

Gender and Resource Co-Management in Northern Canada

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ABSTRACT. An inventory of the nominal representation of men and women on northern co-management boards in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut identified a total of 34 co-management boards. Of their total of 210 members, 176 (84%) were males and 34 (16%) were females. Nine boards were composed exclusively of men, and 18 boards had only a single female representative. The land and resource management regimes created through the settlement of comprehensive land claims have afforded Aboriginal governments equitable representation in co-management but have not promoted gender equity in board membership.

Key words: gender, co-management, land claims, northern Canada

RÉSUMÉ. L'inventaire de la représentation nominale d'hommes et de femmes faisant partie de conseils de cogestion dans le Nord, plus précisément au Yukon, dans les Territoires du Nord-Ouest et au Nunavut, a permis de répertorier 34 conseils de cogestion au total. En tout, ces conseils comprenaient 210 membres, dont 176 (84 %) étaient des hommes et 34 (16 %) étaient des femmes. Neuf conseils étaient exclusivement composés d'hommes et 18 conseils ne comptaient qu'une seule femme. Les régimes de gestion des ressources et des terres découlant du règlement d'importantes revendications territoriales ont permis une représentation équitable sur le plan de la cogestion des gouvernements autochtones, mais n'ont pas fait valoir l'équité entre les sexes au sein des conseils de cogestion.

Mots clés : sexe, cogestion, revendications territoriales, Nord canadien

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, Aboriginal governments in Canada have entered into a range of resource co-management arrangements with federal, territorial, and provincial governments. A conservative estimate of co-management boards in Canada's northern territories alone suggests on the order of 40 different boards, with responsibilities ranging from wildlife, water, and lands to non-renewable natural resources. These boards include some implemented following the settlement of comprehensive land claims and others reflecting agreements that have arisen from conservation concerns over specific wildlife populations (e.g., the Porcupine Caribou Co-Management Board) or formed to manage newly established parks and protected areas (e.g., the Torngat Mountain National Park Co-Management Board). In fact, co-management boards are now among the principal institutions managing access to and use of natural resources throughout much of northern Canada.

While ethnic and political parity have been noted as decisive factors in the formation and function of resource co-management arrangements in Canada (White, 2008), gender issues have received far less analytical attention. Despite the extensive body of literature devoted to gender and natural resource management in other parts of

the world (Resurreccion and Elmhirst, 2008), with few exceptions (Archibald and Crnkovich, 1999; Kafarowski, 2009) gender has gone largely unnoticed in the analysis of resource co-management in northern Canada. This note addresses this void by presenting the results of an inventory of the nominal participation rates of men and women on territorial co-management boards.

METHODS

This research aimed to assess the relative representation of men and women on northern co-management boards as officially appointed board members. Board members are nominated by their respective territorial or Aboriginal governments, and final appointments are made by the federal government. The inventory conducted here includes only those boards established through the settlement of comprehensive land claims in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. Not included are those boards established in response to resource "crises" or for the shared management of parks or protected areas. A preliminary step in compiling this inventory was to consult with the three northern research institutes: the Northern Research Institute (Yukon College, Whitehorse), the Aurora Research Institute

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(Inuvik), and the Nunavut Research Institute (Iqaluit). These consultations identified a list of territorial co-management boards. The method was then framed as a review of research (Hewson et al., 2002), in which existing information on each board listed was located and accessed on the Internet. Like a literature review, this approach involved collecting information about co-management boards that had been made publicly available on their respective websites. Because these boards are public institutions with a mandate to communicate management information, it was found that, with few exceptions, board information was available and up to date. This information often includes biographical sketches and photos of current board members. For those boards whose sites lacked current information, direct contact was made by phone and e-mail. In addition to identifying the number of male and female board members, the review also identified those members holding leadership positions (as chair or co-chair) within their respective boards. All data were collected by the author in May and June 2012.

RESULTS

The review identified a total of 34 co-management boards (Table 1). The total board membership was 210 members, 176 (84%) males and 34 (16%) females. In some cases board positions were vacant while waiting for appointments to be made. In the Yukon Territory, 15 co-management boards were identified, with a total of 100 board members, 18 (18%) of whom were female. These boards include 10 Renewable Resource Councils (RRCs) that have a total membership of 53 members, nine of whom were female (17%). While Yukon RRCs exercise considerably less decision-making authority than do other boards across the territories, they nonetheless serve as important institutions for representing community interests in land and resource management. In the Northwest Territories, 15 boards were identified, with a total of 83 members, 14 (17%) of whom were female. In Nunavut, four co-management boards were identified, with a total of 27 members, two of whom were female (7%). Women hold leadership positions (chair or co-chair) on six boards (17%), four in the Yukon and two in the Northwest Territories. In the case of the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee, the positions of co-chairs are both held by women. In Nunavut, neither of the two female board members held a leadership position. In summary, female representation was found to be limited across all three territories, among all claimant groups, and across all sectors of responsibility (e.g., land, water, wildlife).

