

**Economic and Socio-economic Planning Processes: Beyond the Document**

**Regional Planning Process in Gander Bay**

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Community-based Research Project Steering Committee

## Introduction

The area of focus for this report is Gander Bay. Gander Bay is a region located approximately 50 kilometers north of Gander, Newfoundland and Labrador. Presently, it is divided into three service districts: Gander Bay North, with a population of 330; Gander Bay South, population of 435; and Main Point and Davidsville with a population of 350.<sup>1</sup> These Local Service Districts (LSD's) are comprised of nine smaller communities: Rodgers Cove, Wings Point, Dorman's Cove, Clarkes Head, Beaver Cove, Victoria Cove, Davidsville, Main Point, and Gander Bay South, and Gander Bay Indian Band.

The Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Gander Bay Report was created in 2008 from data collected, compiled and interpreted through the combined efforts of Service Canada, Kittiwake Economic Development Corporation (KEDC), the Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development (INTRD) of Newfoundland and Labrador, The Gander Bay Indian Band Council (GBIBC), LSDs and other organizations and individuals. The purpose of the LMP report was to gather statistics about the region and to assess Gander Bay's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to development. It was also created to make recommendations for the future by providing a list of possible development opportunities.

This paper investigates the creation of the LMP Report and subsequent related activities. Research methods included a review of the LMP Report and related development literature as well as interviews with five individuals involved in community and regional development in Gander Bay. The interviewees include: a GBIBC representative, the coordinator of the LMP Gander Bay Report, a KEDC representative, an INTRD representative and a representative from the LSD in Gander Bay.

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<sup>1</sup> Kittiwake Economic Development Corporation. (2008). *Gander Bay Final Report*. Labour Market Partnership.

The five topics discussed in the interview questionnaires included: a description of the way the planning process was conducted, moving from planning to implementation, outcomes to date from the planning process, key factors that have contributed to implementation success or lack thereof, and removing challenge and barriers to planning and implementation. Research results that are related to each of these topics are presented below.

### **Description of the planning process**

This section outlines the steps, measures and decisions that went into the development of the LMP Report. Here, informants' responses about how the planning process was identified, conducted and assessed will be described and analyzed. The planning process for Gander Bay began in 2005 when Service Canada identified the need for some form of development planning in the area. Two respondents suggest that this process was reactive because it was a response to the threats of underdevelopment in the region. However, this reactive response came from Service Canada, and not from residents within the region. Service Canada had identified that there was a lack of response to opportunities for development projects in the area, with no uptake for grants or job creation projects underway. It was also recognized that there were high levels of unemployment, low skill levels and education in the area. For these reasons, Service Canada wanted the region to be assessed and went to KEDC requesting that the organization conduct research to assist in the creation an economic and socio-economic plan for the community.

It was decided to conduct the research and resulting socio-economic report such that multiple communities, rather than a single community, were involved due to the interconnectivity of the region. The nine communities in Gander Bay are geographically close and considerations such as political boundaries, shared services, natural and cultural interactions were taken into account.

The planning process was structured through a series of actions. First, there was an initial meeting between Service Canada and KEDC that identified the need for the evaluation of the Gander Bay region. The KEDC then developed a proposal/action plan. To do this, a community facilitator (i.e. the LMP Report Coordinator) was hired to conduct the study and gather the required information while living within the communities. While living in Gander Bay, the facilitator followed a five step project analysis. The first step in the project analysis involved meetings with community leaders, community organizations and other stakeholders to develop positive working relationships. Then, an analysis was done on the local labour market and the demographics for the region. After the demographics were identified there were meetings with individuals, local groups, businesses and LSD representatives. These meetings were used to identify possible employment barriers, barriers to preserving and retaining local businesses, and social and economic opportunities for the future. The fourth step involved taking all the information that had been recorded and observed to create a Labour Market Partnership Report. After this, the final step of the project was to show the report to residents, who, it was suggested by three informants, were interested in participating in development. Residents were generally interested in how they could access resources for their community to assist in the development projects that were suggested in the economic and social strategy, developed in the LMP Report.<sup>2</sup>

