

Healing Through Collaboration

A Case Study of The Nunavut
Poverty Reduction Process

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By Don Lenihan



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<http://www.ppforum.ca/engagement-community/book>

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Introduction

In the fall of 2009, the Government of Nunavut (GN) invited the Public Policy Forum (PPF) to send me to Iqaluit to deliver a workshop on public engagement to about 40 of its officials. For me, it was the beginning of a fascinating two-year journey. During year one I participated in a number of planning sessions and discussions in Nunavut that led, finally, to the launch of Nunavut’s Poverty Reduction Process. During the second year, I acted as an observer, advisor, facilitator and even participant in the territory’s year-long public engagement process.

The Poverty Reduction Process was led by the Government of Nunavut’s Anti-Poverty Secretariat, in partnership with Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), which is the Inuit organization entrusted with ensuring that promises made under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement are carried out. The process culminated in an action plan developed and agreed to by people and organizations from across the territory, including representatives of government, Inuit organizations, municipalities, community organizations, businesses, and people who have lived in poverty. The government and NTI are now working with all these partners to implement the plan over an 18-month period.

In writing this study, I’ve drawn freely on all aspects of my involvement in the project, as well as my experience as an expert in the field of public engagement. As such, the paper takes something of an “outsider’s perspective”—though hopefully an informed one—on this remarkable experiment. To this end, I’ve set some specific tasks for the paper. First, and foremost, I explore the rationale behind the particular type of process and its design. Why did the government opt for public engagement? Second, I distill some of the lessons learned from the process and consider what was achieved. Finally, I look at some key challenges that lie ahead in implementing the plan and make some suggestions for how to proceed. My discussion is divided into five parts:

- Setting the Stage
- Origins of the Process
- The Poverty Reduction Process
- The Poverty Reduction Plan
- Implementing the Plan

While this study is based on my personal experience with the project—and the conclusions, therefore, are my own and should not be attributed to the Government of Nunavut—I hope the lessons I draw will be of real interest and value to people living in the territory and to those living in other parts of Canada—indeed, to readers around the world.

Setting the Stage

Nunavut’s Poverty Summit was held in Iqaluit from November 28th – 30th, 2011. It was the culminating event in a remarkable, year-long process that engaged some 800 people across the territory. The Summit was co-chaired by Premier Eva Aariak and Jack Anawak, Vice-President of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and Chair of the Nunavut Social Development Council.¹ Over 60 representatives and observers attended, from all sectors and regions of the territory.

¹ The President of NTI, Cathy Towntongie, was scheduled to attend the Poverty Summit as co-chair but was prevented from leaving her home community by a fierce blizzard.

By the close of the Summit, the delegates had fashioned and agreed to *The Makimaniq Plan: A Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction*.² The document sets out a collaborative plan for addressing poverty in the territory, based on the previous 12 months of dialogue and deliberation. In her opening remarks at the Summit, Premier Aariak indicated the government's interest in and support for a collaborative approach, stating that: "I believe we can improve the quality of life here for everyone, if we work together. This is the way of our ancestors. This is the way of self-reliance."

Through her participation in and leadership at the Summit, Aariak seemed to be signaling that the government is ready to commit to a long-term, collaborative partnership on poverty reduction. To help readers from outside the territory understand what this might mean for the government and the people of Nunavut, let's begin by looking back to the territory's origins.

Nunavut was established a decade ago from the Inuit claim to their territorial lands. At the time, some wanted a different form of government—a more ethnically based self-government. In the end, however, Inuit didn't choose this path, as did, say, the Nisga'a people in northern British Columbia. Instead, Inuit settled on public government, but with two qualifications.

First, the Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut—a federation of the three Inuit organizations that originally negotiated the claim—was assigned a special role in the new territory. Today, as Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., it acts as a steward of Inuit interests in the future of the territory, from the preservation of language and culture to protection of their rights over resources on Inuit lands.³

Second, the land claim agreement, which is effectively Nunavut's constitution, contains a clause—Article 32—that provides a broad guarantee that Inuit will have a say in government decisions on the policies and the design of programs and services that affected their language and culture. Article 32 states that:

...Inuit have the right...to participate in the development of social and cultural policies, and in the design of social and cultural programs and services, including their method of delivery, within the Nunavut Settlement Area.

However, ten years on there are concerns that the promise of 'Inuit government within a public government' remains unfulfilled. There is a sense that the principles of Inuit governance need to be more fully incorporated into the new public government. This governance question became an important theme in the poverty reduction dialogue.

For example, in his opening comments at the Summit, Jack Anawak spoke of how, although he was born in a seal-skin tent, poverty was not part of his people's view of the world. There were times of scarcity—even enormous hardship—but they were cyclical. Hard times came and went, like the seasons. The people were self-reliant and self-sufficient. They made decisions together and solved their problems together.

² http://www.makiliqta.ca/uploads/The%20Makimaniq%20Plan_FINAL_ENG_20.12.11.pdf

³ NTI's website describes this role as follows: "Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) ensures that promises made under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) are carried out. Inuit exchanged Aboriginal title to all their traditional land in the Nunavut Settlement Area for the rights and benefits set out in the NLCA. The management of land, water and wildlife is very important to Inuit. NTI coordinates and manages Inuit responsibilities set out in the NLCA and ensures that the federal and territorial governments fulfill their obligations."

The moral, I think, is that community collaboration is not only central to traditional Inuit governance, it is central because it is a key condition of healthy communities.

