

## Public Engagement and the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction: Attempting to Understand Nunavut's Poverty Reduction Strategy

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**Abstract:** The 2009 Government of Nunavut Report Card, a review of the first ten years of Nunavut's existence, recommended the development of an anti-poverty strategy to help address severe social inequality in the territory. Between October 2010 and November 2011, the Government of Nunavut (GN), jointly with Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), oversaw an extensive public engagement process that resulted in the creation of the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and the territory's poverty reduction strategy. The strategy suggests that the tension that exists between Inuit forms of governance and the model of public governance used today is the root cause of poverty. However, it does not offer an official definition of the term. Knowing the way in which poverty is perceived in Nunavut is key to understanding the direction of the territory's poverty reduction strategy. Drawing upon interviews conducted in Iqaluit and in Ottawa in 2015, as well as on records from the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat, this article examines how the territory's poverty reduction strategy was developed. It argues that the roundtable's participatory methods, closely aligned with principles of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, have fostered a politicized discussion about poverty that has resulted in Nunavut's poverty reduction strategy's focus on collaboration and healing.

### Introduction

Discussions about inequality in the Canadian North are not new (c.f. Berger, 1977; Canada, 1996; Jenness, 1964); however, the issue has received renewed attention in recent years. Between 2009 and 2014, all three territorial governments—the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and

Nunavut—launched poverty reduction initiatives. In 2012 and 2013, Canada-wide media coverage of food price protests, rising inequality, income disparities, and social welfare grants coincided with the visits of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Canada Without Poverty [CWP], 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; CBC News, 2012; Whittington, 2012). The reports of both visitors were highly critical of Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples, and of living conditions in the North (Anaya, 2013; De Schutter, 2012).

In Canada, socio-economic disparities exist across age, gender, and ethnic groups, and particularly between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations (Collin 2007, 2008; Cooke, Mintrou, Lawrence, Guimond, & Beavon, 2007; Hazell, Gee, & Sharpe, 2012). A quick look at the socio-economic indicators of Nunavut helps to reveal the extent of this disparity. Approximately 85% of Nunavummiut (residents of Nunavut) are Indigenous (almost 84% of the population is Inuit), and the territory falls well behind the rest of Canada in terms of life expectancy, income, and levels of education (Hazell et al., 2012; Statistics Canada, 2011). Nearly 70% of preschool-aged children in the territory live in food insecure households.<sup>1</sup> Community-based studies indicate that general rates of food insecurity in Nunavut range from 50 to 80%, up to six times higher than the national average in the rest of Canada (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami & Inuit Circumpolar Council, 2012; Wakegijig, Osborne, Statham, & Doucette Issaluk, 2013).

In recent years, poverty reduction has become an important policy priority in Nunavut. Since 2010, the Government of Nunavut (GN) and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) have co-chaired the Nunavut Roundtable on Poverty Reduction, which produced *The Makimaniq Plan: A Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction* in 2011. The strategy has since been enshrined into law by means of the *Collaboration for Poverty Reduction Act* (Nunavut, 2013a). The Makimaniq Plan identifies six areas of focus for poverty reduction efforts: Collaboration and Community Participation, Healing and Well-Being, Education and Skills Development, Food Security, Housing and Income Support, and Community and Economic Development (Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction [NRPR], 2011a). However, the strategy does not define poverty in Nunavut, or identify any indicators by which to measure the progress of poverty reduction efforts in the territory. A five-year poverty reduction plan was under review in late 2014, and ten draft outcomes of poverty reduction were released on the Nunavut Roundtable’s website in the spring of 2015

(NRPR, 2015a, 2015b). At the time of writing, however, neither had been officially released.

This article seeks to offer insight into the operations of the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction in an effort to develop a better understanding of the vision behind the Makimaniq Plan. It does so by drawing on the semi-structured interviews and the raw data from the roundtable public engagement process, which were collected as part of the research for my Master's thesis and which focused broadly on the ways in which poverty is conceptualized in Nunavut and the resulting policy implications for Nunavut's poverty reduction plan. I begin by tracing the origins of Nunavut's poverty reduction efforts and outlining common approaches to poverty reduction. I outline the stages that led to the drafting of the Makimaniq Plan and examine the intentions behind the design of the roundtable's public engagement process. Finally, I argue that the Makimaniq Plan, shaped by a politicized understanding of poverty, has at its core a focus on collaboration between Inuit and the Government of Nunavut, and on healing from the social trauma and upheaval created by federal colonial policies of relocation and resettlement that dispossessed Inuit from their traditional territory and way of life. This understanding of poverty is the product of the roundtable's participatory methods. These are closely aligned with Article 32 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, which states that Inuit have the right to participate in the development of social and cultural policy, as well as in the development of cultural and social programs and services in the territory.

### **Approaches to Poverty Reduction**

Poverty assessments and poverty reduction policies generally are approached from one of four differing perspectives. The most common is a monetary approach, which defines poverty as economic deprivation and assesses a person's welfare by measuring individual levels of consumption, through their total spending or their total income (Stewart, Laderchi, & Saith, 2007; Stewart, Saith, Franco, & Harriss-White, 2007). Despite its popularity, this approach is strongly criticized, as it sees poverty as a one-dimensional phenomenon. Monetary assessments of poverty rarely include the consumption of non-market goods and services in their estimates, and the approach does not explain why the consumption levels of some individuals are higher than others (Stewart, Laderchi et al., 2007). This criticism is particularly relevant in the context of Nunavut's mixed economy, where it has been noted that Inuit practices of sharing food have begun to expand, albeit in a more limited fashion, to the giving of money,

the lending of equipment, and the provisioning of ammunition, fuel, and parts (Harder & Wenzel, 2012; Wenzel, 1995).