The entire process involved the participation of a series of stakeholders, including government officials, regional and community organizations and individual community members. These included Council representatives from the LSDs, the GBIBC, a Department of Transportation representative, local business owners, the Gander Bay North (GBN) Firettes, Main Point/ Davidsville Firettes, GBN Fire Department, and representatives from the churches

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<sup>2</sup> Planning team representative, personal communication, Nov. 2009

and schools. To involve all the stakeholders in the process there was a variety of methods used: public meetings, meetings with individual groups, newsletters, workshops, informal resident home discussions, and mailed surveys. A large portion of the socio-economic statistical data in the LMP Report was based on information provided from the mail-out survey, which received a response rate of 27%.<sup>3</sup> Four out of five informants agreed that most, if not all, of the community groups and individuals that required representation were included in the planning process. One informant emphasized that there should have been a greater involvement from higher levels of government. It was also suggested, by all informants, that an individual should have been hired, during the planning stage, to move the implementation phase forward.

The coordinator for the LMP Report was an external consultant from the KEDC. This coordinator moved to Gander Bay for approximately one year to collect information (via the participatory methods stated above) and compile data to report back to KEDC and Service Canada. The LMP Report is the product of his findings. The total budget for the planning process was approximately \$76,000. The cost was covered by Service Canada, who provided \$65,000, and the KEDC, who supplied the remaining \$11,000.

There were specific strategies and initiatives included in the plan that were identified primarily by residents of Gander Bay. Initiatives were identified through meetings and individual discussions. The economic strategies identified (in descending order of highest priority) included: daycare facilities, exploration of mineral possibilities of deposit in Tungston, upgrade Victoria Cove wharf, aquaculture possibilities, blueberry farming potential, the implementation of a recreational vehicle park for tourism, and the establishment of a call centre.<sup>4</sup> The most important social projects identified were adult continuing education, a public library with high

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<sup>3</sup>Planning team representative, personal communication, Oct. 2009

<sup>4</sup> KEDC 2008

speed internet, a play ground, and a Boys and Girls club.<sup>5</sup>

There was not a consensus on the process' connection to broader regional plans. While some individuals considered the plan an entirely separate entity, others thought that there were some moderate connections with the plans of the surrounding region that were considered in the development of strategies and initiatives. However, there was no attempt, as a part of this project, to do a formal review of other regional plans to identify specific planning documents that may complement or conflict with the Gander Bay plan.

### **Moving from planning to implementation**

When moving from planning to implementation there are several steps that have to be taken to make sure that the process of implementation is carried through. According to Ling et al (2007) there are four main steps in implementing a plan: influencing decision-makers, educating community leaders, communication and outreach and fostering sustainable community commitment.<sup>6</sup> In this case none of these steps have really been taken, resulting in the plan not moving past the planning process.

In order for implementation to occur, commitment, planning, education, and funding are important factors that are needed to get the process completed. In the case of Gander Bay, there is little funding, and in order for implementation to take place, funding needs to be provided to “get the ball rolling”. According to one provincial representative, presently, no programs are funded by the government to assist with the implementation phase, which results in serious program gaps. There were some profitable enterprises in the area identified, through adventure tourism along the Gander River.<sup>7</sup> There is also a boat basin that is used by locals to dock their

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ling et al. 2007. Integrated Community Sustainability Planning Tool. Royal Roads University

<sup>7</sup> Government representative, personal communication, Nov. 2009

boats to access the Gander River. The basin is maintained by a group of volunteers from the Gander Bay area, and in order for people to gain access, there is a minimal fee which creates some revenue but not enough to establish any programs.<sup>8</sup> Coupled with the lack of a municipal government with taxation ability in the area, the ability to generate funds within the region to launch new initiatives is limited

In the LMP Report, it is stated that in order to establish implementation there has to be “qualified individuals to provide leadership in undertaking new initiatives”<sup>9</sup>. In this case, there is lack of leadership or qualified individuals which prevents implementation from occurring. The coordinator of the Gander Bay LMP stated that there was lack of volunteers to spear head any progress on the plan. Another informant mentioned that there was little structure in place to even start implementation. Without structure or resources it is impossible for implementation to occur. There is also a lack of education as a result of the absence of continuing education programs,<sup>10</sup> the significance of which is discussed further below.

