

Governance Pilot Project: Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Tribal Council

The Ktunaxa Nation consists of five semi-independent bands. The Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Tribal Council serves both Ktunaxa and Kinbasket communities in the capacity of an *Indian Act* Tribal Council. As part of its ongoing nation-rebuilding and treaty negotiation process, the Ktunaxa have agreed to return to a model of governance based on the principle of individual, family and community accountability to the nation, and a balancing of responsibilities and privileges in four areas – social investment, traditional knowledge and language enrichment, land and resource stewardship and economic investment. To support this development, the Ktunaxa Nation engaged in two interrelated governance projects.

In the first project, an analysis and codification of community/tribal governance models and the delineation of legislative, executive, judicial and administrative functions and authorities held at both the community and the Nation level was completed. The project describes a multi-level political system with both nation and community level institutions. It includes an institutional map identifying traditionally grounded institutions based on family structures and describing their interrelationships with individuals, family organizations, and the community.

In the second project, the role of Elders in Ktunaxa Nation Government was explored and codified. The Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Tribal Council proposes a system of government which would replace the *Indian Act* in all five First Nation member communities while re-affirming and re-creating a system of Ktunaxa Nation governance. The Ktunaxa system is based on an elaborate system of family and community groups and structures, all of which have roles in the four areas of community and nation responsibility (social investment, traditional knowledge and language enrichment, land and resource stewardship and economic investment).

Ktunaxa groups, government structures and offices include:

- family (primary, extended),
- family heads (primary, extended),
- family sector speakers,
- community sector councils,
- sector chiefs,
- council of community chiefs,
- community elders senate,
- national sector council of chiefs,
- national chiefs assembly,
- sector grand chiefs,
- council of grand chiefs, and
- national elders senate.

Judicial, legislative and administrative authorities would be exercised concurrently at community and nation levels.

The proposed model of Ktunaxa government is not specifically described as representing a return to a traditional form of Ktunaxa governance. Nevertheless, it does represent a renewal of governance grounded in tradition, structurally, functionally and philosophically, and based on traditional principles of individual, family and community accountability to the nation. Though not explicitly stated, it appears to re-create

traditional structures that linked individuals, families and communities to the nation, for example, through the use of different family organizations and their associated structures.

Apart from adopting a traditionally-grounded institutional design, Ktunaxa governance is predicated on Ktunaxa ideas and understandings of such matters as responsibility, community, identity, representation, consensus, and good governance. As such, not only the structure of government but also the practice of government is traditionally grounded. To this end, Ktunaxa values, philosophies, and traditions such as consensus, or the idea of “everyone taking a bite of the same thing, at the same time, and chewing long enough to swallow without choking” is operationalised.

The Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Tribal Council’s report makes recommendations for other First Nations considering the development of First Nation governance models. It is noted that, most importantly, the model must “fit” the community, and as such it must be respectful of conditions such as the community’s, internal social and political environments, and assets.

Excerpted from *First Nations Governance Pilot Projects: Challenge and Innovation*. A Final Report Prepared for the National Centre for First Nations Governance by Carleton University Centre for Community Innovation. February 2005.