



Context

Today, Nunavik Inuit remain wildlife harvesters, but they are also members of modern communities and active participants in the wage economy. The signing of the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement* in 1975 was a pivotal event that transformed the region's administrative structures as well as relations with Québec and Canada. Over the past 35 years, responsibility for all kinds of community programs and services has gradually been transferred to locally elected decision-makers. Over this same period, Nunavimmiut have passed from dogsledding to the Internet.

A Few of the Challenges

Concerns and challenges in every sector converge in the communities: education, health and social services, economic development and employment, correctional services and justice, municipal services, telecommunications, the environment and wildlife, as well as culture and identity.

Despite major gains in local infrastructure and programs since 1975, community development continues to lag behind most other regions of Québec. Government funding moreover does not reflect high transportation and operating costs.

Whether referring to the population dependency ratio, overcrowded housing, the rate of criminality, suicide, substance abuse, life expectancy, poverty, unemployment, low literacy, the issue of school drop-outs, or food insecurity for elders and disadvantaged households, the situation in the communities is alarming and a source of preoccupation for local and regional leaders as well as residents.

Non-ethnic organizations such as the northern villages and the Kativik Regional Government have difficulty accessing Aboriginal funding for specific sectors such as community infrastructure construction and operations, even though 90% of the population is Inuit.

The high cost of living limits the purchasing power of Nunavimmiut and contributes to poverty. The high cost of doing business (transportation and operating costs, including most importantly municipal taxes) makes it very difficult to start up and run local businesses.

Economic development is hindered because the communities are not connected to the Québec electrical power grid or land transportation network.

Agreements concerning the construction and maintenance of local infrastructure, at the heart of community development in Nunavik for many years, must continue to be renewed.

Solutions and Priorities

Communities that will be impacted by the industrial development of Nunavik must be full participants in this development.

Plan Nunavik pre-condition 2: An effective, long-term approach is needed to reduce the high cost of living and of doing business in the communities.

The funding of essential services (municipal service infrastructure, fire protection, childcare, airports, sports and recreational facilities, policing, search and rescue, etc.) and government programs must be adapted to the actual costs of delivering these services and programs in the north.

Plan Nunavik pre-condition 3: The funding of essential services must be brought together under a long-term agreement.

The Sanarrutik *Partnership Agreement on Economic and Community Development in Nunavik* (2002) recognizes that public goods, services and construction contracting represent an opportunity to stimulate economic development and job creation in the region's communities. The implementation of priority government contracting must be achieved.

Support local subsistence harvesting in order to ensure food security, by contributing to safe access routes to harvesting areas, lowering transportation costs for harvesting equipment, and maintaining traditional levels of harvesting.

The creation of protected areas enhances the practice of traditional subsistence activities, and Inuit must have a say in selecting the areas to be protected.

Follow up on the recommendations of the regional working group on justice, specifically regarding the implementation of the justice provisions under the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement*.

Identify permanent funding for landholding corporations to enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities under the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement*.

A municipal-tax relief program for businesses must be put in place.

Discussion

The communities will continue to demand that government initiatives, programs and services be adapted to a comprehensive regional vision of development, the Inuit way of life and other regional realities in the fields of health, education, housing, employment, environmental protection, wildlife conservation and economic development. Community development will moreover be greatly influenced by development in the transportation, energy and telecommunications sectors.

Nunavik is the next frontier and will be at the heart of much development for decades to come. Our youth have the potential to be the region's most positive asset if every effort is made now to ensure safe and healthy communities, and a decent quality of life.