### **Outcomes to date**

This section outlines the outcomes and benefits that have been achieved through the planning process. Innes and Booher suggest that outcomes are often intangible entities that are thought of as social capital, including outcomes that result in relationship building, communication and problem solving.<sup>11</sup> This section will focus on some of the ‘intangible’ outcomes that were mentioned by the respondents. Many of the intended outcomes in the LMP Report have not been recognized because there has been minimal implementation to date. In the case of Gander Bay, there were some identified regional issues that brought the communities

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<sup>8</sup> Regional representative, personal communication, Nov. 2009

<sup>9</sup> KEDC, 2008, p.30

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Innes & Booher. 1999. Consensus Building and Complex Adaptive Systems: A Framework for Evaluating Collaborative Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 65(14). pp. 1-13.

together. There were raised hopes and expectations in response to the initial stages of planning, however these hopes and expectations were followed by disappointment when implementation did not occur.<sup>12</sup>

Generally there were limited intended outcomes of the plan. However, there were some benefits from the planning process that include improved relations amongst the people of the community which can result future collaboration. Two respondents suggested that there were some unintended (or „unplanned’) outcomes of the planning process. These included the revenue generated at a local church where the planning sessions were held and a couple of people that attended the workshop sessions who then went on to write business plans of their own. Unfortunately, these individuals subsequently moved away from the Gander Bay region.

In the future, new or enhanced skills or knowledge can be obtained from educational programs, such as the adult development program that is offered by the Anglican church.<sup>13</sup> There is also support at local churches which include “women that organize fund raisers for the church” .<sup>14</sup> The area also has a very strong underground economy, with people being involved in saw milling and the exchange of wood, for example.<sup>15</sup> The saw milling economy is a result of low levels in education, and people create jobs for themselves through the exchange of wood.

### **Key factors in implementation success (or lack of)**

There are multiple factors which can determine the success, or the lack of success, in a plan’s implementation. In Gander Bay, there are limited resources to facilitate a plan and implementation. All five of the informants suggested that without these inputs in place, there is no way to start project implementation, let alone create sustainable and long-lasting projects and

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<sup>12</sup> Regional representative, personal communication, Nov. 2009

<sup>13</sup> KEDC 2008

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Provincial representative, personal communication, Nov. 2009



initiatives. Each of the five informants attributed the lack of implementation success to a combination of factors including: the absence of core staff and a general lack of human, physical and financial resources. For instance, there is a limited amount of volunteers, community champions and support funding in the Gander Bay region.

There was also some variation between the responses of those interviewed. This section will highlight both the similarities and differences among the factors that were identified as most detrimental to implementation success. Three of the five informants emphasize that getting beyond the bureaucratic processes is quite a challenge, for example, and acts as a barrier to even trying to implement a project. The bureaucratic barrier is likely exasperated by the fact that there is an absence of municipal governments in the Gander Bay region.

Three of the five respondents suggest that a lack of financial resources have been the most damaging aspect to project implementation in Gander Bay (2009). Finances and grants are certainly an important part of planning and development. For example, the process of starting a regional steering committee would obviously benefit from project funding, such that committee members would receive support (such as honoraria or perhaps even wages) for their efforts.

Yet, other informants did not state that funding (or lack thereof) was the biggest challenge facing Gander Bay. A resident in Gander Bay, stated that “if someone were to donate a million dollars to me right now and say ‘take that and spend it towards economic development in Gander Bay,’ well I’d have a hard time spending it...on anything long-term and meaningful.” The issue of not being able to develop sustainable economic programs is related to the highly aging demographics in Gander Bay as well as its relative proximity to Gander. Because Gander is so close, many of the residents in Gander Bay work, shop and socialize in Gander, meaning

that there is little support for local businesses and programs.<sup>16</sup> This focuses the problem of underdevelopment on the fact that there is little community support for local business and other initiatives.