DISCUSSION

These findings indicate that 84% (176 of 210) of all co-management board members are men. This result is consistent with that of White (2008), who found that, among

a select sample of co-management boards, women represented less than one member in six. Kanter (1977) argued that 15% female representation should be considered little more than tokenism. In such cases, it is not uncommon for women, because of their minority representation, to be subjected to marginalization and made to feel “invisible” in decision-making processes (Westermann et al., 2005). Acharya (2006) argues that a “critical mass” of no less than one-third female membership is required for co-management institutions to function most effectively. Establishing critical mass is important for creating more supporting institutional environments in which women can overcome potential reticence and speak out on issues and concerns in the presence of supportive female colleagues (Agarwal, 2010:99). The more equitable presence of women in natural resource management organizations has also been found to enhance collaboration and solidarity within the group and increase the willingness of members to resolve their conflicts (Westermann et al., 2005:1795). Yet, within northern co-management boards, this critical mass is far from being realized, with nine of the 34 boards composed exclusively of men, and 18 boards having only a single female member. Thus, 27 of 34 co-management boards in northern Canada have at most one female representative involved in formal decision making. In only one case (Wek’eezhii Land and Water Board) do women represent a majority (3 of 5 members), including the position of board chair. In all other cases women are a minority, their greatest representation being in the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee (3/9), the Yukon Land Use Planning Council (1/3), Carmacks Renewable Resource Council (2/6), the Northwest Territories Environmental Impact Review Board (2/6), and the Sahtu Renewal Resources Board (2/6), in which women represent 33% of their respective board memberships. Although a main objective of co-management is a balanced representation of multiple interests (Pinkerton, 1994), co-management in northern Canada can be characterized in part by significant gender imbalance. These conditions may, in effect, create conditions of institutional inequality where men remain in the position of authority while women remain on the margins of formal decision making, with few opportunities to influence the scope of discussions.

FUTURE RESEARCH

An important distinction must be made between representation and participation in decision-making. Representation may refer to board membership and is measured by the numbers of male and female members appointed and the leadership roles they may hold. However, because women may attend group activities without being official board members, their participation may nonetheless influence management decisions without having a formal role in deliberation. The next phase of this research aims to gain access to the arenas in which women informally influence management decisions, and to make visible the cultural and

TABLE 1. Gender representation on territorial co-management boards.

Co-management boards (2012)	Appointments	
	Male	Female
Yukon:		
Fish and Wildlife Management Board	10	2
Yukon Water Board	6	2
Salmon Sub-Committee	6	3 ¹
Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Board	5	1
Land Use Planning Council	2	1
Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resource Council	5	1
Alsek Renewable Resource Council	5	1
Carmacks Renewable Resource Council	4	2
Dan Keyi Renewable Resource Council	5	1 ¹
Dawson Renewable Resource Council	5	1
Laberge Renewable Resource Council	4	1 ¹
Mayo Renewable Resource Council	5	1 ¹
North Yukon Renewable Resource Council	5	0
Selkirk Renewable Resource Council	6	0
Teslin Renewable Resource Council	9	1
	82 (82%)	18 (18%)
Northwest Territories:		
Sahtu Land Use Planning Board	4	0
Sahtu Land and Water Board	3	1
Sahtu Renewable Resources Board	4	2
Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board	3	1
Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board	6	1
Gwich'in Land Use Planning Board	4	0
Gwich'in Land and Water Board	4	1
Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board	6	1
Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board	8	0
Wek'eezhii Land and Water Board	2	3 ¹
Environmental Impact Screening Committee	6	1
Environmental Impact Review Board	4	2 ¹
Wildlife Management Advisory Council (NWT)	5	1
Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope)	5	0
Fisheries Joint Management Committee	5	0
	69 (83%)	14 (17%)
Nunavut:		
Nunavut Wildlife Management Board	7	0
Nunavut Planning Commission	5	1
Nunavut Impact Review Board	5	1
Nunavut Water Board	8	0
	25 (93%)	2 (7%)
Total	176 (84%)	34 (16%)

¹ Chair or co-chair position held.

political context in which gender differences affect natural resource management outcomes, through extensive observation and prolonged community engagement. This phase is an effort to distinguish nominal representation in board membership from the actual input and influence women may have in decision making, for instance, through kinship and other socio-political affiliations.

CONCLUSION

This research set out to determine the nominal representation of male and female board members on territorial co-management boards. Results indicate that women are underrepresented in co-management boards across northern Canada. The land and resource management regimes created through the settlement of comprehensive land claims have afforded Aboriginal governments equitable representation on co-management boards but have not

promoted gender equity in board membership. It is hoped that the data presented in this note can serve as a baseline against which to measure future changes in male and female participation and a point of reference as new co-management institutions emerge from future land-claim settlements or other forms of devolved natural resource management in northern Canada.

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