Excerpt from Aviaq Johnston’s debut novel THOSE WHO RUN IN THE SKY

Douglas Clark & Jocelyn Joe-Strack

on keeping the “co-” in co-management

Making a living wage in Yukon

By Kendall Hammond
The simple fact is that Arctic strategies throughout my lifetime have rarely matched or addressed the magnitude of the basic gaps between what exists in the Arctic and what other Canadians take for granted. Closing these gaps is what northerners, across the Arctic, wanted to speak to me about as an urgent priority. Reconciliation is inextricably tied to this reality. A new Arctic Leadership Model, if it is to separate itself from many previous and earnest documents on the future of the Arctic, must address these basic issues of human rights.

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RESOURCES and SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT in the ARCTIC
FEATURES
In the first issue of *Northern Public Affairs* magazine published in June 2012, the editors called for a new conversation about Northern public policy rooted in the experiences and concerns of Northern community members whose knowledge and wisdom are central to the shaping and reshaping of Northern life.

At the time, we argued that few formal mechanisms existed to sustain an ongoing dialogue among researchers, policy makers, and the public across the North’s diverse geographic, cultural, and social landscapes. We hoped that NPA would fill that gap. Five years and 17 issues later, NPA has emerged as a credible, dependable, and creative multiplatform space for mobilizing knowledge in and about the North.

Our recognition of the North’s colonial history and our desire to support the decolonization movement has meant that relationships with Northern community members have been central to our publishing efforts. We have worked to bring innovative and sometimes radical ideas into the policy discussions on education and research, modern treaties, literacy, Indigenous rights and governance, and, in this issue, food security. To do this our small editorial team has reached out to Northern thought leaders as well as people in the south who share our goal of making knowledge for policy more accessible. But as we look to the future we realize that in order for the publication to flourish we need to share editorial responsibilities more broadly.

Last year we began the work of assembling an editorial board separate from NPA’s corporate board that would be responsible for planning, curating, and producing content for each issue of the magazine. Today, we are pleased to announce the formation of such a body and honoured to welcome a membership with the energy, expertise, and experience to help us renew our commitment to thoughtful, plain language dialogue on issues facing Northern Canadians:

- Tim Argetsinger
- Julia Christensen
- Kirk Cameron
- Paul Crowley
- Sean Guistini
- Gwen K. Healey
- Sandra Inutiq
- Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox
- Aviaq Johnston
- Hayden King
- Rhiannon Klein
- Heather McGregor
- Pitseolak Pfeifer
- Thierry Rodon
- Jerald Sabin (Founding Editor)
- Deborah Simmons
- Kiri Staples
- Valoree Walker

Joshua Gladstone and Sheena Kennedy Dalseg will remain co-managing editors. Meagan Wohlberg remains as online editor.

In this issue of the magazine, produced before the formation of the new editorial board and with the assistance of guest editors Andrew Spring and Deborah Simmons, we focus on the issue of food security in the North. The content of future issues will be overseen by the expanded editorial board.
Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1996). The topic of food security in the North is a complex puzzle. There are many social, economic and political factors at play, including the high cost of food and transportation, and now the impacts of climate change. What we do know is that for many in communities across the North, the food system is not working. Often described as a crisis, moderate to high food insecurity has been reported in 17% of households in the Yukon and almost 70% of households of in the Nunavut — significantly higher than the national average of 8% (Rosol et al., 2011; Council of Canadian Academies, 2014; Tarasuk et al., 2016).

The fact that such high rates of food insecurity exist in a developed country such as Canada is alarming, and brings issues of rights to food, rights to land, and other Indigenous rights into question. For many communities in the North, maintaining a strong connection to the land while continuing their traditional livelihoods through hunting, gathering and sharing of traditional foods is important not only for food security but to maintain social and cultural identity. A solution to many of the issues around food insecurity may lie as much in strengthening social and cultural connections within communities as in fostering local food production and lowering the cost of food. Unfortunately, there is no simple solution to such a complex problem.

And yes, there are challenges. But there is hope as well. Communities, governments, and other institutions are creating positive change and beginning to address some of the complex issues of food insecurity. And there are a great deal of initiatives at all levels – community, regional, territorial and federal – that are making a difference. The challenge now is one of connecting the pieces. Ensuring a food secure future for Northern communities means addressing community needs and supporting them through partnerships and collaboration.

