



SakKijânginnatuk Nunalik:

Understanding opportunities and challenges for sustainable communities in Nunatsiavut

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Nunatsiavut communities are rapidly growing and changing, placing new pressures on development planning for sustainable, healthy communities. At the same time, climate change is having an increasingly pronounced impact in the region, affecting infrastructure, community services and the wellbeing of residents. Recognizing the urgency to respond, the fiscal return from appropriately designed, low maintenance infrastructure and the opportunities associated with community expansion and a changing climate, the Environment Division of the Nunatsiavut Government, in partnership with the Joint Management Committee (JMC) of Nunatsiavut, have developed the SakKijânginnatuk Nunalik (Sustainable Communities) initiative. The overall goal of the initiative is to develop best practices and provide support and guidance for enhancing community sustainability in Nunatsiavut.

The first project action, as directed by the JMC, was to understand current community priorities, challenges and opportunities through a series of workshops with focus groups from each community. These workshops were held in January and June 2012. Specifically, the aims of these workshops were:

- 1. To document those places, spaces and activities in the community that are valued by residents and seen as important to maintain for the future*
- 2. To reflect on the challenges of recent community development in terms of addressing community needs, values and goals*
- 3. To identify some of the obstacles to and opportunities for building a more sustainable community*

The AngajukKâks of each Inuit Community Government and Trevor Bell of Memorial University, a partner in the SakKijânginnatuk Nunalik initiative, facilitated the workshops. The focus groups included elders, youth, councilors, town managers and employees, development officers, service providers (e.g. health professionals, recreation directors, RCMP), past and present community leaders, and residents with specialized knowledge of the community.

At each workshop, participants unanimously voiced their appreciation for the opportunity to discuss openly and respectfully those issues that are central to their community. They also strongly urged that the information discussed be used to trigger action on their concerns and that regular reports be made back to their communities. This synthesis report, together with the individual community workshop reports, are intended to summarize the main discussion points of each workshop for the information of JMC members and to advise future decision-making and development of the SakKijânginnatuk Nunalik initiative. Emerging themes and findings have been compiled from all community workshops and are summarized below.

Meeting Organizers and Research Team: These meetings were organized by the Environment Division of the Nunatsiavut Government Department of Land and Natural Resources and the Joint Management Committee of Nunatsiavut, in partnership with the Department of Geography of Memorial University, the Environmental Resource and Indigenous Studies Departments at Trent University and the Inuit Community Governments of Nunatsiavut.

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PART 1. WHAT IS VALUED?

Preserving the natural environment

Participants of all workshops emphasized the importance of the natural environment within their community. Berry patches and fishing spots provide much needed sources of country foods, supporting the food security of residents and also providing recreational opportunities that connect community members with their cultural heritage. Freshwater brooks and ponds provide preferred sources of drinking water or swimming holes that are particularly popular with young people. Vegetation beautifies the community, contributing positively to the mental health of residents and plays an important role in dust suppression and the maintenance of slope stability, thus minimizing the harmful effects of erosion. The protection and preservation of these areas are especially important for low-income households, and others without access to motor vehicles who rely solely on local resources within walking distance of the community.

Preserving local infrastructure

All communities voiced a strong interest in preserving local infrastructure. Recreational facilities such as skating rinks, ballparks and play grounds, offer youth safe spaces to play and grow. Heritage structures (such as the Moravian Mission Complex in Hopedale and the Hudson's Bay Company Trading Post in Rigolet), in addition to community markers and trails, connect residents with their past and are strategic venues around which to develop tourism attractions. Airport and harbour facilities provide essential transportation services on the coast and represent critical infrastructure for emergency services and search and rescue operations, in addition to daily operations of all communities.

Community events and recreation programs

Participants from Makkovik, Rigolet and Postville emphasized the importance of sports and recreation programs, community events and 'community spirit' as factors contributing positively to quality of life. These activities help strengthen bonds between residents, foster community pride, build self-esteem and promote an active lifestyle, thus supporting the mental and physical health of residents. Larger events, such as the Salmon Festival in Rigolet, Easter games in Postville and Makkovik Jamboree, draw visitors to the community and provide revenue for the Inuit Community Government.



Country food

Country foods and the places, spaces and activities that support the procurement of country foods are all highly valued. Hunted and harvested foods provide vital sources of nutrients, good fats and calories, thus supporting food security, while hunting and harvesting activities, hunting grounds, cabins and food sharing networks all form a fundamental part of Labrador Inuit identity and are deeply embedded within the fabric of life on the coast. The protection and preservation of the bays, lakes, trails, wetlands and forests outside the communities are thus essential to the health and wellbeing of residents inside the communities. Participants from Nain and Hopedale specifically highlighted the importance of the community freezer programs in their communities and the support they provide for elders, single parent households, and other residents who are food insecure and have difficulty accessing country foods.

