of what was done with those maps. No reciprocal requirement. Those type of issues need to be addressed: demanding wants in regards to research. What we want to do today to identify the strategies. I learned very quickly when working on PhD that what I wanted isn’t what the community wanted. We haven’t eaten caribou in 30 years. All the different stories surfaced. Not wanted to perpetuate that problem scrapped his plan and came up with a plan more tailored to community needs. So PhD went a little longer, couldn’t find funding. Solutions are going to come internally. Looking not at development projects but at life projects. How we mobilized and analyzed the infrastructure around us and the natural systems around us. Doing an online survey dealing with the issues with the store up north. Open up dialogue with people to help guide the work. Historical relationships, economic status, Hudson bay lobbied to continue to sell of stock they had in remote communities (Sacron). General perception is that it's our fault but communities very much know that that's not the case. Development proposal coming next fall and if you want to participate in the program then its open. Integrating principles and action we’re taking. Matching what universities and industries are capable of resourcing and communities are not. Through accessing resources then it can be termed as community action research.

Address another issue: prescription drugs – people coming out of residential schools were afraid of authority figures. Finding out with trial and error that doctors don’t know what they are talking about most of the time. Medications are doing more harm to people with diabetes. Drs. Are blaming it on diet when it isn’t. Our people need to understand that we need to stand up and talk to doctors and question what they are doing because it is our health. If we are eating healthy we won’t have to deal with these illnesses.

I went to doctor a few years ago so dr. prescribed oxyconton. Felt that he was really high and stopped taking it. Refused it the second time the doctor prescribed. Youth come to him and say the same thing so he directs them to Indigenous traditional people. Doctors are tied in with pharmacy and its all about capitalism.

Misdiagnose with epilepsy. Prescribed medication that made her depressed. They discovered she didn’t even have epilepsy and she was under 3 xs the minimum amount. Raised you don’t tell the doctor anything, they'll get mad at you. Don’t question authority. Deep seated thing that took generations to indoctrine. It's going to take generations to undue. We have come so far then where we were 10, 20 yrs ago. Need to start quantifying the changes for the better. Bring warrior spirit back to our people.

Can you talk about your stories with Indigenous Health Group?

Working with University of Ottawa. $5000 a quarter for last 3 years. Community coupon. As long as we use it for what our community needs its okay. Items like gas for boat etc. Explain how our priorities were helped through those programs. Greenhouse, fishing. Went to Conference in Minnesota and they’re talking about rebuilding our old trade routes. We had wide trade networks. Last year spent $200 on seeds because we already have the infrastructure in place. Know when a mushroom is good for you, my grandfather used to say, watch the squirrels. So I did that these last couple of years and learned a lot about mushrooms.

How can we be more food secure in our communities? At a point now that if we want our children to eat we have to go to other FN to do that. So strategies to rebuild trade routes has to happen now. We need to go to our elders and ask these questions. How much caribou left? Is there a need for a community garden....more questions. With those answers put into a document, do research. We need to look at our plant medicines and see what's there. We need to answer these questions in a traditional way. Elders will give us the answers and offer to help. Included in process. Home-based community research. Photo voicing – picturing – Health Canada Climate Change Adaptation Program. Funding available to do this type of research. Hire somebody that’s trained and respected to conduct the research.

What’s the need for action-oriented research? We know what we want? We know what food is in our area? Where are we going to get that food? Fish? Look to other FN communities and work with them? Ask elders what do you want for your children's future? We need to start looking at where are we going to get funding for that?
Fundraised themselves and came up with $225,000. It’s amazing what community can do when they are onboard.
Teach youth how to research, probe, ask questions and then the youth become researchers and it helps them with their university. Form a committee, bring people in who have skills. Build on what has been built and keep building. My goal is to make sure everyone of the communities in Yukon will have a food security plan. Community gardens don’t work unless it’s a community initiative. Volunteers don’t work. Community based strategies. We want to do our own strategies. The amount of people who are in poverty in this country. It needs to be addressed.

Lobby our chief and council that when they make deals with mining companies to secure money for food security strategies.
Some of them are willing because they want the resources. If they don’t want to meet your needs then kick them out.

Researchers that are not working, kick them out. Embrace the young researchers that are in community nurture them. But the researchers that come in and don’t respect kick them out. Young students can be molded.

If they want to do research in our community they better factor in those young researchers. It’s about finding the right ones.
I was chief and it only lasted one and half years. Constantly being bombarded with other issues. Food security is not priority. Have to have thick skin. Leaders are targeted constantly. You got to find one champion who will sympathize with food security. Can’t access it.

What we did – fighting fishing industry – left with only a small territory to fish. Strategized with elders, youth, educated. Went to Guelph and chose a young man who wasn’t so westernized and he worked with elders. It worked.

Elders need to watch young kids play and choose potentials to nurture for future leaders. We know which kids came back. We know them. Reincarnation. Nourish all children but they can be identified at a young age.

Residential schools interrupted that whole system.
That’s how we nourished our community.

Nourishing young people we also need to acknowledge our hereditary chiefs as well.

Using funds to support young people to learn skills like fishing. Mentoring youth at a young age can support their future efforts in education. Capacity building in grant applications.

Learn by watching. We need to encourage all our youth and if we can pay them that would be great.