In this issue of Northern Public Affairs we offer articles on food security from the perspectives of Northern community members, researchers, and policy analysts. Published in collaboration with Wilfrid Laurier University’s Centre for Sustainable Food Systems in Waterloo, ON, the issue includes personal stories (Tuglavina) and descriptions of local initiatives such as a community garden in Kakisa (Simba and Spring), Yellowknife’s food charter (Johnston and Williams), and food security strategies in Yukon that address the impacts of climate change on health (Pratt et al.). Other articles directly address the politics of food security in the North (Loring) and the ways in which country food (food harvested from the land) factors into food security at the level of the community (Daborn; Mills et al.) and government policy (Stephenson and Wenzel). Finally, Michael Fitzgerald and Fred Hill unpack the federal Liberal government’s in progress improving Nutrition North.

We are also pleased to include two articles based on research projects funded in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council’s partnership grant Resources and Sustainable Development in the Arctic (ReS4), Saxinger and Gartler introduce their mobile mine workers guide, and Mills et al. discuss the results of focus groups with women in Nunatsiavut who say that food security has been impacted by the Voisey’s Bay mine. Clark and Joe-Strack offer a provocative call to reject sweeping generalizations about the success or failure of co-management regimes in favour of more current and “better-engaged” research. David Roddick gives his view of the recent Yukon territorial election. And Kendall Hammon discusses the concept of living wage and its recent application in Yukon.

Finally, we are pleased to publish an excerpt from Those Who Walk in the Sky, the soon-to-be-released debut novel by Aviaq Johnston. We thank Aviaq and her publisher, Inhabit Media, for providing the selection. Look for Aviaq’s novel in stores in April.

References
Executive summary
Throughout their traditional homelands, Inuit face an acute housing crisis which threatens their health and safety. This persistent and growing housing shortage has been characterized as one of the most significant public health emergencies in this country. Severe overcrowding, substandard homes, and a lack of affordable and suitable housing options has left many Inuit families one step away from homelessness; an unsettling reality in one of the harshest climates in the world. In Nunavik alone, over half of Inuit families live in overcrowded housing. In far too many communities, up to 15 people, including young children, live in small and crumbling three bedroom units. The effect of these conditions, on children in particular, is deeply troubling. Overcrowding results in higher levels of domestic violence and abuse, placing children in unacceptably vulnerable situations.

The lack of decent and affordable housing continues to have serious public health repercussions throughout the Inuit territories. Tuberculosis, which is rare in southern Canada, occurs among Inuit at a rate over 250 times higher than for non-Indigenous Canadians. Inuit families are at higher risk for mental health problems, including stress and anxiety. High levels of respiratory infections among Inuit children, such as chronic lung disease after lower respiratory tract infections, are also linked to crowding and poorly ventilated homes.

Adequate housing contributes directly to improved educational attainment levels, positive relationships, good health and economic prosperity. As Inuit are the youngest population in Canada, there is a growing urgency to identify and implement culturally-appropriate solutions. The Committee heard clearly that if we are serious about providing young Inuit with the ability to participate fully in the life of their communities, investments in housing must be a priority.

To this end, the availability of social housing is essential, especially because private homeownership will likely continue to be financially out of reach for many Inuit. Given the ongoing financial and demographic pressures for social housing, adequate federal support is considered critical by many in order to help territorial and Inuit governments keep up with the escalating housing needs in their regions.

However, we heard consistently, that at current levels, federal funding is inadequate to meet current and projected demand. The high costs of construction (estimated at three times higher than in Toronto), operation, maintenance, and transportation mean that few homes can be built with federal funding. To make matters worse, in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, federal funding for social housing is declining, making it impossible to meet community housing needs.

Recognizing the need for additional federal funding, the Committee recommends that the federal government develop a funding strategy for housing in Inuit Nunangat. Such a strategy, we believe, is necessary not only to address the declining funding under social housing agreements, but also to provide adequate, predictable and stable funding so that regional housing authorities can plan for, and meet, long-term housing needs.
Old House in Dettah

Courtesy of Peter Workman
Over the longer term, Inuit need to have access to a range of housing options capable of meeting their needs, including private homeownership, co-operative housing, and rent-to-own opportunities. Currently, barriers such as affordability and the absence of a real estate market have prevented these options from gaining traction in Inuit Nunangat.

