



BUILDING ON SUCCESS

A National Conversation on First Nation Self-Government

Assembly of First Nations Yukon Region
Self-Government Conference – Building on Success
Managing the Transition to Self Government
Fran Asp – Champagne & Aishihik First Nations

Good Morning, Elders, Chiefs and delegates.

My name is Fran Asp, I am a citizen of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. I have worked for CAFN since 1998, involved in the implementation of our Self-Government Agreement, I am currently the Director of the Secretariat.

Understandably, after more than twenty years of negotiations, the expectations of our citizens were pretty high. The document “Together Today for our Children Tomorrow” laid out a statement of grievances from the Yukon Indian People and what the expectations of a fair and just settlement would be.

One of my memories, that consistently happened after we signed our agreements, was people would approach Lena Smith Tutin, our Finance Director and say “Hey Lena, do you have my land claims cheque. ” Some were saying this in jest, but many were serious.

One day we were a First Nation governed by the Indian Act with very limited authority, the next day we opened our doors as a self governing First Nation with law making authority and the responsibility for ensuring the implementation of our agreements!

Wow, where to start and how? There was no “how to manual”, so many outstanding issues required further discussion and negotiations of the parties. Implementation would be a challenge, as the focus to date had been on the land claims negotiations and agreements.

Citizen expectation’s from the Elders to the Youth of what self-government is and how it should work ranged from the belief that the First Nation should take over where DIA left off... to one of self-reliance. Education was the key, the new CAFN government established an education program that encouraged and supported citizens to further their goals.

Our organizational structures needed to be planned and developed to be able to address our community and citizens needs;

We developed a new Heritage, lands and Resources Department. A challenge for this department was explaining and educating our citizens on what our rights and obligations were within our Land Claims agreements. This department worked to develop a Lands Act, Traditional Activities Protection Act and a Fish and Wildlife Act



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based on extensive consultation and inclusion of our citizens.

Citizens expectations regarding social issues continue to be a challenge. It is sometimes known as the legacy of dependency or the DIA hangover. The “right” to housing was entrenched by DIA policies, CAFN continues to work towards home ownership that builds on the vision of self-reliant citizens, while recognizing the social needs of the community.

Revitalization of our language and culture was and continues to be a priority, a cultural center is currently being built, that will showcase our culture, but also provide a teaching environment for our citizens wishing to learn our traditions and practices.

Our staffing capacity needed to be developed, we were going from administering programs designed by and reporting to other levels of government to determining our own solutions to our unique needs. Citizens believed that if you already worked for CAFN then you benefited, in reality in 1994 CAFN had 25 staff positions, in 2009 we had 81 full time employees. We are continually negotiating with Governments on addressing our fiscal requirements to effectively implement our agreements.

We needed to build our financial management skills to respond to the need to establish new entities such as the Trust and re-mandating our Development Corporation, negotiating taxation, program and financial negotiations.

At the same time, our communities needed developing, our citizens need housing, training, jobs, and programs that would help CAFN achieve its vision of a healthy, unified and self-reliant people.

No small task, CAFN Council and staff developed a Vision statement which led to a strategic planning process to prioritize and implement the Governments priorities.

The vision for programs and services speak to how programs are designed and delivered in the communities, where there is a possibility to build on or expand existing programs, great we would work with other governments to accomplish this. Some programs simply do not work and need First Nations design and control, otherwise we will continue to waste time and resources for programs that are not achieving their purpose.

The biggest challenge in meeting these expectations is time, and as it’s been said these agreements are evolving as our governments mature.

We expected a lot and wanted to do everything! Realizing that there is too much to do, and not enough time, money and resources to get to everything we needed to set priorities. We needed to ensure our citizens truly understood the challenges of implementing these agreements and the process of negotiations. Including our citizens through a series of educational sessions has assisted us in managing unrealistic expectations. We are proud of being a Self-Governing First Nation, with all the ups and downs, the challenges and successes along the way. It is still us doing and deciding what we want and need on our own time!

We all need to understand that in re-building these relationships among the



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different levels of government we need to be open to creative and new opportunities to truly achieve the spirit and intent and honor of the Parties.

These are the programs and services that most directly affect our citizens. When our citizens see their children healthy, happy and immersed in their culture, proud of their identity and sharing in all that this land has to offer than I would say that we as Yukoners should be proud to say that we offer a blueprint that Canada can offer the world.

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this conference.