In many respects, Nunavut today is not a healthy community. Seventy percent of preschoolers live in food-insecure homes. Twenty-five percent are severely food insecure. Fifty percent of the youth 11-15 sometimes go to bed hungry. Infant mortality rates are two and a half times the national average. Unemployment is chronic. People live in over-crowded housing. Nunavut has, by far, the highest suicide rate in the country.

If the Poverty Reduction Process had an overarching message, I think Anawak's comments articulated it eloquently. Poverty reduction is about much more than income, food or housing. It is about feeling at home in one's community and being able to do one's part in making it work.

Although issues such as housing, food security, economic development and education were discussed at length during the process, the sessions I attended and the reports I reviewed also placed a clear and prominent emphasis on healing and wellbeing, especially community healing.

Moreover, participants often seemed to link healing and wellbeing to a greater sense of control over the decisions that affect their communities and their families. Many Inuit seemed to be saying that, while they want government that can make decisions and act in the community's interest, they also want government that challenges—and allows—the community, its organizations and people to solve their problems together.

In this sense, the discussions around food security, housing and so on were often as much about *how* these decisions are made as *what* the decisions were. The question of governance thus was never far from the surface.

Origins of the Process

Tamapta and the Process Objectives

Premier Aariak not only seems alive to these sentiments; she has essentially staked her government's credibility on addressing them. *Tamapta* is a short document that lays out the government's vision and priorities. Released in 2009, it was intended to frame the government's agenda for the next four years.⁴ Reducing poverty was a key commitment of *Tamapta* and the main goals of the Poverty Reduction Process are drawn directly from it:

- Tamapta's vision for the future is one in which "Communities will be self-reliant, based on Inuit societal values, with reduced dependence on government." Tamapta thus aims to strengthen self-reliance.
- Tamapta recalls that traditional Inuit governance was based on dialogue, discussion and consensus, which served the people well. While the government recognizes that the new institutions of parliamentary government are essential, it believes a better integration of the

⁴ http://www.gov.nu.ca/files/Tamapta%20Action%20Plan_eng.pdf

two traditions is both possible and necessary. A guiding principle of Tamapta is that decision making should be based on dialogue and consensus.

- Connecting the community is a cardinal principle of Tamapta. It means that “All generations, from youth to elders, will be encouraged and supported in expanding their individual roles in governance and leadership.” The goal, then, is to engage community members in helping to solve and manage community affairs.
- Finally, Tamapta recognizes the difficult living conditions of many Inuit and declares that reducing poverty is a key priority of the government.

Nunavut and the Public Engagement Project.

The Poverty Reduction Process has roots in a number of earlier processes, especially the *Qanukkanniq GN Report Card*,⁵ which helped shape *Tamapta* (see Section 3 below). However, one source that is not as widely recognized comes from the Government of Nunavut’s involvement with a research and capacity-building project outside the territory, which I led on behalf of the Public Policy Forum: the Public Engagement Project (PEP).

In 2009, the Public Policy Forum launched the PEP to explore new ways of thinking about how governments, stakeholders, communities and ordinary citizens can work together—collaborate—to find and implement solutions to complex problems, such as poverty, climate change, poor public health or the failure to innovate.⁶

To say that poverty is complex is to say that it has multiple causes. These may include a lack of education, dependency, cultural or gender barriers, illness, lack of opportunity, technological change, economic shock, and a range of other things, including causes not yet recognized. Moreover, the particular cluster of causes will be different in different places. Thus the causes of homelessness in a city like Winnipeg will be quite different from those in Vancouver, so that a one-size-fits-all solution won’t do.

The Public Policy Forum’s approach to public engagement rests on the assumption that dealing with this kind of complexity requires a collaborative approach, in at least two ways:

1. *Government must engage stakeholders and citizens in a dialogue to identify the key causes at play in their community.*

⁵ <http://www.gov.nu.ca/en/Report.aspx>

⁶ The Public Engagement Project involved seven provincial/territorial governments—British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Nunavut—the Canada School of Public Service, the City of Hamilton and the Government of Australia. It established an online dialogue with more than 500 officials from participating governments, and held some 35 workshops across Canada and in Australia. In addition, the project participated in several innovative projects, including the Canadian Sport Policy Renewal Process, Australia’s Community Engagement Project, New Brunswick’s Poverty Reduction Initiative and, of course, Nunavut’s Poverty Reduction Process. The final report from the PEP can be downloaded at: <http://www.ppforum.ca/engagement-community/book>

Such a process taps the community's collective experience by asking its members to explain how poverty is affecting their families, friends, neighborhoods and workplaces, and then "mapping" these causes. Every community is different and such a dialogue is a way of bringing those differences to light.

2. *The solutions, like the causes, will be complex and must involve the community as a whole, not just government programs and policies.*

Thus families may need to support their members in new ways, businesses may need to change how they hire people, and governments may need to redesign programs. Everyone has a role to play. Unless the community as a whole is engaged, it is very difficult to build a sense of collective ownership and responsibility in which everyone works together to find and deliver solutions.

The Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat found the public engagement approach highly attractive. Not only did it suggest that deeper integration of traditional Inuit governance and the parliamentary system was possible, but that other governments were struggling to find their way toward something similar. The Public Engagement Project was a meeting place for such ideas. The Government of Nunavut joined the project in 2010 and the Secretariat quickly emerged as an energetic and highly engaged participant.

The Poverty Reduction Process

A Public Engagement Approach

Government projects like the Poverty Reduction Process usually begin with the release of a Terms-of-Reference document that defines their objectives. In fact, the Government of Nunavut never produced such a document. Presumably, it never felt the need to. Poverty reduction was one of highest priorities identified in *Tamapta*. The Poverty Reduction Process was therefore naturally conceived and designed around related goals the government has set itself in that document, such as self-reliance, dialogue and consensus and connecting the community.