Ultimately, any solution to the housing crisis will require the direct involvement of Inuit who experience the housing crisis every day. Currently, targeted federal funding for housing in Nunavik and Nunatsiavut is transferred first to the province, and then to Inuit organizations. As these organizations are better positioned to identify local needs and priorities within their communities, the Committee recommends that federal funding for housing be provided directly to Indigenous organizations.

In this report, we have set out actions to support integrated and community-based solutions that better reflect Inuit cultures and the climate in which they live. This means involving Inuit in meaningful partnerships in the design of suitable homes, exploring new technologies to make better and more affordable homes available, exploring alternative financing opportunities that support greater homeownership, and taking appropriate steps to lower operating and construction costs, while promoting local skilled labour.

Finally, the chronic housing shortage, combined with a young and growing population, requires us to act now to alleviate the vulnerability experienced by far too many Inuit families due to a lack of housing and to ensure that generations of Inuit to come can fulfil their promise.

**Recommendations**

1. That the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation work with other federal departments, and the relevant provincial, territorial and Inuit organizations, to develop a funding strategy for northern housing. This funding strategy should address concerns about declining funding under social housing agreements and provide adequate, predictable, stable and long-term funding for housing in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut.

2. That the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation work with Inuit organizations in the Northwest Territories, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut to ensure funding for Inuit housing is provided directly to those organizations, where appropriate.

3. That Fisheries and Oceans Canada amend the Fee Schedule to exempt all Nunavik communities from marine navigation services fees.

4. That the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation provide sufficient funding to northern housing authorities to permit the construction and operation of additional transitional housing options based on community needs.

5. That the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, in consultation with other federal organizations and Inuit governments, take immediate steps to review and expand the Isolated Posts and Government Housing Directive’s eligibility criteria to include local Inuit employees, where appropriate.

6. That the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, in co-operation with the relevant provincial, territorial and Inuit housing authorities, explore ways to support homeownership, such as co-operative and cohousing ownership, home buy-back and grant programs, that are suited to community needs in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut.

7. That the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation continue to provide funding to Habitat For Humanity’s Indigenous Housing Program.

8. That the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation allocate a portion of the Affordable Rental Housing Innovation Fund specifically to the development of alternative housing options in communities in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut.

9. That the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation work with relevant federal departments and appropriate housing agencies in order to develop a coordinated strategy for government research and development into northern housing.

10. That the National Research Council work with the provinces and territories and other stakeholders to develop model building codes tailored to the conditions and limitations of the North.

11. That Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada reinstate the Climate Change Adaptation Program to provide funding to help Indigenous communities minimize the impacts of climate change.

12. That the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation ensure that a greater number of young Inuit from Nunavut, Nunatsiavut, Nunavik and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region participate in the Housing Internship Initiative for First Nations and Inuit Youth.

13. That the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, in collaboration with Indigenous organizations and other relevant partners, ensure that the proposed national housing strategy include a specific strategy to address the housing challenges in northern Indigenous communities located in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut.

**Endnotes**

Pitu lay on the ice, huddled into a ball, clinging to his tools. He thought of his dogs, especially Miki. There was nothing else to think of, other than his occasional remembrance of how horrified he was. He tried to think of home and his mother and Saima, but that brought only bad feelings, not comfort. The strength of the wind was blowing him around in all directions, toy ing with him and terrorizing him.

When he finally opened his eyes again, they were sore from being shut so tightly for such a long period of time. The sky above was a pure and unfa ltering shade of grey that hurt Pitu’s eyes, like an overcast day in spring. After several moments, he gathered enough strength to push himself up into a seated position. He was no longer on an endless expanse of smooth ice; instead he was now sitting at the bottom of a hill in the middle of the day. The air was cool, but not bracing. Everywhere he looked, there was white snow. The sea ice he’d been blown across was adjacent to him. As far as he could see, there were no signs of life, no tracks in the snow. Even the air felt dead, as the strong winds had completely vanished. The things that would be typical of a shoreline, like tidal ice, rocks peeking through the

**Those who run in the sky**

The following is an excerpt from Those Who Run in the Sky by Aviaq Johnston.
snow, meandering fox tracks, and constant wind, were not present, making everything seem smooth and unnatural.