Local industry

Local industry and employment sources, such as the fish plants in Makkovik and Nain and the lumber mill in Postville, were highlighted as making significant contributions to economic security on the coast. Opportunities for expanded economic development, for example, the tourism sector – were discussed with optimism as participants from all communities emphasized the need for jobs to retain youth and help ensure the future viability of their community.

Health services and service providers

Health services and service providers, such as the community clinic, nurses, counselors and social workers, are greatly appreciated in all communities on the coast. Necessary transportation services that allow residents to access additional health services in Goose Bay and elsewhere are also valued, despite some frustrations (see additional comments below).



PART 2. EXISTING CHALLENGES AND EMERGING DEVELOPMENT THEMES

Geographic setting

The remote, isolated, coastal location of the communities and their subarctic climate were identified as geographic realities that define lifestyle on the North Coast but present specific challenges for community sustainability.

Landscape and environment

There is a significant lack of desirable building land in all communities on the coast. Available land is constrained by landscape hazards (such as slope instability, drainage, runoff, erosion, flooding and core ice), contaminated sites and the prevalence of pug and other types of land that are unsuitable for development. Land uses, including garbage dumps, airports, cemeteries, quarries and housing developments, are competing for the minimal amount of desirable land that is available. Restricted sources of local building resources, such as aggregate, sand, gravel and topsoil, further amplify difficulties stemming from conflicting and non-complimentary land uses.



Housing availability

More housing and more diverse housing types that include those suitable for seniors and youth are needed in all Nunatsiavut communities. The availability of multiplexes or apartments may offer energy efficient, affordable alternatives to single family detached dwellings, thus allowing independent living for residents in need of a space of their own, while easing current overcrowded conditions.

Housing design and construction

Participants of all community workshops expressed strong concerns that current housing is inadequate. Housing designs are needed that have a longer lifespan without major repairs, reduce the occurrence of mould, are developed through participatory processes in partnership with coastal residents and reflect the cultural preferences and lifestyle needs of Labrador Inuit.

Water security

All communities highlighted the need for improved access to reliable sources of clean drinking water year round.

Sewage

Participants from Nain would like to identify the impacts of sewage disposal in Unity Bay, including the possible detrimental effects on human health and the environment.



Energy security

Some residents in all communities are unable to adequately heat their homes. Low-income households and seniors with wood stoves have particular difficulty due to the inaccessibility of firewood and the high costs of oil. As all power plants are operating all full capacity on the coast, residents are unable to switch to electric heat and alternative energy and heating sources need to be developed. Homes that are not sufficiently heated promote the growth of mould, lead to frozen water pipes, negatively affect the health of residents and cause general suffering.

Dust

Participants from all communities are concerned about high levels of dust and the detrimental health effects of dust exposure, especially for elders, infants and those with existing respiratory concerns. Dust suppressants such as calcium have had limited effect and are expensive to apply.

Waste management

Participants from Hopedale, Nain and Makkovik identified the need for a regional waste management strategy. The majority of garbage dumps on the coast have reached their capacity and limited building land restricts possibilities for expansion.



Docking and wharf infrastructure

Docks and wharfs in all communities are congested in summer and infrastructure improvements are needed to facilitate emergency planning and the movement of necessary goods to and from the community.

Airport

A longer, safer airstrip with lights is needed in Nain that provides reliable service 24 hours a day. Fueling facilities are needed at the airport in Hopedale to make full use of this airstrip, better accommodate transportation needs and to meet the demands of emergency services.

Economic development

The need for economic growth and jobs was outlined during all workshops on the coast. Job training and employment opportunities are needed for youth retention and to create a prosperous, secure future for residents.



PART 3. A CALL FOR ACTION

Actions requested by workshop participants derive from past experiences, present conditions and future needs. They are a blueprint for the sustainable, environmentally sensitive, culturally appropriate and adaptable communities residents would like to build for the future.

Funding opportunities

Participants requested that new funding opportunities be explored to support sustainable initiatives in their communities. Infrastructure and community development support must take account of the remote, isolated, coastal geographic setting of the region in the planning and funding of sustainability programs.

Youth out-migration

There was strong concern, particularly in the three southern communities, regarding the outmigration of youth. Proposed actions to retain youth included strengthening support services, expanding training and job opportunities, making available appropriate accommodation, supporting vibrant recreational programs and developing strong connections with the land.

Waste management

Waste diversion programs, such as recycling, scrap metal collection and hazardous waste disposal, are needed to maximize the use of existing dump space and ensure materials are re-used where possible. Garbage compactors and incinerators that meet environmental standards should also be considered.



Economic development

Areas of potential future growth outlined by participants included: tourism (including cruise ships, whale watching, outfitting and guiding), diversification of species processed at the Nain and Makkovik fish plants, and lumber and wood pellet manufacturing in Rigolet, Makkovik and Postville. Participants also discussed how the SakKijânginnatuk Nunalik initiative may in itself be a driver of economic development within communities. For example, the Nunatsiavut Group of Companies and Torngat Regional Housing Association should be involved in the planning and construction of new housing and infrastructure programs, while training programs should be strengthened and expanded to ensure that Nunatsiavummiut, particularly youth, have the necessary skills to fully participate in local construction projects.