In fact, it is increasingly accepted that indicators of economic development alone do not provide a complete picture of social well-being. Although money improves a person's chances of well-being, assessments of other variables such as housing, life expectancy, rates of literacy, and sense of community help to provide a more holistic picture of well-being (Akindola, 2009; Bourguignon & Chakravarty, 2002; Duhaime, et al., 2004). This has given rise to alternative approaches to assessing poverty.

The capabilities approach to poverty assessment explores what an individual is able to do (their functionings) and the freedom they have to carry out their functionings (their capabilities) in the pursuit of a valued life (Bourguignon & Chakravarty, 2002; Stewart, Laderchi et al., 2007). This approach, with its emphasis on quality of life, is commonly used by development practitioners. However, the approach captures a person's situation at a particular moment in time and does not engage in an analysis of the causes of that situation (Akindola, 2009; Collin, 2008; Cooke et al., 2007; Hazell et al., 2012; Stewart, Laderchi et al., 2007).

A third approach to defining poverty is more participatory in nature. It engages people with the lived experience of poverty in the assessment of the condition in activities such as community mapping, and wealth and well-being rankings, in an attempt to prevent external value judgements about the meaning or magnitude of poverty from the informing policies and programs designed for its reduction (Akindola, 2009; Lenihan, 2012; Stewart, Laderchi et al., 2007). The participatory approach is also widely used among development practitioners, and it is usually outsider academics or development professionals who collect the assessments and interpret the results. Furthermore, the participatory nature of the approach is affected by time and language barriers faced by community members, as well as the marginalization or exclusion individuals may face within their own community (Stewart, Laderchi et al., 2007).

The fourth approach to poverty, the social exclusion approach, examines the societal causes of poverty, seeking to explain the historical processes of impoverishment and enrichment that have led to the marginalization of certain groups within societies that, in general, appear to be prosperous. The approach is unique in its focus on the processes, dynamics, and structures that cause deprivation; however, the concept of exclusion is difficult to define and measure (Stewart, Laderchi et al., 2007). Like the participatory approach to poverty assessment, the social exclusion approach tends to reveal the context-specific, multi-dimensional nature of

poverty. As will be explored below, this is a useful tool for examining poverty in Nunavut. However, this also makes the identification and collection of data about levels of poverty challenging (Impact Economics, 2012; Stewart, Laderchi et al., 2007).

#### *Critical Perspectives on Poverty*

Critical scholars of poverty and development discourse argue that throughout the twentieth and into the early twenty-first century, development practice has translated issues of poverty, landlessness, and hunger into technical public health issues (Hindess, 2001; Li, 2007; Razack, 2002). This results in band-aid “improvement” rather than structural change, because the root causes of poverty are not acknowledged (Li, 2007; Razack, 2015). These scholars argue that understanding the way in which neo-liberal governmentality and capitalism intersect under settler colonial rule are key to understanding processes of dispossession and impoverishment past and present (Harvey, 2003; Li, 2007).

The beginning of the description, classification, and management of the condition of poverty began alongside the rise of liberal governmentality in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Under liberal governmentality, although most Western populations were assumed to have the capacity for autonomous action, the majority of the world’s population, including the poor and the colonized, were not (Hindess, 2001). Those who were considered to be incapable of autonomous action were instead seen as subjects of improvement. Liberal (and more recently neo-liberal) governmentality have therefore intersected with capitalist relations to improve impoverished and colonized populations through the education of desires as well as the configuration of habits, aspirations, and beliefs (Hindess, 2001; Li, 2007; Razack, 2002; 2015).

Capitalist relations are not only a means of accumulation, but also a way of teaching the habits that create the ideal liberal, autonomous subject (Li, 2007). Capitalism is not an autonomous system, however, and interventions are necessary to stimulate economic growth. These interventions set the conditions that have secured settler dominance and accumulation and have dispossessed Indigenous peoples of the land (Coulthard, 2014; Harvey, 2003; Li, 2007; Razack, 2002, 2015). Experts and government administrators are tasked with managing the impoverishment produced by the capitalist interventions that stimulate economic growth through programs of intervention (Hindess, 2001; Li, 2007; Razack, 2002, 2015).

Governmental programs of intervention first identify a problem that can be improved upon. Then the problem is “rendered technical” (Li, 2007, p. 7). This process helps to develop indicators that measure improvement while simultaneously removing the problem from its historical and political context, thus de-politicizing the issue (Razack, 2015). Experts therefore tend to offer improvements of the poor or the colonized without addressing the causes of dispossession. At the same time, they can use a population’s failure to improve as a rationale for assigning resources to another population that will make “better” use of them. A population’s failure to improve can therefore be used to justify dispossession (Li, 2007; Razack, 2002, 2015).