He looked around some more, searching but finding no trace of his dogs. His heartbeat quickened. Although the landscape was vastly unnerving, there was also a sense of vague familiarity, like it was his world shown to him through the stillness of a lake. A reflection of the truth. He could see peaks in the distance, and the hill he sat upon was a part of a range of ancient, weather-softened mountains, not unlike the ones his village camped along.

“Qimmitt!” Pitu shouted into the strange land. “Come here! Dogs!”

There were no distant barks or howls in answer, just the echo of his voice. Pitu continued to shout for several moments, more out of confusion and disbelief than the thought that they might hear him. The last time he had glimpsed the huskies, they’d been running away with his sled full of gear. They were long gone by now, probably back at camp. Anaa-na would be worried, sending all the hunters in the camp and in nearby Iqaluit to search for him. It could take days for him to return, and he was afraid to start a journey when he did not know where he was. What if he chose the wrong way and started a journey in the opposite direction of his camp? He wouldn’t know anything until he saw another person.

He thought solemnly of the promise he’d made to Saima. He worried that she might think he had left and disappeared on purpose because he was too afraid of marrying her. He quickly dismissed the ridiculous thought. He’d been told too many times this past summer that the whole village knew he wanted her to be his wife. There’s no way Saima would think I left to hide from my commitments, he thought. It could take weeks until he could explain to her what had happened, but he believed that she would wait for him.

After sitting at the bottom of the hillside for what felt like hours, shouting until his throat was raw and sore, Pitu finally got to his feet. In either hand he held the snow knife and harpoon, using the latter as a walking stick. There was no way the dogs wouldn’t have heard him, unless he had travelled farther than the wind could possibly have taken him. Pitu knew that there were many things wrong about the whole situation, but he still refused to believe it.

Once he began to move and walk up the hill, Pitu’s senses slowly returned to him. The strangeness of the land around seemed to be speaking to him. Pitu felt that he was no longer in the same land that he had been in. The feeling he had felt last summer in the fog was gone. No longer was he filled with peace and purpose. Now, he was enveloped in hostility. He was not at home here. The thought brought an ache to his chest. He thought of Saima, of how close they had been only this morning. The thoughts overwhelmed him and he chose not to dwell on them any longer.

A gust of wind blew over the hill. It carried the sound of a wailing woman.

Pitu started up the hill at a quick pace, more out of excitement at the prospect of seeing another person and finding answers than out of concern for why the woman might be crying.

At the crest of the hill, he saw three women huddled together on another expanse of ice, this one more normal looking than the one he had just slid across for what seemed to be miles and miles. Jagged boulders of ice jutted out vertically as signs of the ocean’s tides. The women were just a bit farther than the field of ice boulders, staring down into an open crack before them. Another gust of wind swept over him, and Pitu could hear the pathetic crying again.

He made his way down the hillside, calling out to the women. The wind would not carry his words toward them. Pitu walked as quickly as he could without wearing down his energy. When he reached the pillars of ice sticking out of the frozen water, the looming figures towered over him. The ice seemed to cast imaginary shadows underneath their scrutinizing gaze, but in the bland light, it was impossible to truly see the dark shapes the shadows would form. The feeling lingered, though, that there was something terrifying about these jagged figures, some breath of life hiding in their cracks.

I never felt so small, Pitu thought. Not even next to the mountains they went to hunt by in the summer, not even when he paddled the qajaq on great expanses of open water, nor at the sight of the huge bowhead whales in the sea. The beauty of those things far outweighed the formidable danger they could entail. These towering hunks of ice were alien, sharp, and terrible. Pitu felt like they were the ghosts of evil men, taunting him as he hiked through. With the wind carrying the wailing cries of the women through the sharp passage, the place was nightmarish. He sped through the narrow spaces between each formation, a hopeless need to leave the area propelling him forward. He felt the prickles of fright on the back of his neck, the cold sweat coming from his skin. He stumbled through, jumping over dark cracks in which he felt he could hear the breaths of a thousand drowning victims. The ice cast shadows over the path and he had to squint before he could keep manoeuvring.
his way through, twisting away from the sharp edges.

