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Household Survey Methodology: An Option
for Collecting, Analyzing, Disseminating,
and Reporting Aboriginal Subsistence
Whaling Data about Cultural, Subsistence
and Nutritional Need

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INTRODUCTION

At IWC65, the Commission adopted Resolution 2014-1 “to work to improve the process for ASW in the future through a more consistent and long-term approach” (IWC/65/Main Outcomes). The resolution contains language relating to the standardization of the ASW need statements, as well as the collection and analysis of data relating to “local consumption and use and the extent of monetary transactions” relating to whale products. In addition, ASW countries were invited by the Commission “to continue to provide regular data and improve information on all aspects of their hunts and needs” (Resolution 2014-1)¹. Given the potential conflict in goals calling for both standardization and differentiation, the question for consideration becomes “How can we collect data that uncovers the needs unique to each ASW community, while simultaneously providing a practical basis for evaluating such needs?”

This paper provides information about and opportunities for discussion surrounding the use of a Household Survey Methodology. This overall strategy provides mechanisms for approaching the standardization of needs statements at one level, while providing for an elegant collection of social, cultural, nutritional, and economic data in a manner that respects the diversity and autonomy of ASW peoples and their respective nations².

A brief summary of the generalized methodology follows. A survey director trains a local interview team comprised of resident members of the ASW community, and uses their input to modify questions on the template to reflect local priorities. Individual interviewers take the standardized survey instrument to randomly selected households, and use the first residential adult to connect with the interviewer as the respondent for whaling-related activities of the people in that household. Interviewers return the completed surveys to a centralized location; the survey director takes possession of the instruments from that location and completes the analysis of the data. The number of interview teams is dependent on the cultural and geographic areas that need to be surveyed. The process to adapt a standardized instrument for all residential sites for one ASW community can also be affected by social, cultural, linguistic, and geographic factors.

BENEFITS OF HOUSEHOLD SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Household survey methodologies can be as complex as the protocol developed by the United Nations (2005), or as culturally flexible as those developed to uncover language use in a home setting or migration of a particular ethnic group (Leap 1981). While cost and complexity are factors which can influence the choice of the methodology, there are a number of direct benefits in using households as the lens for collecting data about an ASW community:

- (1) Focusing on the household (HH) allows for the capture of important information regarding the procurement, processing, preservation, preparation, and distribution of whale products within family groups as well as residential groups. Involving members of the ASW group as interviewers in the actual survey process, and as consultants when constructing the questionnaire and analyzing the responses, increases the cultural validity of the process while bringing important technical skills into the community. In addition, the use of local personnel helps decrease the survey timeline because community members already have connections to the field staff. Local personnel who become skilled field staff provide a labor pool for future interview-based research efforts.

¹ Resolution 2014-1 referenced Resolution 1994-4 and the IWC objectives for aboriginal subsistence whaling which include “enabl(ing) aboriginal people to harvest whales in perpetuity at levels appropriate to their cultural and nutritional requirements, subject to other objectives”.

² The Needs Statements for the Makah Tribe has relied on Household Survey Methodology for Household Whaling Surveys conducted in 2001, 2006, and 2011. A complete survey instrument is found in Appendix 1 of IWC/64/ASW4 and a complete description of the methodology is found in Appendix 2 of the same document.

- (2) The survey instrument can be constructed to collect cultural, nutritional, and economic data in a single process that minimizes the burden for the ASW country, while ensuring that all major issues are uniformly covered. Construction of the questionnaire can follow a skeleton of standardized categories that can be populated with questions and categories unique to, as well as important to, each ASW community. By hosting a series of structural categories which repeat across groups, the data can be compared over time for a single community. It may also provide the basis for comparing ASW communities, though as noted above, respecting the diversity of such communities may limit the value or appropriateness of such comparisons.
- (3) HH surveys can present opportunities for ASW countries to “nest their goals” and collect socio-cultural and economic data for use in other, long-range contexts.
- (4) HH surveys provide an important framework for distributing findings back to the ASW community, an important consideration for building and maintaining a trusting relationship which would allow for future surveys (whether related to whaling or other topics). This dynamic part of the process can build additional relationships that enhance data management and provide reliable sources of information about the use of whale products in the periods between HH surveys.
- (5) HH surveys can provide information which might assist the Commission’s evaluation of need statements relative to currently undefined terms like “predominant portion”, “small scale”, and “at levels appropriate to their cultural and nutritional requirements”.
- (6) HH surveys allow an ASW community to quantify and report their perceptual data regarding any one or more of the processes associated with the whale hunt. By establishing a quantified measure for perceptual data points like the level of community support for continuation of whaling practices, or level of reliance on whale products, ASW people can provide population-based percentages rather than opinions of a few individuals which may not be representative of the community’s views. The ability to access population-based data provides important support for long-standing practices and beliefs within ASW communities as they continue to respond to requests to objectively communicate their cultural and nutritional needs for whale products.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR HOUSEHOLD SURVEY METHODOLOGY

- (1) One practical concern for any system of data collection and management is the associated cost. The Makah Tribe’s 2011 Household Whaling Survey required three months to interview, collect, analyze and distribute data from 170 households on the Makah Reservation at a cost to the Makah Tribe of approximately \$15,000 U.S. dollars. This substantial cost would likely vary among ASW communities, and is an additional burden associated with meeting their needs for whale products.
- (2) As a point of reference, the budget for a HH survey depends primarily on the complexity of the methodology (including the process for random selection of households) as well as the length of the operational timeline and the need for survey translations into multiple languages. Costs climb as the number of HH survey sites (like villages or cities) increase for any one group, or if the overall geographic area requiring coverage increases. In the case of the Makah Tribe, geography was conducive to the Household Survey Methodology. One primary village with peripheral residential developments³ (within a reservation of approximately fifty square miles) allowed interviewers to conduct two interviews a day with minimal travel time. ASW communities with multiple residential locations spread over vast land areas might find distance and travel time to be significant limitations of the Household Survey Methodology. Another factor moderating the cost of the Makah HH survey was tribal members’ extensive experience conducting and participating in HH surveys (for whaling and other purposes).
- (3) Electronic adaptations of the Household Survey Methodology (using e-tools like Skype) would certainly be dependent on Internet connectivity and access in remote areas, but present a potential means of reducing the high cost of conducting the HH surveys in person in such areas.

³ The Makah Tribe elected to survey its tribal members who were also reservation residents. Tribal members who live away from the reservation retain strong ties to the ancestral homeland, often travelling hundreds of miles to return to Neah Bay to participate in ceremonial and subsistence activities.

REFERENCES

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