This, in turn, meant that, when it came to designing the process, public engagement was a natural choice. Its emphasis on collaboration, dialogue, shared responsibility and community engagement were very much in keeping with the government's priorities.

By contrast, conventional consultation positions government as the principal decision-maker and problem solver and sees the public as essentially passive consumers of its programs and services. Opting for consultation instead of public engagement would have seemed like a willful ignoring of the government's basic aspirations, as well as those of Nunavummiut, which were recorded in the *Qanukkanniq GN Report Card*.

When Aariak first became premier, she launched a major review of the effectiveness of the government's programs and services. 2,100 people from 25 communities were consulted on all aspects of the government's responsibilities and how they affected their families, their communities, and the territory as a whole. The *Report Card* finds that:

While many were happy with the progress being made in certain areas, most were disenchanted with, and some were profoundly discouraged by, directions taken by the government in others. Often people described governance in Nunavut as a vision not yet realized and, at times, a vision derailed. Without doubt, the expectations most people had of Nunavut at its inception have not yet been met.

The *Tamapta Action Plan* can be viewed as a response to the *Report Card*.

So as Nunavut began to plan its Poverty Reduction Process, officials drew heavily on what they had learned from the Public Policy Forum's Public Engagement Project. They not only saw public engagement as offering a new approach to dealing with poverty, but one that seemed highly consistent with *Tamapta*. Public engagement thus became the model for the process.

The Poverty Reduction Roundtable

The Poverty Reduction Process began in earnest in the spring of 2010 with the establishment of the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat. Its mission was to provide leadership for the process. But this "leadership" had already been assigned a particular meaning.

The *Tamapta Action Plan* states that the government will "actively engage its partners, including Inuit organizations, other governments, nongovernmental organizations and our business community in the development of programs and policies to support Nunavummiut in their efforts at eliminating poverty."

In short, by the time the Secretariat was formed, the government had made clear its preference for a collaborative approach.

NTI Vice-President James Eetoolook responded in kind, promising that NTI would "work closely with the GN ... to develop the poverty reduction strategy..."

By June of 2010, NTI's Department of Social and Cultural Development and the Secretariat had forged a close enough working relationship – it had been agreed that the government and NTI would together co-sponsor public engagement – that they were ready to expand the circle. They convened a meeting of other individuals and organizations with an interest in poverty reduction. About 15 organizations attended, where they discussed the need for joint ownership of the process.

Everyone agreed joint ownership was necessary to ensure the kind of leadership, expertise, organizational and financial support needed to make the process a success. The invitees therefore accepted the invitation to become partners in the exercise and formed the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, which became the key planning forum for the project.

The Process

The Process was launched on October 18, 2010 and unfolded over the next 12 months. In total, 45 different dialogue events were convened on poverty reduction, including public workshops, radio shows, inter-agency meetings, survey groups, photo voice projects, chairpersons meetings, focus groups and elders gatherings. About 600 people from 21 communities participated in the community dialogues, with roughly another 200 participating in the two subsequent stages. The structure of the process was as follows:

- **Community Dialogues: Gathering Views:** The first stage of the process was the community dialogues. It began in late 2010 when a letter of invitation was sent from Premier Aariak and NTI Vice-President Anawak to all communities, asking them to join the process. The goal was to allow citizens to express their views on the issues and priorities that the strategy would address. In February and March, workshops were held in Kugluktuk, Cambridge Bay, Rankin Inlet and Iqaluit to train the volunteers who would convene, facilitate and report back on the meetings.

Volunteers were provided with *The Makiliqta Community Dialogue Toolkit*, a detailed guide to facilitation of community meetings on poverty reduction, and a large post-paid envelop to ensure all flip chart pages and materials used in the meetings were returned to the Roundtable. The community dialogues were completed by June, with 21 communities participating and submitting reports. Roundtable staff (i.e. the Secretariat staff as well as staff from NTI's Social and Cultural Development Department) reviewed the reports from the community dialogues and identified five key theme areas where issues surfaced. These reports – *Issues and Ideas for Change* - were the foundation on which the rest of the process was built.

- **Regional Roundtables: Deliberating on the Issues and Options:** The second stage of the process consisted of a series of regional roundtables, held in each of the four regions of Nunavut: Kitikmeot, Kivalliq, South Qikiqtani, and North Qikiqtani. Officially, the roundtables were co-chaired by the Government of Nunavut's lead Cabinet Minister for poverty reduction, Peter Taptuna, Deputy Premier and Minister of Economic Development and Transportation, and NTI Vice President Jack Anawak.⁷ These events brought together representatives from across the region. They came from each of the communities, as well as from government, Inuit organizations, not-for-profits and the business community. Their task was to prepare policy options for action in each of the five theme areas from the community dialogues. Participants began by reviewing *Issues and Ideas for Change*, then went on to discuss possible policy responses to the reports, which were then included in *Options for Action*, a document prepared on the spot that contained the results of the regional forum. In total, about 135 people participated in these regional sessions.
- **Policy Forum: Deliberating on Implementing the Options:** As a part of the second stage of the process, a policy forum was convened to develop strategies to implement the options from the regional roundtables. The Forum was held in Iqaluit from October 11th – 13th. Some 40 officials from organizations inside and outside government participated. These were people with expertise in the priority areas and, in many cases, responsibility for acting on them. The policy forum allowed the participants to begin to shape the options that would eventually be adopted in the plan.
- **The Poverty Summit: Preparing the Action Plan:** The concluding stage of the process was the Poverty Summit, which included leaders from all sectors from across the Territory as well participants from the first two stages. They came together to define and agree on an action plan, based on the results from the first two stages of the process. The result was *The Makimaniq Plan: A Shared Approach to Poverty Reduction*, prepared by participants during the Summit.