He slipped a few times before he made his way out. Looking back briefly, Pitu expected to see something like a shadow of darkness on the path he’d just left. He was sure he felt the presence of a malevolent entity within the huddled ice. And yet, he could see that there was nothing. The contorted columns of ice were still and unwavering.

Pitu called out to the women again. They were only ten paces away from each other now. The three women went rigid, their backs straightening, their shabby amautiit jostling what they carried in their pouches. He continued his way toward them, but their wailing had ceased. The oddness of the situation made him hesitate—the terror from his journey through the ice still making his stomach turn, his heart pound, and his skin prickle.

“All,” Pitu cautiously called out again. He was standing only two or three strides away now.

One of the women turned to look at him.

Pitu stepped back in instant horror, dropping his weapons in shock. It wasn’t a woman, he realized instantly. The stories he had been told as a child about playing on the ice alone sprang to memory. The screams coming out of their mouths disoriented him. He fell to his knees, clamping his mittened hands over his ears. Though he felt woozy, he wanted to face the qallupilluit with dignity.

One of the qallupilluit, the one in the middle, seemed to be the leader. She growled at the others who had spoken to him. Pitu watched as the life drained out of his target.

Three of the creatures landed on their feet; one of the creature’s claws cut through his cheek. The slick feeling of blood flowing made his head spin. The qallupilluq on top of him made a sound of disgust and jumped off. He took the opportunity to start crawling away.

Only when he saw his own blood reddening the snow did his stomach convulse hard enough that he vomited. He retched onto the snow until nothing else would come out. The shrieking suddenly stopped.

He looked up to see them observing him. They crouched in a grotesque fashion with their knees turned outward, their curled backs looking ancient and broken. One of the qallupilluit pointed a long, bony finger at him, and in a hoarse voice, asked, “Are you alive?”

Pitu did not respond. The dialect was ancient, but he understood it.

The creatures whispered to each other. Pitu slowly began to regain control over his body. He clenched his hands together over and over again, the movement and concentration calming him, distracting him. He stood up from his position on his hands and knees, getting back to his feet. Though he felt woozy, he wanted to face the qallupilluit with dignity.

One of the qallupilluit, the one in the middle, seemed to be the leader. She growled at the others and addressed Pitu again. “Did you come to steal our babies?”

They didn’t wait for him to answer. Instead, all three leaped forward to attack him. Pitu suddenly remembered his weapons. The qallupilluq did not seem to have noticed that the harpoon was on the ground next to their flipper-feet. When they leaped, it was left in the open. Pitu dove for it while the three creatures were midair. He grasped it with a definite grip, readjusted it for aiming, and threw it with all his strength at the qallupilluq in the middle, the one who had spoken to him.

It seemed as though time had stopped as the harpoon sailed through the air. The qallupilluq had their backs to Pitu now, unaware of the harpoon flying toward them. Pitu stared at it, willing it toward his target.

Two of the creatures landed on their feet; one fell into a heap on the ice. The harpoon stood out stiffly from the back of its neck. There was a moment of surprised silence. With horror that mirrored Pitu’s, the qallupilluq watched as the life drained out of their kin. The two, aghast and now frightened, straightened from their crouching stances.

“Nanjauniaravit,” said one in a horrifying whisper. “You’ll be found.”

The two ran into the trail through the frozen
shards of ice that Pitu had just passed through. Pitu shivered, the words finding a way to penetrate his spine and crawl into his mind, momentarily paralyzing him there. He closed his eyes against tears that were beginning to well up. His blood was running through his veins in a terrified frenzy. He knew that this was something he had had to do, he had had no choice, but there were too many thoughts going through his mind. He had just encountered a creature of myth—he had just killed one.

A sudden thought slammed him back from his fear, though the thought was no less dreadful, perhaps more so. He made his way over toward the dead creature in front of him. Pitu warily touched the back of the qallupilluq’s amauti. Under his hand, there was no mistaking the solid curve of children in the pouch. More sickness was forming in his stomach. Pitu didn’t want to see them, he didn’t want to see what had become of the children that were stolen by the creatures. With courage he did not think he possessed, Pitu opened the hood of the amauti, disturbed to see the two small children in the pouch.

One was a boy, his skin gone blue from asphyxiation and drowning. The little boy must have been three or four. He still wore the caribou snowsuit that his maternal guardian had made for him. The child was shrunken and frozen, dead.