Settler colonial relations emerged later in the Eastern Arctic than in other parts of Canada. Despite a Supreme Court of Canada ruling in 1939 that Inuit were a federal responsibility under the *Indian Act*<sup>2</sup>, it was only with the onset of the Cold War, excitement about mineral resource exploration in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and international outcry about living conditions in the Arctic, that Inuit lives came under direct influence of the Canadian government. Although the federal government implemented programs of intervention including resettlement and relocation that were intended to improve Inuit well-being during this time, Inuit had no treaties with the Canadian government until 1993, when the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement was signed (Abele 2009; Canada, 1996; Clancy, 1987; Coulthard, 2014; Goldring, 2010; Hicks & White, 2000).

The Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC), undertaken between 2007 and 2010, investigated the “history of decisions and events that affected Inuit living in the Qikiqtani region” from 1950 to 1975 (Qikiqtani Inuit Association, 2013, p. 14). The Commission found that the Inuit experienced considerable cultural, personal, and economic upheaval and trauma between 1950 and 1975, “the effects of which are still being felt, and in some instances have been passed on to younger generations” (QTC, 2015, “Qikiqtani Truth Commission – Key Findings”, para. 6).

Iqaluit mayor Madeleine Redfern is the former executive director of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission. She describes how the process of relocation, which was initiated with the arrival of colonial administration to the Eastern Arctic, led to the erosion of self-sufficiency:

And it's not just the simple issue of relocation. It's actually the shift in disempowering people so they stop being self-sufficient. Inuit were self-sufficient. And some Inuit—not all Inuit—in different places, for different reasons could suffer periods of hardships. Just the same way that any society. Let's say your family suffers a parental loss and the only bread-winner, dies. A shift happens. So that's pretty much how it was ... But the intervention of government controlled almost every aspect of Inuit lives; like who got a house and who didn't. Who gets a job and who doesn't. Whose children are sent away and not. Who gets provided training or skills or not. And so it's no longer a question of individual choice. And that is the foundation of why and how — there are some people who moved off the land first. Got the first houses. Got the first jobs. Certain families were liked by area administrators over others and if they got that initial leg up, those families usually continued to do well. The Inuit who came in later or were forced, or who were not liked by government officials, did badly. Three, four, five generations now have not done well. (Redfern, 2015)

In order to effectively address poverty in Nunavut, it is important to understand the historical and political context in which it emerged. Cultural disruption and dispossession of the land in Canada has created among Indigenous peoples a “near total psychological, physical and financial dependency on the state” (Alfred, 2009, p. 42). In Nunavut, the upheaval caused by relocation and resettlement continues to be felt several generations on. As will be seen below, this cultural disruption continues to have significant repercussions on family well-being and economic independence in the territory, despite the fulfilment of the political vision of Nunavut, a territory governed by Inuit, for Inuit.

### **Origins of the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction**

Nunavut, which means “our land” in Inuktitut, came into being on April 1, 1999. The signing of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA), which secured the creation of the new territory, occurred after two decades of negotiation with the Government of Canada. The Inuit position throughout the land claims negotiations was firm—“No Nunavut Territory, No land claims agreement”—as negotiators pushed for a territory governed through public government (Hamely, 1995; Hicks & White, 2000; Merritt, 1993, p. 4). The Agreement was a major achievement for Canadian Inuit. The territory of Nunavut covers one-fifth of Canada's land mass and

includes a large marine area, making it the largest land rights agreement in Canada (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2015; Kusugak, 2000).

In exchange for the surrender of Aboriginal title, the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement acknowledges Inuit title to 356,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land, 38,000 km<sup>2</sup> of which is fee simple title, which includes surface and mineral rights, in promising areas. Where Inuit have surface title to the land, they have the right to negotiate with industry for impact mitigation and socio-economic benefits. The NLCA grants Inuit a 5% share of any royalties the federal government receives from oil, gas, and mineral development on Crown land, and contains provisions for a capital transfer payment of \$1.148 billion, payable over fourteen years. The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement also gives Inuit priority rights to harvesting wildlife for domestic, sport, and commercial purposes in the areas covered by the Agreement. It also includes provisions for the establishment of three national parks, an increase in Inuit employment in government, and a \$13 million training trust fund. Inuit have equal membership with government (both territorial and federal) on the institutions of public government created by the land claim, including the Wildlife Management Board, the Water Board, the Impact Review Board, the Nunavut Planning Commission, and the Surface Rights Tribunal (Canada, 1993; Hicks & White, 2000; Kusugak, 2000).

Public expectations for the new territory were high (Bell, 1992, 1993; Maghagak, 1999). In addition to all the rights secured in the NLCA, public expectations were that an Inuit-run territorial government would increase levels of employment and help improve the lives of Inuit. However, scholars and Inuit leaders were cautious about the degree to which the new territory would produce immediate change. Instead, they emphasized that the Agreement was part of a process of Indigenous political empowerment and a transition stage in the relationship between Indigenous people and the Canadian state, rather than an end in and of itself (Hamely, 1995; Hicks & White, 2000; Kusugak, 2000; Merritt, 1993).

In 2009, ten years after the creation of Nunavut, the territorial government, under then premier Eva Aariak, commissioned a review of the effectiveness of the programs and services it offered. More than 2,100 people participated in public meetings, interviews, phone-in radio shows, and an online survey in twenty-five communities. Entitled *Qanukkanniq? The GN Report Card*, the review found that although Nunavummiut remained supportive of the territory of Nunavut and the vision that had created it, most people's expectations of Nunavut had not been met. According to the report card, Nunavummiut were particularly critical of the lack of improvements in education and training outcomes, the



territory's housing crisis, and the substantial levels of poverty as well as growing reliance on income support (North Sky Consulting, 2009).

