



# Long Distance Commuting and Impacts on Northern Communities: A New Research Agenda

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# Background – Resource Development and Northern Communities



“In the past resource development devastated northern communities. People came, disrupted communities, damaged cultures, polluted the land, made money, and then left leaving the communities to clean up the mess.”

## Suicides prompt First Nation to declare state of emergency

Lack of resources, mining development 'exhaust' Neskantaga First Nation

[CBC News](#)

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A small First Nation in northern Ontario has declared a state of emergency after two suicides in less than a week, bringing the toll to seven deaths and 20 suicide attempts in Neskantaga in the past year.

Leaders in the community, which lies in Ontario's remote James Bay lowlands about 480 kilometres northeast of Thunder Bay, say pressures from nearby mining development are contributing to the problems.

About 400 people live in Neskantaga, and a recent health report said about half of them struggle with addictions — three quarters them younger people.

That leaves about a handful of employable adults to help grief-stricken family members and do all the other jobs in the community.

A First Nations leader in the region said meeting the demands of the burgeoning mining industry is only adding to Neskantaga's misery.

“It's just a lot of pressure, I think, from the outside,” Nishnawbe Aski Nation Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler said, “as well as trying to deal with what's happening right in their community.”

On Wednesday, the community issued a cry for help from all levels of government and Ottawa has promised additional nursing and counselling staff.

“Our hearts go out to those who have lost friends and loved ones to suicide,” said Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq in a written statement.

The community is faced with many challenges including a high rate of prescription drug abuse (about 50 per cent of the population), issues of sexual abuse, poor water quality (currently under a boil water advisory), inadequate policing services, and no access to proper mental health and addictions treatments and counselling.

Neskantaga First Nation is a remote fly-in community located 480 kilometres northeast of Thunder Bay, with a population of 421 people. Young people make up more than 75 per cent of the population.

# The Central Research Questions



Can resources be developed in a manner that helps the long-term sustainability of Arctic communities?

How can this be done?

How can FIFO be done in a way that contributes to community sustainability?



Giant Mine, Yellowknife NWT

# First Projects – Gap Analyses



Gap Analysis Theme	Lead Researcher
History of Resource Development	Ken Coates, University of Saskatchewan
Impacts of Resource Development	Peter Schweitzer, University of Vienna; Thierry Rodon, Université Laval
Measuring Impacts	Andrey Petrov, University of Northern Iowa
Resource Revenue Regimes	Lee Huskey, University of Alaska Anchorage
Social, Economic and Environmental Impact Assessment	Bram Noble, University of Saskatchewan
Regional Economic Development	Frances Abele, Carleton University
Social Dimensions of Resource Development	Brenda Parlee, University of Alberta
Community – Industry Relations	Ken Caine, University of Alberta
Impact Benefit Agreements	Ben Bradshaw, University of Guelph
Resources and the Subsistence Economy	David Natcher, University of Saskatchewan
Traditional knowledge and resource development	Henry Huntington, PEW Environment Group
Resources and Environmental Issues	Arn Keeling, Memorial University
Climate Change	Chris Southcott, Lakehead University
Cross Cutting Theme research: Gender and Resource Development	Suzanne Mills, McMaster University; Martha Dowsley, Lakehead University

# Initial Findings related to FIFO from a Northern Community Perspective



## A New FIFO Typology to understand impacts

- Two types of FIFO – external and internal
  - External FIFO is usually seen as negative
  - Internal FIFO is seen as having both positive and negative impacts
- Various forms of FIFO
  - Isolated FIFO
  - Staging area FIFO
  - Proximate FIFO

# External FIFO



- **Positive aspects**
  - Reduction of boom and bust impacts (fluctuations in housing prices, employment fluctuations)
  - Less out-migration
  - Reduction of cultural impacts (especially if workers isolated from locals)
  - Benefits through IBAs
- **Negative aspects**
  - No employment benefits to communities
  - No indirect benefits through capacity-building (education and training)
  - No multiplier effect

# Internal FIFO



- **Positive Impacts**

- Employment benefits to communities
- Indirect benefits through capacity-building (education and training)
- Limited multiplier effect

- **Negative Impacts**

- Impacts on families and youth
- Drug and alcohol abuse and associated social pathologies
- Dangers of cultural assimilation
- Dangers of future out-migration
- Gender divisions

# Isolated Internal FIFO



- **Positive aspects**
  - Limited boom and bust impacts (depending on levels of local FIFO employment)
  - Employment benefits to communities
  - Indirect benefits through capacity-building (education and training)
  - Limited cultural impacts
- **Negative aspects**
  - Limited multiply effect
  - Impact of families
  - Some drug and alcohol abuse and associated social pathologies
  - High danger of future out-migration



# Staging Area Internal FIFO



- Positive Impacts
  - Increased multiplier effects
- Negative Impacts
  - Increased danger of boom and bust impacts
  - Increased cultural impacts
  - Increased danger of social pathologies

# Proximate External FIFO



- **Positive Impacts**
  - Multiplier effect
  - No FIFO for local workers
- **Negative Impacts**
  - Boom and bust impacts
  - Strain on local services
  - Cultural impacts
  - Strong possibility of social pathologies
  - Impacts on women

# Towards a FIFO research agenda for northern communities



- ReSDA is be interested in things that directly impact northern communities
  - Host communities and regions
  - Workers from host regions
- Better understanding of the impacts of FIFO under different situations
- What are the positive aspects of FIFO and how can these be optimized?
- What can be done to mitigate negative impacts?

# Thank you Merci Qujannamiik

## **Main Contributing Partners for ReSDA**

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