The other child was a girl, slightly older than the boy, but she was not dead. Instead, she was transforming. The child shied away from him, from the light. Her eyes were almost normal, her hair was almost normal, but her skin was scaly in certain spots … Pitu could see that she was changing. She was becoming like the qallupilluq that had just attacked Pitu. The little girl cried, her voice still human, her mouth still unchanged by the awful transformation. She was still more human than she was monster.

Pitu didn’t know what to do. Should he reach in and help her? The little girl whimpered softly. Her mouth was forming words, but he couldn’t hear her gentle voice. “Hai?” he asked.

“Avani,” she mumbled infinitesimally louder. “Go away.”

“I can help you,” Pitu said, though he was not sure that was true. “You can come with me. I’m a shaman.”

“Avani!” she shouted, a bit of anger in her voice. “Go away!”

The little girl began to wail like the qallupilluqit had before he came along. Her eyes darkened, looking sinister.

Pitu stumbled away. He pulled the harpoon from the dead qallupilluq’s neck and grabbed his knife, which was lying a little ways off. He started walking away, passing the crack in the ice the creatures had been crying over. He glanced at the hole. Inside, there was only darkness, but he thought of the holes in the ice he went by sometimes, broken wide open and dangerous, chunks of ice and frozen seaweed floating at the surface. He couldn’t help but imagine his little brother and sister, standing at the edge of one of those holes and peering in, hoping to see a seal, and instead finding bony hands reaching out and grabbing hold of them, bringing them here only to die or become a monster.

He took one last glance at what he’d just left. The little girl had crawled from the amauti and was now walking into the terrible ice shards he’d come through. She was looking for the others. She cried out hesitantly. A wail called back in return. The little girl sprinted into the maze of ice, without a glance at the mess that Pitu had created.

Walking away from that little girl haunted him more than anything that had ever happened to him. He felt like a coward for abandoning her, even though the child had told him to leave.

Pitu was in the spirit world. That was about the only thing he knew.

Aviaq Johnston is an Inuit author from Igloolik, Nunavut. In 2014, Aviaq won first place in the Aboriginal Arts and Stories competition and a Governor General’s History Award for her short story “Tarnikuluk.” Those Who Run in the Sky is her debut novel.

More information:
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Over the past two hundred years, “Indigenous peoples have been marginalized, mistreated, controlled, manipulated, and impoverished...” This is but one of many views that Ken Coates includes in his book, *#IdleNoMore and the Remaking of Canada*. He imposes this timeline on the reader to reinforce the reasons for the peaceful protests that occurred as part of the Idle No More (INM) movement, contrasting them with the violent conflicts that have occurred in Canada’s past, such as Ipperwash Provincial Park, Ontario and Oka, Quebec, to name a few. Coates opines on the few violent protests that have occurred, noting that Indigenous Peoples have often internalized their anger, “taking it out on themselves, their families, and their communities.” He suggests that INM provided an outlet for this internalization.

Coates provides insight into the intentions that four women had in initiating INM: to shift the pain and focus on self-abuse and community frustration, to one of sustained Indigenous demonstrations of culture, identity, and determination. Coates emphasizes the movement’s collective desire to steer a different path for Indigenous Peoples.

Writing this book from a non-Aboriginal perspective, Coates provides great insight into INM’s grassroots beginnings, its protests and gatherings that brought light to issues faced by Indigenous Canadians. Coates emphasizes the misunderstanding that non-Aboriginal peoples had of the movement and provides awareness of INM that any non-Aboriginal person can follow. He notes the disconnect non-Aboriginal people have, coming from the few experiences that non-Aboriginal people share with Indigenous peoples. Coates’ book attempts to shed light on these experiences through personal stories.

Research and discussion of the use of social media in the advancement of the movement is central to Coates’ thesis, of sorts. Coates admits, at the beginning of the book, that he writes his own views on INM, rather than putting forward a sound academic argument. Using a different approach to be sure, Coates examines INM and the use of technologies in spurring mass mobilization. I felt in this regard that the last chapter, which provides the reader with a basic understanding of the use of social media and how it impacts movements generally, may have been better served if it had appeared earlier in Coates’ work. It provided me with a good understanding of the use of social media and how it assisted in the success of INM.