Monetary measurements of poverty indicate that levels of poverty in Nunavut are high (CWP, 2015b; Impact Economics, 2012). A recent study found that 48% of the territory's population lives below the low-income rate (Duhaime & Édouard, 2015). However, defining poverty is not as straightforward as simply identifying low rates of income. Studies commissioned by the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat have argued that poverty, as it is known today (i.e., low levels of income), did not exist in Nunavut until Inuit came to live in modern settlements. Before this transition, through times of plenty and times of hardship and suffering, Inuit were self-reliant and community support figured prominently in individual survival (Battle & Torjman, 2012; Impact Economics, 2012). Other studies have found that despite the "objective living conditions" in Nunavut, which both outsiders and Nunavummiut see as harsh material living conditions, nearly all Nunavummiut are satisfied with their lives in their communities (Morin, Édouard, & Duhaime, 2010). The International Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic (SLiCA) acknowledged that living conditions are shaped by an individual's control of both material and non-material resources, and that an individual's use of resources is in turn shaped by structural conditions (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2015). Strong family and community networks continue to help ensure material existence in Nunavut and give Nunavummiut meaning and a sense of belonging in their daily lives (Damas, 2002; Duhaime, Searles, Usher, Myers, & Fréchette, 2004; Harder & Wenzel, 2012; Morin et al., 2010; Usher, 1976; Wenzel, 1995). Clearly defining, and therefore reducing, poverty in Nunavut is a delicate and complex task (Laderchi, Saith, & Stewart, 2003).

In December 2009, the Third Legislative Assembly of Nunavut released an Action Plan for the Government of Nunavut's 2009–2013 mandate, *Tamapta: Building Our Future Together*. In response to the GN Report card, the action plan committed the territorial government to developing and implementing a poverty reduction strategy (Nunavut, 2009). In the absence of federal leadership on poverty reduction over the last decade, poverty reduction efforts have been led by Canada's provinces and territories (Falvo, 2012). A quick survey of Nunavut's *Hansard* records, however, reveals that prior to opening of the Third Legislative Assembly in the fall of 2009, the term "poverty" had been mentioned in the territory's legislature fewer than a hundred times. Approximately half of these mentions occurred in the fourth session of the second assembly.

This seems to indicate that the public discussion about poverty and poverty reduction in Nunavut is relatively new, at least as a political issue.

### **The Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and the Public Engagement Process**

Before examining the participatory way in which Nunavut's poverty reduction policy was created, a few words should be lent to the methods used in this research project. The fieldwork was carried out in the spring of 2015 over a period of three weeks in Iqaluit, which is the capital of Nunavut and the hub of government offices in the region. Iqaluit is also home to the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat, which oversees the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and is housed in the offices of the Department of Family Services.

My analysis draws on raw data from the early stages of the roundtable public engagement process, which I collected while in Iqaluit. This material spans the official launch of the territory's poverty reduction efforts in 2010, discussions about poverty at the community level, as well as the regional meetings that took place before and after the Poverty Summit, where the Makimaniq Plan was drafted in late 2011. Records included photographs of flipchart notes written during community dialogue meetings; transcripts of radio programs; reports of community poverty reduction committees; as well as meeting minutes and reports from an Elders' workshop held in Arviat, a Qikiqtani Inuit Association Youth Summit held in Iqaluit, and a Youth Photovoice project carried out in Pangnirtung. While the roundtable records offer a fairly clear, unpolished image of how the public engagement process worked, there were gaps in some of the information. The documents I was given access to did not include records of the community dialogues in four communities: Cape Dorset, Repulse Bay, Resolute Bay, and Whale Cove. There were also no records from the poverty summit itself. Additionally, much of the public engagement process was conducted in Inuktitut and, although the majority of the material I had access to had been translated, not all of the meeting documents were available in English. These holes have been filled as much as possible by the discussions about the roundtable process that occurred during my interviews.

I conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews in person and over the phone while in Iqaluit, and three interviews by Skype upon my return to Ottawa. Interview participants were identified using snowball sampling and included ten people who had personal experience with the

roundtable's process (including three who were involved in the design of the process), as well as eight community members who, although aware of the process, have not participated in the roundtable. Due to the large number of southerners working in government and other official positions in the territory, in general, and Iqaluit in particular, only six of my interview participants were Inuit; two of these individuals were NTI staff and one worked for the GN. My reliance on interviews primarily with residents of Iqaluit (sixteen of eighteen interviews) does introduce a bias towards the Iqaluit perspective of the work of the roundtable. However, the conversations about poverty that emerged from my interviews echoed the discussions found in the records of the roundtable's community dialogues.<sup>3</sup>

The raw data from the early stages of the public engagement process were examined using descriptive codes in order to develop a clear image of how the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction operates, to draw out key themes of the discussions, and to compare them with the themes of the Makimaniq Plan. Descriptive codes were then applied to the interview transcripts to identify some of the differing debates and understandings of poverty in Nunavut within the sample group. Finally, analytic codes were applied to the transcripts to identify common themes within these understandings and which of these featured most prominently in discussions about the definitions or meanings of poverty. This process revealed the importance of collaboration and healing to poverty reduction efforts in the territory.

