

# Human Security in the Arctic



*GAPS Project: The Impacts of Oil and Gas Activity  
on Peoples in the Arctic Using a Multiple Securities Perspective*

An International Polar Year (IPY) Project: 2006-2011

## GAPS Project Results Summary

### Gas Arctic Peoples and Security - GAPS

Dawn Bazely (Institute for Research and Innovation in Sustainability, York University, Toronto, Canada) led a very interdisciplinary team. We are interested in ecology and the natural environment, human health and well-being and politics. We looked at how the northern environment and communities are currently being affected by many different factors. Oil and gas development will alter these pressures, in both positive and negative ways, in both the short and long-term.



Northerners are well aware of these current and impending challenges and also, of the kinds of resources and governance that will enable them to adapt and respond to them, in the context of rapid change. A key feature of this adaptation is that it will differ among local communities but will reflect inclusive, community-based processes.

Our sub-projects looked at health, housing, governance and invasive species. What we found, overwhelmingly, was that the human security of northern residents in general, and indigenous peoples, in particular, is already being affected in many ways. They include increasing homelessness, a lack of mental health services, insufficient governance support, and the presence of non-indigenous plant species that have the potential to invade and alter intact northern ecosystems as further changes occurs.

## More About GAPS



GAPS is a multi-national (Canada, Norway and Russia), multi-disciplinary initiative. GAPS looks at the scope and range of human security - aspects such as environmental security and health security, across the Arctic. Prof. Gunhild Hoogensen of Tromsø University, Norway, leads the international project. GAPS specifically focuses on the short and long-term impacts that stem from oil and gas activity, including

climate change, on Arctic peoples. Our goal is to identify and document threats and coping strategies from traditional and human security perspectives (in both Arctic communities and among Arctic researchers).

The express purpose of the Canadian GAPS projects has been to explore and describe both the positive and negative impacts arising from pressures to develop oil and gas, on peoples in communities in the North (focusing on the Yukon and the North West Territories in particular).

We have consulted with community members and other stakeholders, and done field work in many Arctic communities: Tuktoyaktuk, Old Crow, Whitehorse, Fort Simpson, Fort Good Hope, Norman Wells, Inuvik and Yellowknife.

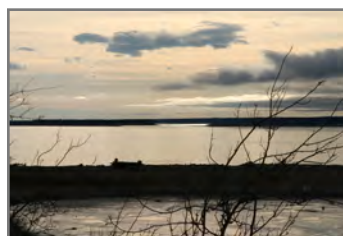


Since the community consultation and field work have ended, GAPS researchers have been analyzing the results and writing reports. So far, two masters theses have been completed by Alana Kronstal and Milissa Elliott, and Julia Christensen passed her preliminary PhD examination. Updates on specific sub-projects follow.

## What is Human Security?

All GAPS sub-projects have used the Human Security framework to assess how Arctic communities think about their security. Human Security exists "when individuals and communities have the freedom to identify risks and threats to their well-being and the capacity to determine ways to end, mitigate or adapt to those risks and threats", according to Prof. Hoogensen. Human Security is, essentially, about human well-being. In order to achieve and maintain this well-being, we must initiate action to take control of the mounting threats to Human Security in the Arctic, which is seeing rapid shrinking of ice shelves as the temperature increases, affecting the people themselves, as well as the animals and resources which sustain them. Human Security is a **demilitarized** form of security. The military and the state are NOT seen as the only source of security. The Human Security approach accepts that individuals and communities can and should have a voice

in defining their own security, at a local level. Therefore Human Security considers bottom-up (local voices) and top-down (e.g. national government) inputs. The Human Security framework is a process and a journey. Most importantly, Human Security is about dialogue - it is a way to get local voices heard!



## Sub-Project Results

### Pipelines and the Northward Movement of Plants

Milissa Elliott's MSc thesis found that many potentially invasive, non-native plants are already living along the proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline route. They have not yet entered the nearby forest and taiga plant communities. However, with changing environmental conditions, these introduced plant species could jump into the forest and taiga. Local community members were very interested in this issue.



In a different project, looking at whether common grasses eaten by mammals contain a microscopic fungus that is potentially toxic, Paul Marmer found that the fungus is present in several NWT grass species. These grasses appeared to have been introduced from southern seed mixes. In related research, Nora Saona will soon finish her PhD, which has examined the nature of these grass-fungi-grazer interactions in more detail.