Following INM in the south and being present in Yellowknife at the height of the movement, I wondered what INM represented and how it would impact the public and government. Being a few years wiser, following the election coverage, and the makings of a new federal, municipal, and territorial government religiously, I can now appreciate the influence of INM.

Coates’ book provides the reader with context that allows one to appreciate the impact that Indigenous Peoples have had on shaping government, the public service, and the public generally. Coates believes that the movement represented “an assertion of cultural survival and political determination.” INM unleashed new power and confidence amongst Indigenous peoples in Canada. The reality of this movement, and the change it had on Indigenous Peoples, can be witnessed in the high turnout of Indigenous Peoples in the most recent federal election and how the federal government’s mandate is structured. It focuses on murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, over-representation of Indigenous peoples in prison, and social and economic improvements on reserves, including drinking water, housing, and education. We can also see a similar framework with the new territorial government here in Yellowknife and the changes being made, including the GNWT’s response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions’ (TRC) Calls to Action.

This movement has initiated change in non-Indigenous people, as well, seeing a high voter turnout across the country in October with individuals looking for change. The argument could be made that the catalyst for changing Canadian public policy was firmly entrenched in INM. The movement had a clear goal – to articulate frustrations with the current government’s legislative strategy.

Coates admits, however, that the full social im-
impact and influence of INM on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Canada has yet to be seen. He suggests that it may take decades to understand this impact. However, we are starting to see a new “normal” in Canada, where governments are quickly realizing that Indigenous assertiveness is now the reality going forward. The way in which public policy is designed now has to change. This observation comes at an opportune time, with the TRC releasing their final report and Calls to Action for Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationship building, as well as the multitude of legal gains coming out of the Supreme Court of Canada dealing with Aboriginal and Treaty rights, cultural revitalization, and modern treaties.

Public servants will now have to look at their work from a different perspective; they must look to nation-to-nation building and developing policies that incorporate Indigenous consultation from the ground-up. Similarly, governments, like the GNWT, will have to begin developing programs for public servants that provide ongoing cultural awareness training.

Although, there is some repetition in the book on the use and importance of social media, overall it is a great read for someone trying to understand the movement. It acts as a good tool for looking back on INM and the changes that have taken place within Canada since 2013. Coates states that it is unfortunate that more non-Aboriginal people did not see and understand what was going on with INM at its height. This book provides that insight, even if after the fact.

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There is a future. It’s a future Canada in which Indigenous Peoples’ founding role in the federation is widely recognized and celebrated by a new Royal Proclamation. It’s a future where the Indigenous Peoples of Canada are a source of cultural richness for Canadian identity rather than a reminder of state failure. It’s a future where most non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples have come together and, through joint compromise, agreed on a common path forward for our country. It’s a future that stands before us. It’s a future that can be achieved.

It is perhaps wisest to start at the beginning: We Canadians are treaty peoples. However, this is a reality that Poelzer and Coates assert is not sufficiently realized nor reflected in our country. Indeed, part of the challenge stems from the fact that a great many Canadians simply don’t know much about our shared history and the obligations it entails.

The treaties were entered into in order to impose British sovereignty over lands that would later become modern Canada and to help peoples “coexist in friendship [...] and [...] flourish culturally, socially, economically, and politically” (xiii) Yet this original intent of the treaties has not been fully achieved. Accordingly, the authors urge that “it is about time all Canadians began to live as treaty peoples” (viii) and perhaps in so doing learn to become “strong like two people.” This wise chō concept can cut both ways.

For those unfamiliar with political thinkers on Indigenous matters across the spectrum of thought in Canada, the authors offer a balanced review that identifies both the potential and limits of the various views and philosophies at play. Importantly, they readily admit that it is particularly difficult to determine just how much support there is for the various thinkers across that spectrum. To this, I suggest this is precisely the reason why all Canadians need to seize this moment and ensure that we not approach a breaking point but rather, as the authors suggest, “a breakthrough point” (ix).

With respect to the competing philosophies, Poelzer and Coates are careful to point out that “the Canadian debate has been conducted too much in the context of colonialism and the need to develop coherent responses to colonial realities. Colonialism may be a very good way of understanding Canada’s past, but it does not provide a useful analytical tool for building Canada’s future” (188). A joint future will demand a different and practical theoretical framework – one that works with the Canadian state.