Community planning

Participants from all communities would like to be more involved in community planning and would like to ensure local goals and values are integrated into community planning decisions. Specifically, residents would like to preserve valued places, spaces and activities in their communities while fostering the development of sustainable, environmentally sensitive and adaptable Inuit communities.



Community transportation

The larger communities of Nain and Hopedale recognized that their rapidly expanding town footprint meant that local services were becoming increasingly spread out and that there was a growing demand for local transportation. These demands including moving residents and visitors back and forth to the airport, bussing children to and from school - especially during dinner hour - supporting seniors in day-to-day activities and encouraging residents to participate in community events - especially those without their own vehicles. Such essential transportation infrastructure could be deemed emergency services under some circumstances.

Building lots

Participants specifically noted a need for new approaches to the development of building lots that minimize the need for gravel pads, preserve natural vegetation, reduce cost, and meet local needs for storage and outdoor practices. Residents would like disturbed areas to be re-vegetated, building foundations that are adapted to local land types and new construction practices that mitigate structural damage resulting from shifting ground, permafrost thaw and climate change.



Housing design

Participants from all communities would like to contribute to the design of local housing and would like Labrador Inuit Knowledge to shape the development of new housing models. A design charette should be held with participants from across the region to discuss culturally appropriate housing types and styles that are energy efficient and well adapted to changing environmental conditions and climate. Best practices from across the north should be reviewed to advise the creation of new building standards and new approaches to housing development. Building a model home in the region, gathering feedback from residents of the home and other community members and monitoring energy use would allow a new design to be tested before adoption.

Contractors

Communities would like to foster more positive, trusting relationships with hired contractors, would like independent inspectors to certify the work completed in their community and would like to be more intimately involved in all levels of decision making. In addition, participants would like support to develop training programs for local workers.



Food security

Participants in all communities expressed concern regarding access to country foods and fresh fruits and vegetables, both quality and range; they would like to develop community gardens and community freezer programs to help support those in need and to improve food quality and diversity. Some participants spoke of creating local food cooperatives.

Health services

More frequent visits from eye doctors, dentists, social workers and counselors were requested, in addition to improved patient transfer services to Goose Bay.

Harbours and docks

All community harbours should be charted to permit safe navigation and docking of ferries and ships, particularly larger ferries that are required for future marine transportation. For example, residents identified a desire to travel with their vehicles to Goose Bay, requiring roll-on, roll-off ferry services. Docking infrastructure to accommodate larger ships would help attract cruise tourism and may provide opportunities for further economic growth.



Transmission of land skills

In order to strengthen connections to the land and increase the participation of youth in subsistence activities, workshop participants identified opportunities and barriers to the effective transmission of land skills and hunting ethics from harvesters to youth. Existing programs in schools need to be strengthened and new initiatives, such as the Aullak, sangilivallianginnatuk (Going off, growing strong) youth program in Nain, should be explored. The Nunatsiavut Government and Inuit Community Governments should help reduce or remove obstacles to youth program operations. Successful programs may not only pass on valuable resource management skills and traditional hunting ethics to future generations, but will also help retain youth by encouraging them participate more fully in their community and their culture.

Road link to Goose Bay

During the workshops in Makkovik, Rigolet and Postville, there was lively discussion around the possibility of building a road linking the communities with Goose Bay. Although there was strong support among some participants for the construction of a road, others were clearly conflicted by the possible disadvantages that a road may bring. It was clear that residents would welcome a neutral forum where they can openly voice opinions about the possibility. Holding a forum such as this, regarding the road, and similar issues in future, may help communities establish a formal position in advance of a proposal, should one be developed.



Water security

Municipal water system infrastructure should be adapted to local environmental conditions, constraints and changes and not be dependent on snow cover to insulate underground water pipes from winter freezing. Rigolet participants expressed strong concerns regarding the quality of their tap water and would like long-term solutions developed to mitigate the occurrence of trihalomethanes (THMs) and other potentially harmful contaminants.

Environmental monitoring

Although Makkovik, Postville and Rigolet participants specifically requested environmental monitoring programs for their communities, most if not all communities identified drinking water quality, airborne dust, contaminated sites and air quality around diesel generators as issues of concern that require immediate attention. For example, there was a general call for monitoring programs to evaluate dust levels in communities and new strategies to minimize the concentrations of airborne dust.

Government services

Workshop participants from Rigolet and Postville would like a stronger Nunatsiavut Government presence in their communities. They do not want the size of their communities to restrict opportunities for attracting government offices and postings. Such decentralization of government decision-making would provide much-needed local job opportunities and ensure decision-makers are more fully aware of the needs of coastal communities.