The process was designed so that each of these stages would build on the one before it. This, in turn, was supposed to ensure that the final plan reflected the values, priorities, concerns and perspectives expressed in the initial community dialogues, while making room for a range of experts to help focus, refine and operationalize these views in the second and third stages.

⁷ Although Minister Taptuna was the official co-chair, he was only present at the Roundtables in Iqaluit and Rankin Inlet. The session in Cambridge Bay was co-chaired by the Hon. Keith Peterson, Minister of Finance, and in Pond Inlet by the Hon. James Arreak, Minister of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth.

In turning now to a discussion of the plan that emerged from the Summit, we begin by considering the approach to defining poverty that was adopted for the Poverty Reduction Process.

The Poverty Reduction Plan

Defining Poverty: The Nunavut Approach

In policy circles today, the question of how or even whether poverty should be defined is the subject of intense and often highly technical dispute. For present purposes, we can divide this into two basic schools of thought: the objective and the participatory approaches.

The objective approach treats poverty—and poverty reduction—as an objective and measurable condition of society. The task of policy-makers is, first, to provide an adequate definition of poverty by identifying the key conditions that combine to cause it; and, second, to provide reliable measures for testing the impact of these conditions on people’s lives, and the impact of the policies that are supposed to mitigate these effects. In this view, the methods used to understand poverty rely almost exclusively on the analysis of data on income, capability and social exclusion.

Almost no one in the poverty debate denies that there is an objective side to poverty or that this kind of research is needed. However, in recent years, the objective approach has been criticized for failing to take account of the particular, and often varying, perspectives of the people living in poverty. In this so-called “participatory” approach, how people view poverty is a key part of any adequate definition of it—and therefore of its solution.

We can bring out the rationale behind this approach by looking at recent changes in another policy area: health promotion, which also involves a participatory approach.

In traditional medicine, health was seen as an objective condition. The doctor was the expert who examined, diagnosed and instructed the patient on this condition. The patient’s role was a largely passive one. He/she answered the doctor’s questions and followed the doctor’s instructions. The doctor was the only one qualified to assess and treat illness.

Today, most health experts have moved away from this approach and take a more holistic view of health. They recognize that wellness or well-being is a complex condition that results from a variety of conditions, such as income, culture, gender, education and environment.

While these factors may be accurately measured when taken in isolation, wellness is a product of their interaction; it is a kind of balance between them. However, there is no single or objective answer to the question, what is the right balance between these factors? For one thing, wellness is a dynamic condition that requires ongoing adjustment to the changing physical, social and psychological conditions around us.

But the issue goes beyond this. The deeper point is that *every person is different and what is a good balance for one may not be for another*. Wellness involves more than the right amount of exercise or a balanced diet. It involves basic choices about life-style, which, in turn, may reflect attitudes and values based in cultural, gender or other differences.

Such choices, then, are based on much more than science. This, in turn, means the doctor is not in a position simply to prescribe what should be done. The patient plays a critical role in assessing his/her own approach to wellness and making decisions about it. The doctor can certainly help, but this is most likely to take the form of advice, based on open, respectful and honest conversations with the patient. Indeed, one of the most important tools for managing the doctor/patient relationship is dialogue.

So, in a participatory approach to health, the patient and the doctor must work together to arrive at the right program for the patient. Engaging the patient in the task of developing this plan transfers some ownership of it to him/her, along with some of the responsibility for making it work.

This, in turn, means the doctor must treat the patient's views on his/her well-being with respect, rather than dismissing or ignoring them on the grounds that the doctor is the expert. The doctor's expertise is real and valuable, but it has limits.

A participatory approach to poverty reduction rests on similar premises. It views poverty as a complex condition that results from many factors, including highly subjective ones, such as a person's attitudes, preferences and beliefs.

As a participatory approach to poverty reduction, public engagement aims at establishing a meaningful dialogue between government and citizens so that they can work together to establish a plan for overcoming these conditions. Such a dialogue helps promote greater self-awareness, new perspectives and ideas, the development of new skills and relationships, and new sources of motivation for change.

In short, the dialogue is an important learning—and even healing—experience that helps citizens and communities recognize and accept some responsibility for overcoming their condition. In the language of *Tamapta*, the dialogue itself helps reduce dependence on government and promotes self-reliance.