Nunavut's poverty reduction efforts were officially launched on October 18, 2010. Over the next year, Nunavummiut participated in meetings at the community, regional, and territorial level, in order to discuss poverty reduction across the territory (NRPR, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2011e, 2011f, 2011g, 2011h, 2011i). These meetings were convened by the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat, which was co-chaired by the GN and NTI and followed a participatory model of community development.

Following a pilot workshop held in Iqaluit, the poverty reduction public engagement process began in earnest in February and March 2011. Six facilitator workshops were held in the Qikiqtani, Kivalliq, and Kitikmeot regions. At these workshops, the facilitators, who had been identified with the help of local hamlet councils, were first provided with some background to the GN's poverty reduction efforts and then participated in a model community dialogue session (I-P, 2015).<sup>4</sup> Drawing on the World Café method of community development,<sup>5</sup> designed to engage a large group of stakeholders in collective decision-making

processes, workshop participants were divided into small groups and asked to talk about concepts from *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, Inuit values and principles, that were important to them (NRPR, 2011j). These small groups then discussed a series of questions that sought to develop a vision of happy, healthy communities, before returning to the larger group to share their thoughts and ideas (I-P, 2015; McKenna, 2015). The facilitators were not required to follow this model of workshop for meetings they were to chair in their community. However, many of the subsequent community dialogue sessions drew upon the methods and tools provided during the facilitators' training. Workshop participants also brainstormed meeting logistics and ways to document and share the information gathered at the meeting they were to facilitate. Workshops, small group dialogues, informal conversations, and radio programs were identified as effective methods of engaging community members in discussion about poverty reduction, and the Anti-Poverty Secretariat offered participants a list of questions that could be used to prompt discussions.

Between March and May 2011, fifty community dialogue sessions were held across Nunavut, allowing for extensive opportunities for contributions from nearly every community in the territory. More than 800 Nunavummiut participated in call-in radio shows, public workshops, a short survey, youth workshops, elders' workshops, inter-agency meetings, and poverty reduction committee meetings. The transcripts and findings of many of these meetings were shared with the Anti-Poverty Secretariat and were synthesized into regional reports ahead of the regional roundtables held in May and June in the North Qikiqtani, South Qikiqtani, Kitikmeot, and Kivalliq regions (NRPR 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2011e).

At the regional roundtables, community representatives, government representatives, and policy experts, invited by the Anti-Poverty Secretariat with help from the hamlets, met to discuss the reports to ensure that they accurately reflected what the communities had discussed. The six overarching themes that emerged from the community-level meetings included: healing and well-being; education, training, and skills development, including Inuit societal values, knowledge, and core life skills; food security and country food access; housing and income support programs; community economic development, employment, and cost of living; and other issues and ideas, a catch-all thematic category. Following this discussion, regional roundtable participants brainstormed "Options for Action" that could be included in the territory's poverty reduction plan. These options were compiled into regional reports and then consolidated

by the secretariat ahead of the Poverty Summit, where they would be used to help draft Nunavut's Poverty Reduction Strategy, *The Makimaniq Plan: A Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction* (I-D, 2015; McKenna, 2015; NRPR, 2011k, 2011l, 2011m, 2011n).

The Poverty Summit, held in Iqaluit, November 28–30, 2011, was attended by fifty participants including elected officials, government employees, and community representatives from each of the regions with the exception of Kivalliq, where participants were weathered in (I-P, 2015; NRPR, 2011a). Over the first two days of the summit, participants achieved consensus on what should be included in the poverty reduction strategy. Anti-Poverty Secretariat staff spent the evening of the second day of meetings drafting text for the strategy. On the last day of the summit, the text was read back to the participants and discussed line by line until general agreement on the draft of the Makimaniq Plan was achieved. The six thematic areas of the plan differ only slightly from those that emerged through the community dialogue sessions—community collaboration and participation; healing and well-being; education and skills development; food security; housing and income support; and community and economic development (CWP, 2015b; NRPR, 2011o; Nunavut, 2013b). During the summit, then premier Eva Aariak committed her government to developing and introducing legislation that would ensure the implementation of a long-term Poverty Reduction Action Plan, in collaboration with members of the roundtable (McKenna, 2015; NRPR, 2011o).

Over the next few months, the Makimaniq Plan was finalized by the secretariat and was released publicly in February 2012. Between May and September of that same year, the secretariat held four more regional gatherings to ensure that the Makimaniq Plan accurately reflected the ideas and themes that had been raised in the community dialogues and regional roundtables, as well as to discuss the implementation of the plan and some of the poverty reduction activities already underway in communities across the territory (NRPR, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). In October 2012, a Memorandum of Understanding between Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the Government of Nunavut was signed, renewing their partnership in leading Nunavut's poverty reduction efforts (I-D, 2015; McKenna, 2015; NRPR, 2011c; Scott, 2015). As part of the territory's poverty reduction efforts, the roundtable convened the Nunavut Food Security Coalition to develop a food security strategy (McKenna, 2015; Nunavut Food Security Coalition, 2012).