### Negotiating Change: Community Mental Health and Addiction Practice in the Northwest Territories of Canada

Alana Kronstal's study set out to explore the experiences and support needs of community mental health and addiction services providers in the context of rapid social and economic change in communities in the Northwest Territories (NWT) of Canada. Two main questions were: How do community mental health and addictions workers experience and respond to rapid socio-economic change in relation to their professional practice? What are the support needs of practitioners in light of ongoing change in the region? Alana interviewed 15 community-based mental health and addictions practitioners



throughout the NWT. In the discussion of her research findings, three key lessons emerged:

- Lesson #1: Social and Economic Change Affects Mental Health and Addictions in Northern Communities
- Lesson #2: Internal Organizational Changes are an Expression of Socio-Economic Change and Affect Practitioner Interactions with Community
- Lesson #3: There are Ways to Move Forward Together

### A Renewed North: Resources, Corporations & First Nations

This project originated out of a conversation Gabrielle Slowey had with the former chief of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (Old Crow, Yukon) in which she asked the question: "So, what exactly has changed since you gained self-government fifteen years ago?" Following up on the chief's invitation to visit Old Crow and find out, Slowey expanded the study and received a SSHRC grant to look at how the situation in Old Crow compares to non-self-governing communities next door in the NWT. In the fall of 2007 Slowey spent 6 weeks conducting research in Edmonton, Yellowknife, Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk, Whitehorse and Old Crow. During this time, she interviewed over 20 officials including oil and gas executives, self-government negotiators, Aboriginal leaders and community members.



Her preliminary results suggest that self-government is a critical component in preparing communities to respond to and cope with the challenges presented by oil and gas development. The power to make decisions locally (versus at a distance from Ottawa) is an essential part of self-government, and of tools to improve conditions for local peoples. She plans to publish these results, along with those of her colleagues, in an edited volume which she is currently working on. In addition, she is currently looking at how the lessons of this northern research can be applied to communities in southwestern Ontario.

### Homeless in a homeland: housing insecurity and homelessness in the Northwest Territories

Over 150 homeless men and women, as well as northern policy developers, advocates for homeless people, and frontline staff have participated in Julia Christensen's study.

Community governments have also played a major role, with a high degree of consultation and support from the Nihtat Gwich'in (Inuvik Homeless Shelter), the Gwich'in Tribal Council, the Inuvik Interagency Committee, the Yellowknife Homelessness Coalition, the Centre for Northern Families, and the Yellowknife Salvation Army. Their experiences and insights show how housing security is adversely affected by a very tight and increasingly unaffordable housing market in Yellowknife and Inuvik. Policy and program changes related to public housing have led to growing reliance on the



## Spinning-Off from GAPS

- Co-organizing the International Polar Year Time Capsule Project, in Yellowknife, NWT
- Co-hosting the Youth Workshop "Our North/ Our Future: Talking Security, Sustainability and Change with Northern Youth", in Tuktoyaktuk, NWT
- Co-organizing the Conference "How Will Disenfranchised Peoples Adapt to Climate Change? – Strengthening the Ecojustice Movement", in Toronto, ON
- Launching the Global Climate Justice Website with Ecoar, Brazil
- Attending COP 15 and 16 meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

private housing market, which is highly exclusive and has limited access for lower income community members. This insecurity is heightened during 'boom' times related to resource development (oil and gas development booms in the Inuvik area and diamond mining booms in the Yellowknife area), when growing populations lead to rising rents and housing costs, as well as decreasing vacancy.

Housing insecurity and homelessness are also deeply affected by uneven development in the territory, mainly reflected in high unemployment and high core housing needs in the settlement communities. Housing security was repeatedly cited as a major factor in overall human security, with connections consistently made between the socio-economic impacts of resource development and heightening housing insecurity in the territory, particularly in regional centres.

### By the Numbers:

- 5 Sub-projects
- 19 Team Members
- 14 Students
- 3 New Researchers
- 11 Northern Students
- 300+ Northern Participants
- 8 International Collaborators
- 2 Team Workshops
- 28 Presentations
- 21 Conferences Attended
- 2 Books in the Works
- 3 Journal Articles
- 10 Media Articles & Interviews
- 6 Newsletters & GAPS Reports
- ... So far

### GAPS Project Website:

[www.ipygaps.org](http://www.ipygaps.org)

This project summary was prepared by Annette Dubreuil, GAPS Project Manager, and the GAPS team. Photos by GAPS team members. Feedback and comments to the GAPS Project can be sent to [afdubreu@yorku.ca](mailto:afdubreu@yorku.ca) or you can call 416-736-2100 x 33631.



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