The Six Themes

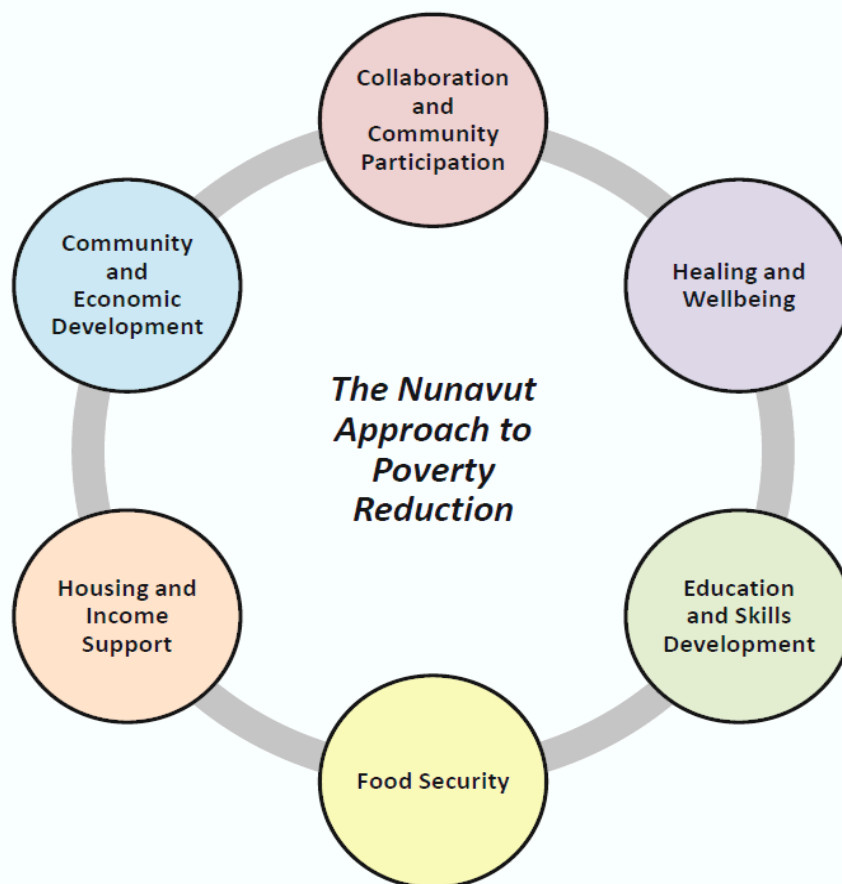
Roundtable members agreed that a holistic and participatory approach to poverty reduction fit well with the vision expressed in *Tamapta* and that it was the most appropriate one for Nunavut. This, in turn, meant the community dialogues would play a vital role, as they would be called upon to articulate the circumstances around poverty from which the definition would come. If the definition is not grounded in real experiences, people will not see themselves as the authors of it. They will therefore feel no personal responsibility to use the definition to help find the solutions to poverty, or to make the solutions work.

The participants in the community dialogues – representatives of government, Inuit organizations, NGOs, businesses and citizens - quickly rose to the task. The toolkit prepared by the Roundtable encouraged participants to take an “asset-based” approach to the dialogue, to identify community strengths, and then draw on these to develop visions for the future. Participants were also asked to consider and discuss what roles they would play in helping the community realize these visions. They talked about their hopes and visions and the challenges they face trying to realize them. These meetings could fairly be described as both ordinary and extraordinary. They were ordinary because they reflected what happens in these communities, day in, day out. They were extraordinary because they allowed the authoritative and authentic voice of Nunavummiut to speak with confidence and clarity on an issue that is of critical importance to them.

By the time the delegates assembled at the Summit, Nunavut’s definition of poverty had been distilled into six key themes:

1. Collaboration and Community Participation
2. Healing and Wellbeing
3. Education, Training and Skills Development
4. Housing and Income Support Programs
5. Food Security and Country Foods Access
6. Community and Economic Development

These six themes form a single, interconnected set of economic, social and cultural challenges, which *The Makimaniq Plan* represents as follows:



The two themes of collaboration and healing merit special attention. In the community dialogues, these two themes were connected—even fused—in people’s experience in a particularly interesting way. Many participants felt that to overcome poverty, first people—as individuals, families and communities—must feel healthy, strong and well. Unfortunately, community members often do not feel this way. Issues around mental health, self-esteem, and the loss of personal and cultural identity strain relationships, undermine efforts at education and personal development, discourage employment, and weaken the ability to engage in community life.

Notwithstanding these circumstances, the tone of the community dialogues was remarkably hopeful, at times even elated. The dialogues seem to have presented rare opportunity for Inuit to imagine what their communities could be like, and how they could use the resources available to achieve this—and to do this without being judged, contradicted or criticized by the “experts.” The process made community members feel that, on matters of their own well-being, their future, and their hopes, *they* were the experts. And, as experts, it turns out they had a lot to say.

In particular, if they were clear that self-respect, self-reliance and community connection are critical conditions of well-being, they were equally clear that healing is connected to a sense of empowerment. Discussions about how to overcome these conditions often focused on changes in how government and Inuit organizations serve people and their communities. There was a heartfelt desire to make the institutions of governance more responsive to community needs. This, in turn, was usually defined in terms of greater community participation in decision-making.

I believe there is a critical message here for policy-makers. These two themes—collaboration and healing—are fused within Inuit society. Colonial-style government is more than a memory. It is a wound that still needs to heal and such healing involves empowerment.

At every stage in the process Inuit voices affirmed the need to fashion a new and more collaborative kind of governance. They want government that challenges the people to assume new responsibilities for their own well-being, while supporting them in their efforts.

A primary challenge for poverty reduction and for *The Makimaniq Plan* is to begin this process by ensuring that the measures proposed under the four remaining themes—housing, food security, education and community and economic development—not only respond to needs in these areas, but do so in a way that contributes to healing through collaboration. At bottom, this requires community participation, dialogue, shared responsibility and shared accountability. It requires engagement.

Implementing the Plan

Now that the Summit is over and the plan has been devised and agreed to by the participants, the partners have moved into the implementation stage. This final section of the paper poses and considers a number of challenges that the Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and their partners are considering as they move ahead.