During this period, the Anti-Poverty Secretariat drafted what would become the *Collaboration for Poverty Reduction Act*. This legislation was enacted into law in May 2013. In a manner that is consistent with Article 32 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, the legislation requires the GN to work with members of the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction to produce a five-year plan of action, to develop an official definition of poverty, and to develop indicators to measure the progress of poverty reduction during the first five years of the plan's implementation (CWP, 2015b; McKenna, 2015; Nunavut, 2013a, 2013b). The first official meeting of the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was convened in June 2013 in Iqaluit to assess the progress of poverty reduction efforts and to identify priorities for a five-year plan. Roundtable participants are representatives of governments, Inuit organizations, businesses, and the labour and non-profit sectors that have a territorial mandate, although membership is open to regional and local organizations, as well as to individuals who live in poverty. Since 2014, roundtable meetings have been held biannually (I-L, 2014; Scott, 2015; Tagalik, 2015).

### **Objectives of the Public Engagement Process**

In its design of the public engagement process outlined above, the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat had sought to meet two key objectives. The first was to develop a model for social policy development that would align government operations with Article 32 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. (Canada, 1993; I-P, 2015; McKenna, 2015; Scott, 2015). However, since the creation of Nunavut, there has been no effective model through which Inuit can participate in social policy development. According to one interview participant:

Government hasn't yet found an effective means of working on social issues with the public and in particular, with Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, with Inuit. We [the Anti-Poverty Secretariat] have hoped that as we developed the [Food Security] Coalition and the Roundtable models, that eventually this approach will be used more and more ... with a broad range of social issues that require meaningful public engagement. (McKenna, 2015)

The Roundtable for Poverty Reduction's public engagement process was designed to be participatory and to promote collaboration between government departments, Inuit organizations, and Nunavummiut (I-D, 2015). The Anti-Poverty Secretariat envisioned a process where "decisions

are made together about what needs to be done and who will do it. A plan is prepared together, after which, everyone takes action” (Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat, 2010, p. 2). The public engagement process offered several opportunities for community and regional feedback while the plan was being developed. The first regional roundtables were convened as a means of fine-tuning the regional analysis of the data submitted by each community dialogue facilitator. The draft Makimaniq Plan, reviewed word by word by poverty summit participants before its public release, was subsequently presented at four more regional gatherings for approval and feedback. This process ensured that roundtable participants remained engaged throughout the process of developing Nunavut’s poverty reduction policy (I-D, 2015; I-P, 2015; McKenna, 2015; Scott, 2015).

The second overarching objective of the roundtable process was to facilitate a discussion about poverty that did not centre on the misery of the lived experience of poverty (I-L, 2015; I-P, 2015; McKenna, 2015; Scott, 2015). While the community dialogue sessions did touch on the challenges faced by Nunavummiut, the facilitation questions helped focus discussions on a vision of happy, healthy communities (Grise Fjord Community Dialogue, 2011; NRPR, 2011p; Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat, 2011; Pond Inlet Community Dialogue, 2011; Qikiqtarjuaq Community Dialogue, 2011). Because of the forward-looking focus of the dialogue sessions, the early stages of the roundtable process did not produce a definition of poverty. As a result, the Makimaniq Plan does not include indicators by which to measure poverty reduction or explicit recommendations, instead identifying the six thematic areas of focus for poverty reduction efforts (I-D, 2015; I-L, 2015; I-P, 2015; McKenna, 2015; NRPR 2011a; Tagalik, 2015). Nevertheless, I argue that this forward-looking, participatory methodology is important, not only because of its alignment with Article 32, but also because it fostered a social exclusion focus to the discussions of poverty, producing a politicized understanding of poverty that continues to inform the direction of Nunavut’s poverty reduction efforts.

#### *Collaboration and Healing at the Core of the Makimaniq Plan*

Canadian approaches to poverty reduction tend to reflect either a monetary, a capabilities, or a social exclusion approach to poverty, although Statistics Canada’s measurements of low income is the most commonly used indicator of poverty (Collin, 2007, 2008; MacKinnon, 2013).<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat oversaw an explicitly participatory public engagement process that fostered discussions about the political

and historical context in which poverty has emerged, clearly identifying the origins of poverty in the territory. Indeed, the product of this process, The Makimaniq Plan makes an explicit connection between historical processes and contemporary poverty in Nunavut:

The root causes of poverty lie in the distinct differences between Inuit forms of governance and the model of governance we use in Nunavut today. Those two systems came together with the creation of our modern settlements and have not been reconciled fully. (NRPR, 2011a, p.1)

Although the plan itself does not expand on colonialism's impact on poverty in Nunavut today, the Qikiqtani Truth Commission has examined the long-term effects of the cultural, personal, and economic upheaval and trauma experienced by Inuit in the region between 1950 and 1975 (QTC, 2015). While the QTC examined the impact of colonial policies and decisions in the Qikiqtani Region specifically, one can easily draw a connection between the findings of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission, the experience of relocation and resettlement in the other regions of the Eastern Arctic, and the emergence of poverty in what is now Nunavut. According to one roundtable participant, the participatory roundtable process offered a public forum in which participants could do just that:

I don't think as many people were saying as loudly as some people do now that poverty is linked with the history of colonization. Of course, people often talked about that in conversation, but I don't think the blatant connection had been made so strongly in a formal, large-scale public forum before. We talked about the connections between historical colonialism and current policies and procedures and how these are linked with poverty today. We also talked what steps we want to take today to mitigate the impacts of colonialism and historical trauma. I think many people have a strong gut sense of the connections between the massive social changes Inuit have gone through in the last hundred years and conditions of poverty today. The roundtable forum supported participants to strengthen their collective voice about the past and hopes for the future. (I-P, 2015)

