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Bridging, Bonding, and Building / Renforcement des liens et des capacités

Subsistence and the Social Economy of Nunatsiavut, Labrador

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BACKGROUND

In 2006, the Nunatsiavut Government entered into a partnership with researchers from the University of Saskatchewan and Memorial University to document the non-commercial use of country foods by Inuit residents in the communities of Nain, Postville, Hopedale, Makkovik, Rigolet and Upper Lake Melville in Nunatsiavut, Labrador (Map 1). A survey was designed to systematically gather information on the harvest, use, and distribution of country foods by Nunatsiavut households. In total, 665 out of 842 Nunatsiavut households were surveyed (79 percent coverage).

FINDINGS

1. Despite experiencing profound social and economic change, the Nunatsiavut Inuit continue to harvest, process, distribute and consume considerable volumes of country foods annually.
2. Harvesting and distribution of country foods not only fulfills important economic and nutritional needs but also strengthens and perpetuates social networks by linking individuals, households and communities across Labrador.
3. Nunatsiavut households represent mixed-economies where wage labour is used to support the harvesting activities of other family members.
4. By optimizing a range of economic activities, Nunatsiavut households have successfully incorporated wage earning into an overall livelihood strategy.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. Any attempt to develop more effective northern policy must begin to accurately reflect the complexity inherent in Aboriginal economies and remain open to the plurality of forms they may take.
2. This requires an understanding of the complex social, economic, and political interplay that takes place between subsistence and wage earning, sharing and reciprocity, and the regulatory regimes that mediate Aboriginal community access to wildlife resources.
3. Given that subsistence and wage earning activities are intrinsically link, more appropriate policies promoting equitable linkages between the two are required.