Sharing Accountability

The responsibility for delivering the action plan cannot fall to government alone, or even to government and NTI as co-sponsors of the Poverty Reduction Process. There must be a genuinely collaborative effort to deliver the plan. Government should be part of such an arrangement, and NTI, but so too must communities, community organizations, businesses, and ordinary citizens.

Some kind of mechanism is necessary to manage this partnership. Participants in the Poverty Summit agreed that the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction should assume this role.

As a result, the Roundtable will be reconstituted as an independent body to provide leadership and oversight around implementation of the plan. More specifically, it will ensure that implementation not only occurs, but is carried out in ways that are responsive to the community and its residents, respectful of their views, and flexible in its approaches.

Under *The Makimaniq Plan* the Nunavut Anti-Poverty Secretariat will serve as the secretariat for the roundtable. The GN and NTI have been tasked with establishing a transition team to develop terms of reference for the roundtable, including an accountability framework. What form should this accountability framework take?

If the Roundtable is to serve as the principal mechanism for a collaborative partnership, it cannot be placed under the control of the government. Were that to happen, whatever words were used to describe the Roundtable, it would be an arm of government. This, in turn, means the other “partners” would be no more than advisors, while the final decision on matters of disagreement would always return to government.

This is not how partnerships and collaboration work. They are based on trust, not hierarchy. When people with a common goal agree to work together as partners to achieve the goal, first, they form a shared plan, and then they use their resources to carry out their part of the plan. The key assumption each partner makes is that the other partners will do the same.

Unfortunately, other than to take legal action, there is usually little a partner can do when another partner fails to deliver. The relationship is based on trust, not force.

If this trust is violated, say, because one of the partners reneges on a commitment, the partnership is likely to collapse. On the other hand, if the partners operate in good faith and deliver on their commitments, trust grows and the partnership is strengthened.

The lesson here is that, if the Roundtable is to be a genuine partnership, the accountability framework should aim at meeting two conditions: (a) it should be based on a governance model that does not make the Roundtable answerable to government alone; and (b) it should be explicit that the partnership is based upon trust.

To return to the task of creating an accountability framework for the Roundtable, a full-fledged, collaborative partnership should be based on five critical success conditions:

- Trust
- Mutual Respect
- Openness
- Inclusiveness
- Personal Responsibility

Trust is the overarching condition needed to build and maintain a high-quality collaborative relationship, but it is not the only one. Mutual respect ensures that there will be give and take. Openness encourages self-examination, the weighing of evidence, the willingness to compromise and the search for new opportunities and solutions. Inclusiveness is essential to bring the community together. And a sense of personal responsibility is necessary to ensure that the dialogue is not just about talk; but that all parties will seek to understand their roles and fulfill their responsibilities. These five factors are mutually reinforcing and, as the relationship evolves, strengthen and enhance one another.⁸

⁸ For a more detailed account of this, see *Rescuing Policy: The Case for Public Engagement*, Appendix 2, Public Policy Forum 2012, by Don Lenihan. The volume can be downloaded at: <http://www.ppforum.ca/rescuing-policy>

Crafting the Legislation

At the Summit the Government of Nunavut declared its intention to create legislation to support *The Makimaniq Plan*. According to the communiqué that was released:

In order to ensure that the momentum created by this work continues beyond the term of any one government or organization, this Government will introduce legislation for the implementation of the long-term Poverty Reduction Action Plan with the collaboration of our partners.

The proposed legislation will doubtless support poverty reduction in a variety of ways. Consistent with the points made in the last section, however, it should ensure that this includes taking a clear position in support of a collaborative approach to the Roundtable.

Such a commitment would not only energize participation in the Roundtable, it would provide the government with a safe but influential place in which to experiment with new ways of working with NTI, communities, community organizations and business, much like a permanent pilot project. It would also provide an open channel for investing new resources or exploring new opportunities, as they present themselves. The Roundtable could conceivably evolve into a much more robust arrangement that manages collaborative action in a number of fields, not just poverty reduction.

At the same time, the legislation should make clear that a commitment to collaborative participation in the Roundtable need not compromise other activities, commitments or responsibilities of the government. The purpose of this commitment would be to help position government participation in the Roundtable as part of a new and ongoing experiment—a pilot project—in transforming government and governance.

Finally, the legislation should make clear that, although the Roundtable would not be accountable to government, government officials who serve on it would continue to report to their superiors in all the usual ways, including for their use of government resources. Similarly, the Secretariat, which would be assigned responsibility for providing administrative support to the Roundtable - would report to government on its use of government resources.

Focus on Capacity-Building

Throughout the process, participants at a variety of levels noted that Nunavut's NGO community is small and often over-worked. If these organizations are to play a new role in providing services, as well as helping to engage communities and their members, capacity-building will be required.

The good news from participants was that regional and community-based organizations are well positioned to build on local assets, respond dynamically to changing local needs and interests, and use their grassroots networks to achieve goals resourcefully. This capacity was demonstrated in the Poverty Reduction Process itself, in which the Nunavut Literacy Council played a prominent role. The organization provided advice and agreed to second a member of their staff to the Secretariat. This support was critical to the success of each stage in the process.

Throughout the process, strengthening Nunavut's social economy was repeatedly recognized as a critical condition of long-term poverty reduction. At present, much important poverty reduction work is already occurring through NGOs. A key task of the Roundtable will be to help build and support a vibrant

network of NGOs that will facilitate the sharing of knowledge and coordination of programs across the territory.

Building the Partnership with NTI

A key question for the future concerns the evolving role of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and the three Regional Inuit organizations, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, Kivalliq Inuit Association and Kitikmeot Inuit Association.