A review of the roundtable data from 2010–2012 reveals that the participatory nature of the roundtable public engagement process fostered discussions about a wide spectrum of issues. Some topics raised at community dialogue sessions and regional roundtables are commonly



associated with poverty reduction—the desire for new community infrastructure, concerns about food insecurity, the need for housing, the importance of education, and the challenges posed by income assistance. Others perhaps less so. Participants voiced their desire for government representation and transparency and the importance of local involvement in decision-making. They discussed importance of skills training both on the land and for formal employment, as well as the need to strengthen Inuit traditions and language. Participants in the public engagement process also discussed the need to promote healthy communities and families, frequently citing the importance of addressing violence in the community, as well as elder abuse and the need for counselling centres.

Although it was articulated in a number of different ways across the territory, the public engagement process revealed a social exclusion approach to addressing poverty in Nunavut. Indeed, at the core of the public engagement discussions was the importance of healing from the upheaval and trauma caused by relocation and resettlement. When envisioning a Nunavut without poverty, roundtable participants described a future where individual and community well-being is ensured. The data collected from the community dialogue sessions and regional roundtables show clearly that participants believe that considerable healing work must be done in order to achieve this future. And, for them, healing begins with developing an understanding of the past.

These communities were created to be part of Canada. All of these communities were created to gather Inuit in certain areas, to be part of Canada. They can say that we are Canadian. We cannot live as we used to live, living however we wanted, camping and travelling. We all need to be living in a community now. In the past, camps were broken and some families were told to get rid of their dogs ... to start living in communities. But we are still paying for those changes that were given to us Inuit. We cannot rewind and change things, but we do need to rewind and understand exactly what pain was caused. Let's face these problems and work on them. I am asking you to be open. Take out your pain. That is the only way we can work on our healing. After healing we can help others. (Karetak, in Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat, 2011, p. 40-41)

According to roundtable participants, healing can be achieved through “collaborative decision making, access to the land, and living according to Inuit values” (NRPR, 2012a, p. 3). Access to the land is crucial to this

process. It is seen as the “doorway to healing, and to acquiring self-knowledge in relation to one’s community, to the land, to the past, and to the present” (NRPR, 2012a, p. 16). This line from the 2012 Kitikmeot Regional Gathering captures the essence of the healing envisioned by those involved in the design of Nunavut’s poverty reduction strategy. It is a process of renewing relationships. This includes the relationships between elders and youth and between parents and children, as well as between community members. In particular, working to strengthen parenting was identified as a fundamental component of healing that must be pursued. Government policies and programs of the mid-twentieth century disrupted Inuit family and political structures. *Inunnguiniq*, Inuit ways of making human beings, or childrearing, in particular, were disrupted by resettlement and have thrown family relationships into upheaval, creating distance between generations of Nunavummiut (Karetak, 2015; NRPR, 2012a, 2012b; Tagalik, 2015).

The elders from across Nunavut say that *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, initially, was destroyed by the income support system and that—one of the reasons why we have high youth suicide rates and family dysfunction—is that, through colonization people were [made to be] dependent. And in creating this dependency, all of the processes that were in place, integral to *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, were set aside. And those processes were dedicated to creating self-reliant, capable individuals. So the result is, we don’t have self-reliance, we have dependence. So that’s why, from the elders’ perspective, that’s why *parenting* for example—interventions in parenting become a very important piece [of poverty reduction]. And not just parenting but *redefining* relationships I think is part of everything that’s happening in Roundtable. And redefining relationships is about a proactive approach to decolonizing, to healing. Healing is a huge theme that came up. And rebuilding the strength that Inuit always had, as a self-reliant people. (Tagalik, 2015)

Acknowledgement of the need for healing permeated all levels of discussion during the roundtable public engagement process. The public engagement data reveals that the disruption of resettlement and relocation is clearly understood to be the source of the poverty seen in Nunavut today, and healing from the past was identified as the foundation upon which a poverty-free future can be achieved. This is indicative of both a

politicized understanding of poverty and a desire to tackle poverty at its root source.

The roundtable has faced criticism from Nunavummiut not involved in the public engagement process. The Makimaniq Plan's lack of a definition for poverty has been highly criticized. People question how poverty can be reduced without a clear understanding of what is being eliminated. The public and the media have challenged the roundtable's lack of acknowledgement of the root causes of poverty, and members of Nunavut's Legislative Assembly have raised concerns about the cost of the process and the lack of tangible outcomes to date (I-B, 2015; I-E, 2015; Nunatsiaq News, 2012; Redfern, 2015). These criticisms are not surprising, given that development practitioners acknowledge that participatory assessments of poverty generally lack data for measuring social exclusion, making it difficult to determine if any progress is being made in anti-poverty initiatives (Impact Economics, 2012).