A key impediment to planning is the fact that there is little organization among community members and very low levels of leadership.<sup>17</sup> The demographics in Gander Bay include a large percentage of retirees and a low proportion of youth,<sup>18</sup> meaning that large numbers of people are leaving the labor force and fewer numbers of people are entering it. Thus, there are increasingly less people available to work and start businesses and community related programs in the Gander Bay region. Because there is a high proportion of the population that has not achieved their high-school education, the literacy rates are relatively low in Gander Bay. A low regional literacy rate is bound to have many repercussions on development, including negative impacts on continuing-education programs, such as a lack of trained people to run these programs.<sup>19</sup> Three of the five informants state that perhaps the biggest challenge facing Gander Bay is the lack of highly educated people to start implementation, such as individual leaders willing to take on various initiatives. Furthermore, when people do not have strong reading and writing skills, it negatively affects their ability (and confidence) in applying for grants and filling out funding applications.<sup>20</sup>

Two of the respondents suggested that another reason that projects have not been implemented in Gander Bay is the general sentiment that community members among the three LSDs are content with the way things are currently. In other words, there is a sense of complacency in many residents such that various projects are not spearheaded because there is

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<sup>16</sup> Planning team representative, personal communication, Oct. 2009

<sup>17</sup> Provincial representative, personal communication, Nov. 2009

<sup>18</sup> KEDC 2008

<sup>19</sup> KEDC 2008

<sup>20</sup> Local representative, personal communication, Oct. 2009

little social and cultural impetus to do so. One respondent emphasized that most people in Gander Bay are content with the region as it is because many of the houses there are owned outright, people have their own crafts including sleigh making, knitting and other ‚handy‘ day-to-day skills and people enjoy recreational pastimes, such as hunting. When complaints are raised about the lack of services or amenities, the general attitude to community development is “why didn’t *they* (emphasis added) do this... why didn’t *they* do that?” Very rarely are people taking on personal responsibility for projects in the region.<sup>21</sup> This is a problematic issue that is perhaps indicative of why there are no other projects being started in Gander Bay.

In multiple-community planning processes there are typically more players involved, from more dispersed areas, than in single-community planning. In the Gander Bay region, there is a wider diversity amongst the groups involved, including diversity in skills and knowledge than if planning involved any one community.<sup>22</sup> “There is no water and sewage at Gander Bay North and Mainpoint/Davidsville” for example, while Gander Bay South is in the process of a multi-phase project to receive water but not sewer services.<sup>23</sup> One respondent said that other than shared fire services and dump facilities, there is not much cooperation among residents of different communities when things go wrong. When there is not much cooperation among communities, there is difficulty with planning because there is lack of input, which results in a major challenge in the planning process.

### **Removing barriers and addressing challenges**

Given the lack of implementation, the Gander Bay region is certainly wrought with barriers and challenges from a development perspective. This section will address some

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<sup>21</sup> Planning team member, personal communication, Oct. 2009

<sup>22</sup> Provincial representative, personal communication, Nov. 2009

<sup>23</sup> KEDC 2008

suggestions provided by various organizations and individuals involved in Gander Bay regional development and the Gander Bay LMP Report. Ideas regarding how to overcome barriers to implementation, identification of key actors/players that are necessary and any lessons learned from the multi-community planning process will also be addressed here.

Informants offered numerous possible solutions to overcome barriers to planning in Gander Bay. These included: getting together organizations and/or committee(s) to initiate some of the recommendations suggested in the LMP Report, creating positions for core staff to take on the role of implementation, securing a greater amount of financial resources for implementation and the initiation of social events to foster a sense of regional pride. Among all the informants, it was agreed that there needs to be an organized group of people to explicitly deal with implementation. This is reflective of the general results suggesting that the largest barrier to implementation is a lack of human resources.