NTI, in particular, constitutes a unique feature in Nunavut's system of governance. There is no real parallel elsewhere in Canada. While NTI is not officially part of the government, it has considerable legal and moral authority to influence the development of public policy in Nunavut, as well as to develop and deliver programs and services directly to Inuit. The exercise of these responsibilities may be about to take a major turn.

In the coming years, Nunavut is poised for a surge of economic growth from the harvesting of natural resources, such as oil, gas and minerals. NTI and the three Regional Inuit Associations are expected to receive royalties from these activities that may run into the hundreds of millions of dollars—possibly higher. The opportunities are potentially huge.

While the Inuit organizations are obligated to manage and invest this money in ways that promote Inuit interests, such investment could take many forms.

Will Inuit invest in new programs, say, in education, community health or local business development? Will they build new transportation or communications infrastructure? Will they help revitalize communities with major cultural initiatives? Will they provide direct transfers of money to individuals? Will most of the money be placed in trust?

Such questions are yet to be decided, but they raise a critical question for the Government of Nunavut: How will the actions of the Inuit organizations align with the government's efforts to provide its own services and to govern well? Will Inuit organizations see themselves as close partners of the government, who are working with it to plan initiatives that complement and enhance their mutual goals? Or will there be tensions and competition between them?

Seen from the viewpoint of conventional parliamentary government, an organization like NTI could appear threatening. Parliamentary governments are based on the principle that, when it comes to public policy, they are supreme. In this view, an organization like NTI could be seen as a challenge to this authority, possibly even a kind of shadow government.

Fortunately, this is not the only way to look at the situation. The alternative is to recognize that Nunavut is not a conventional parliamentary system. Nor was it meant to be. The principle of collaboration has been built into the very structure of the government, as required by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and Article 32, and expressed in the consensual system of governance in the legislature, and the partnership with NTI to reduce poverty.

Nunavut cannot and should not operate as a conventional parliamentary system. Indeed, as the Public Policy Forum's Public Engagement Project shows, governments around the world are finding that they can no longer operate this way either. Collaboration and engagement are emerging as critical skills for

effective government in the 21st century. In this view, Nunavut should experiment and innovate with the parliamentary structures and practices. It should work to bend and shape them in ways that better fit its special circumstances and needs.

From this perspective, good governance in the future likely will demand greater collaboration and partnership. *The Makimaniq Plan* provides an excellent opportunity for the government to experiment with new models of governance in Nunavut. NTI, in particular, has been a strong and supportive partner of the Poverty Reduction Process. The government should seize the opportunity and get on with the task of innovation and renewal.

Poverty Reduction and the Public Service

During the Poverty Reduction Process, participants at all levels agreed on the complex nature of poverty as a public policy issue. They also agreed that government will make little progress trying to reduce poverty on its own. For one thing, it simply doesn't have the resources. But, more to the point, solving poverty is about more than just resources.

A key attraction of the public engagement approach was that it provided a process for arriving at a shared plan to reduce poverty. The process has now succeeded in producing such a plan, but does the plan meet expectations? On at least one level it falls short.

During the two years that I was involved with the project, I spoke with many senior officials in and out of workshops, made presentations to some deputy ministers and interviewed others, and I facilitated or participated in a number of the events, including the Poverty Summit. Through all of this, it was clear that inside the senior ranks of the public service support for a public engagement approach was mixed. In the early stages, some senior officials were enthusiastic, others less so. As the process unfolded, I thought the doubts would be dispelled. They were not. Indeed, in the weeks leading up to the Summit, the tensions were clearly coming to the surface.

Some officials seemed worried that they were being pushed into a process that could commit them to plans and actions they had little or no time to vet or that had little or nothing to do with their key responsibilities, as approved by the Legislative Assembly. A few reportedly saw the process as unfocused, undisciplined and even coercive.⁹

Unsurprisingly, the Secretariat and its partners saw things very differently. They felt these senior officials in government had made little effort to understand or participate in the process until the 11th hour when the Summit was being planned and they were suddenly called on to do something.

I believe that, in large part, these tensions stem from a misunderstanding of the process on the part of government officials, who seem to have assumed they would participate in the Summit in ways that reflected their own priorities, rather than those that communities, residents and community

⁹ A particular misconception persists here that needs to be cleared up. Some think public engagement processes hand the reins of government over to communities or community organizations. This is simply wrong. While they are supposed to give citizens and communities a greater say in setting priorities and options, this does not mean they are allowed to dictate to government what it should do. It does mean that government is expected to participate in good faith, based on a genuine commitment to flexibility and openness. In effect, public engagement makes government more accountable, transparent and responsive, but it does not dissolve its authority and responsibility to make decisions in the public interest.

organizations had identified during the first 11 months of the process. Indeed, there were reports that some of departments had set up traditional consultation processes of their own to solicit community views and were already basing their decisions on the findings. Some departments may even have believed they were already in possession of the information needed to make their policy decisions.

Given these circumstances, organizers of the Summit feared that, if government decision-makers participated in the Summit, they would not do so in the collaborative spirit that the process had worked to build over the past year. As a result, the Summit could become a flashpoint for all kinds of tensions around governance, rather than demonstrating the transformative potential of public engagement.

Happily, the Summit was a success, though only a few deputy ministers attended and most who did sat as observers. For their part, the participants took this in stride. They seemed relatively untroubled by the weak showing from the senior ranks of the public service. They engaged in discussion and performed the requisite tasks with enthusiasm and commitment. And, at the end of the day, they agreed on a collaborative plan.