In addition to these criticisms, there is general skepticism about the roundtable process and Nunavut's poverty reduction strategy. Some interview participants spoke of a perceived culture within the GN of continuous, poorly organized meetings with minimal outcomes (I-C, 2015; I-M, 2015; Redfern, 2015). Some were concerned that the Anti-Poverty Secretariat, in managing the Food Security Coalition and the Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, is stretching itself too thin (I-E, 2015). Madeleine Redfern (2015) is concerned that in emphasizing collaboration, the GN is neglecting its responsibilities to lead policy implementation and placing the burden on individual communities instead. Others questioned how the GN could address a complex issue like poverty within a four-year election mandate (I-B, 2015).

Members of the roundtable are aware of the criticism the process has faced. According to some interview participants, it has been particularly difficult to convince GN senior officials of the roundtable's importance, in part because the roundtable does not have a pool of money to draw on in order to finance poverty reduction activities (I-L, 2015; I-P, 2015; McKenna, 2015; Tagalik, 2015). Furthermore, they acknowledge that participatory methods make policy development a slow-moving, cyclical process. However, participants believe that the iterative roundtable process is important as it adheres to Article 32 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, and they argue that it will ultimately allow for the development of meaningful indicators of poverty reduction (I-P, 2015; McKenna, 2015; Scott, 2015).

I would not attempt to offer an assessment of effectiveness of this last claim. Certainly, the politicized understanding of poverty in Nunavut does present challenges when it comes to policy implementation and evaluation. In the first place, healing is a somewhat intangible concept, difficult to measure and quantify. Similarly, the combination of a participatory assessment of poverty and a social exclusion approach to poverty reduction present a challenge to policy-makers when it comes to collecting data and assessing the progress of anti-poverty initiatives (Impact Economics, 2012; Stewart, Laderchi, et al., 2007). This helps to explain why the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction has not yet released a definition of poverty, specific recommendations, or indicators to measure progress in poverty reduction efforts, although the latter is reportedly under development (I-P, 2015; McKenna, 2015; NRPR, 2015b).

I contend, however, that this participatory methodology is important, not only because of its alignment with Article 32, but also because it fostered a social exclusion focus to the discussions of poverty, producing a politicized understanding of poverty that informs the direction of Nunavut's poverty reduction efforts. The perspectives voiced at the community dialogue sessions and regional roundtables have directly shaped Nunavut's poverty reduction strategy. The six thematic areas of focus identified in the plan—Collaboration and Community Participation, Healing and Well-being, Education and Skills Development, Food Security, Housing and Income Support, Community and Economic Development—have only been slightly modified from the six thematic areas of focus developed at the 2011 regional roundtables. Moreover, the need for healing from the past and collaboration between Inuit and government, so central to the public engagement discussions held at both the community and regional levels, are at the core of the Makimaniq Plan, revealing how closely Nunavut's poverty reduction strategy is aligned with Article 32 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

## **Conclusion**

Launched in 2009 and co-chaired by the GN and NTI, the participatory design of the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was intended to serve as a model for the development of social policy that is aligned with Article 32 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, which ensures that Inuit have the right to participate in the development of the territory's social and cultural policy. The roundtable has faced considerable public criticism due to the fact that it has not yet released a definition or indicators of poverty. Indeed, the ability of the roundtable to produce indicators of

poverty reduction may be the way in which its efficacy is tested. However, the participatory roundtable process itself has created a forum in which the politicized understanding of poverty, as articulated by Nunavummiut, is influencing the design of poverty reduction policy. Reflecting what was voiced throughout the public engagement process, *The Makimaniq Plan: A Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction* identifies government policies and programs in the mid-twentieth century as the root cause of poverty, and states that healing and collaboration must be at the core of all of the territory's poverty reduction efforts.

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### Notes

1. Food security is defined as having permanent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious foods that meet dietary needs and food preferences. In Nunavut, measures of food insecurity tend to focus on the ability to purchase store-bought food. This does not take into account access to country food and sharing networks that play an important role in the experience of food security in the territory. According to the 2007-2008 Inuit Health Survey, however, many Inuit adults and children experience hunger, often going whole days without eating (ITK & ICC, 2012; Wakegijig et al., 2013).
2. In practice, the 1939 Supreme Court decision (*Reference Re Eskimos* 1939 [SCR] 104) had little effect other than to excuse the province of Quebec from the responsibility for social programming for Inuit (Abele, 2009; Goldring, 2010).
3. Quotations in this article are anonymous where individuals have chosen to remain anonymous and are named where they have requested to be named. Where necessary, square brackets indicate editorial clarification. However, all of the quotations from the interviews I conducted were sent to

the interview participants for approval. Some have been edited for flow or clarity by the speakers themselves.

4. For the sake of brevity and clarity, anonymous interviews in this article are identified using letters according to the order in which they were conducted. The citation (I-P, 2015) for example, refers to Anonymous Interview P, 2015.
5. According to the World Café philosophy, conversations are action. The world we inhabit is created “through networks of conversations” (Hurley & Brown, 2009). Meetings that are held using the World Café model divide participants up into small groups seated around tables. Discussions are divided into twenty-minute rounds and each round is launched with a question that has been specifically designed for the purpose of the meeting. After each round of discussions, participants move to a new table and the conversations continue. Once the small-table discussions are completed, participants share their personal or small-table insights with the whole group and these are recorded at the front of the room (World Café website, 2015).
6. The low-income cut-off, generally an after-tax measurement, is met when a family spends at least 20 percent more of their income on food, clothing, and shelter than the average Canadian family (Collin, 2008).

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