One informant suggested that a committee needs to be formed with representatives from each local service district and that this committee should keep the whole region in mind. It is important that this committee keep a „regionally minded’ mandate because this will ensure that the three LSD representatives are more likely to collaborate on issues, rather than operate in isolation to one another. A LSD representative from Gander Bay supported this notion, stating that an individual or group needs take an explicit leadership role in planning implementation.

The informants described a series of tasks that ought to be performed by the government in developing Gander Bay. Two of the informants suggested that government funding for core staff could help initialize the implementation process. This staff could remain in Gander Bay for a designated period of time (e.g. a minimum of three years, maximum five years) and while initializing certain projects they would set up sustainable implementation strategies, such that

projects will be able to persist long after the government funding has ceased.<sup>24</sup>

Another informant recommended that the government should consider officially moving the LSDs into one town, as a kind of amalgamation. Although, according to the MHA for the Gander Region, the provincial government's preference is for the LSDs to come together on their own.<sup>25</sup> This final task is considered to be important because if communities pool their human, financial and bio-physical resources (via becoming a single, incorporated town), it is believed that they would accomplish more. This is especially relevant in terms of physical infrastructure in the Gander Bay region, because as it stands presently, there are some communities that are in desperate need of particular infrastructural services (e.g. sewage and water facilities).<sup>26</sup>

Two other informants, one of which lives in the region, suggested that the provincial government could play a more active role in supporting the education system in Gander Bay. This would entail government assistance for educational initiatives such as continuing-education programs as well as social outreach projects. However, these two informants also stated that individuals in Gander Bay cannot expect the government to do for them what they are not willing to do for themselves. In other words, government assistance and intervention will help to a certain degree, but not without community members' support.

It was unanimous among all five respondents that community residents need to take more initiatives in the planning process. The suggested included: community members creating a task force organization to consider those outlined projects, individuals writing business plans for local enterprises, and a greater dialogue between community members and government officials.

There were mixed responses as to what lessons were learned from the multi-community planning process. One of the respondents could not identify any „larger' lessons that were

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<sup>24</sup> Planning team representative, personal communication, Nov. 2009

<sup>25</sup> LSD representative, personal communication, Nov. 2009

<sup>26</sup> LSD representative, personal communication, Nov. 2009

learned in Gander Bay, while four out of the five respondents acknowledged the necessity of a „community (or in this case, regional) champion’, to move plans forward. This lesson applies to planning implementation more generally. Two of the respondents suggested that the construction of the LMP Report was helpful in identifying community members’ relative strengths and weaknesses, and this process did provide residents with a „taste’ of participation in community development. The excitement surrounding the preliminary stages of the planning process is a positive thing, though it is important that individuals see this as an ongoing process, rather than an immediate fix. One respondent suggested that the greatest lesson learned in this process is the fact that it got residents from one community to look outside and draw knowledge from those in other communities. In this sense, the multi-community approach helped inspire a sense of empathy for other communities and it allowed people to see that they are not alone with some of their challenges. Whether this sense of unity encourages people to act in dealing with particular issues has yet to be seen.

## **Conclusion**

The overall plan of a community or region should reflect the thoughts, ideas, and values of local residents. These are combined to create a vision of what the people want their community to be like. In Gander Bay, the projects and initiatives suggested in the LMP Report, which are based largely on what residents identified as important, have not been implemented. It is suggested that implementation did not occur because of a lack of human and financial resources, and no one available to „champion’ these projects. The aging population and general lack of education were also detrimental to plan implementation. The major result of the LMP Report is that it identified the regional socio-economic characteristics of Gander Bay, which are

perhaps very telling of why the development process has not proceeded in the region. The outcomes of the planning process, albeit somewhat limited, suggest that there is certainly the potential for individuals to engage in local entrepreneurial activities. The question seems to shift then to whether or not residents want to see change in their region enough to make it happen themselves. From the informants surveyed, it appears that there is potential for external support to aid in the process, but ultimately, it comes down to the idiom that development is a two-way street.

### **Work Cited**

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