So where should the public service stand? Before answering this question, it is worth pausing to remind ourselves of why governments around the world are increasingly interested in collaboration.

Complex issues require complex solutions. No organization, not even government, can deliver the kind of solutions needed to seriously reduce poverty on its own. The community must be part of the solution, and this, in turn, requires engagement. Governments, citizens and stakeholders must learn to work together. Collaboration is about building the relationships needed to make this happen.

In my view, the Poverty Reduction Process is best seen as an investment in this kind of relationship-building. It was an opportunity to step beyond the colonial legacy and begin to renew the relationships. That is the spirit in which the process was launched and in which communities and their members were invited to participate. Unfortunately, such an investment only makes sense if the project is seen as the beginning of a long-term effort to change how the government and the community deal with each other, so they can work together to address complex issues such as poverty more effectively.

Most participants wanted to see the process this way. They wanted it to be the first step in a longer journey. No one seems to have thought the issues would be solved in a single round or through a single action plan.

The hard truth, however, is that this kind of project cannot succeed without senior leadership from both the political and public service levels. Stakeholders showed a genuine willingness to make this work, as did the Premier and the Vice-President of NTI. If the implementation process is to succeed, government officials must take the next step.

A Committee of the Legislature?

Ron Elliot, MLA for Grise Fiord, Resolute Bay, and Arctic Bay attended the Poverty Summit. During the session he made a suggestion that was greeted warmly and is worthy of further discussion. Elliot proposed that a Committee of the Legislature be created to consider what can be learned from this process, what is needed to move forward with implementation, and to review the legislation the government proposes to introduce.

Such a committee would provide an opportunity for sustained political reflection on some of the deep questions that have been raised by this process, both in terms of poverty reduction and the need to make adjustments to the structures and practices of government in Nunavut.

Collaboration, Public Engagement and Article 32

At the beginning of this paper I said that Inuit want a better balance between modern government and their traditional forms of governance. They want government that can make decisions and act in the community's interest, but that challenges—and allows—the community, its organizations and people to solve their problems together. Public engagement holds the key to achieving this.

On one hand, public engagement aims at making governments more **effective**, where this refers to a government's capacity to use its resources and authorities to achieve its goals. Today, citizens expect governments to help solve complex societal issues, such as poverty, climate change or poor public health.

We've seen that issues like these are complex in the sense that their solution requires effort and resources from outside government. Businesses, NGOs, communities and citizens all have a role to play. Collaboration is therefore necessary for progress. Public engagement is the process that produces collaboration, and, in Nunavut, that may resonate with traditional models of governance.

On the other hand, getting citizens, NGOs and businesses to assume some responsibility for helping to find and implement such solutions requires giving them a real say. Government cannot simply assign them such a role. Collaboration therefore requires **empowerment**. In practice, this means government must move beyond conventional consultation and engage the public in a genuine dialogue that involves decision making, planning and action—and the resources needed for communities to act.

Such a dialogue is NOT about government giving away its power. Rather than divesting government of its authorities, responsibilities or accountability, dialogue enhances these elements by clarifying the role government can play in solving complex issues and helping officials adjust government's structure and practices to maximize its ability to play this role effectively.

Public engagement is thus about changing government in ways that make it more effective, responsive, inclusive and community-based, on the one hand; and challenging citizens, communities and stakeholders to assume a new role in helping to find and implement solutions to complex, societal issues, on the other.

The fact that these two goals—effectiveness and empowerment—converge in this one process makes public engagement the appropriate and indispensable tool for finding a better balance between the traditional Inuit governance system and modern parliamentary government. It is especially well suited to help the government meet its obligations under Article 32 of the land claim, and ensure Inuit participate in the development, design, and delivery of social and cultural policies.

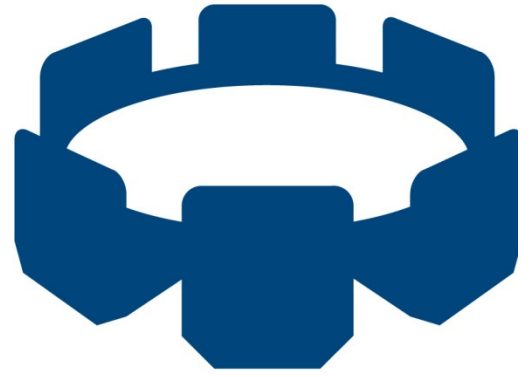
The Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction could serve as the starting point for a new approach to Article 32. This initiative provides a safe and effective way for government to act on Article 32 by agreeing to work closely with communities to resolve poverty through community engagement. If, as *The Makimaniq Plan* says, poverty reduction starts with community healing and a new sense of self-

reliance, the collaborative, community-based approach proposed in the plan is the right way forward and captures the real spirit of Article 32.

While an initiative such as the Roundtable is only a first step, it could also be a watershed. The legacy could be one of on-going, transformational change through the development of new skills, knowledge, expertise, relationships and, most importantly, a rebuilding of trust between Inuit and the government.

The days when government planning and policy-making were the sole responsibility of government officials are disappearing, not just in Nunavut, but in governments around the world. Today, there is growing recognition of the need to engage the public in making choices, developing plans and taking action for the achievement of important societal goals. This not only leads to stronger, healthier communities, but to more effective and responsive governments.

From this viewpoint, Premier Aariak's commitment to reassert and rekindle the traditional Inuit value of self-reliance takes on a larger significance. It is not just a call for citizens to change their ways. It is equally a call for government to change its ways.



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