It’s clear that Canada’s current predicament will not easily be remedied. There are many difficult questions and few easy answers. And while the best avenues to move forward should come from joint discussion, it appears that, on the face of it, some elements critical to traversing the road ahead include:

• Revisiting commonly held conceptions: On matters of land
and environment, sharing of authorities, reconciliation, redress, options for bringing Indigenous Peoples further into the federal fold (e.g., Indigenous representation at first ministers meetings, a third order of government, Métis policy following the Daniels case, etc.) or Indigenous Peoples’ management of their affairs (e.g., the authors’ innovative concept of a Commonwealth of Aboriginal Peoples as a replacement of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada), Poelzer and Coates are correct to say that “continued and thoughtful change is still required” (173).

- **Compromise by all parties:** The authors argue that “a pragmatic, realistic, and moderate approach – one that is founded on real change to the status quo, and built on clear and public respect for Aboriginal cultures and communities, yet saleable to the country at large – could transform the place of Aboriginal people within Canada and create optimism and hope” (281). Compromise is a self-evident part of achieving a shared future.

- **Formalized sharing mechanisms:** Embedded in the treaties is the notion of sharing. While not fully realized, institutionalized sharing of the country’s wealth offers us a means of moving forward. The Government of the Northwest Territories’ Resource Revenue Sharing Agreement is an excellent case in point.

- **Respect and recognition:** Part of the solution is recognizing and celebrating Indigenous traditions in Canada. As John Ralston Saul has argued, until we collectively acknowledge the formative nature of Indigenous traditions in Canada, we will never fully achieve our potential as a nation. Indeed, the authors are correct when they argue “the country will be stronger and richer when Aboriginal Peoples are celebrated as a key element of Canadian society” (269). The Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games’ approach to celebrating Indigenous cultures across the country offers us a road map on how other dignified initiatives might be undertaken. No country can ever reach its fullest potential without dignity for all.

- **Putting our best selves forward:** Poelzer and Coates underscore that “the path towards common ground will require openness and creativity” (174). The predicament we face and the intractable challenges that lie before us are such that only by putting our best selves forward – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike – can we hope to find creative solutions and achieve progress. Putting our best selves forward will also mean a shared commitment by all to transparency and accountability, both to one another and the shared future we seek to create (274).

- **An act of commitment to the new Canada and a shared future:** Critically, a majority of us need to formally commit to a new future. While not everyone will get on board, an act of commitment is key because we must collectively bear the responsibility and undertake this important work in partnership – which is the only way progress will be achieved. Such efforts could culminate in a new Royal Proclamation outlining “a new Canada, one founded on treaty principles and offering a partnership between Indigenous and other Canadians” (279) (as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission).

Poelzer and Coates’ recommendation to have the relevant parliamentary committees return to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) report would be a useful first step in honouring and reviving its work (190) and charting a new collective future.

While Poelzer and Coates can be criticized for favouring a middle-of-the-road approach to charting a path out of our current predicament, we must recognize that this country has changed tremendously since the signing of the historical treaties. As such, any future solution must obtain the support and involvement of a broad segment of the country, some of whom have fewer and fewer ties to Canada’s historical origins. The authors’ pragmatic approach reflects this reality and does so in order to work within the possible. Furthermore, they underscore that Indigenous Peoples will naturally play the key role in defining and determining their cultural survival and dynamism in the 21st century (268).

Given the current and significant turn in the political discourse on the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, those who wish for change need to harness this moment. When such moments aren’t seized, history has shown that stasis can be an all too reliable result.

With the 150th anniversary of Confederation upon us, there is no time better than the present to put our minds towards creating a future we can be proud of. Poelzer and Coates are absolutely correct when they urge: “It is time to build the country we want, not simply to accept the country we inherited” (205). I agree deeply with them and know that, on the horizon of the future, “a better Canada awaits us” (279). Let us each seize this moment to make it so. ☀

This review was authored by Christian Allan Bertelsen, Manager of Crown Consultation Coordination for the Northern Projects Management Office of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency. A proud Northerner, his research interests focus on identity, discourse and ethics. This review was prepared for Northern Public Affairs magazine by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada’s (IPAC) NWT Regional Group. Please note the views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of IPAC or the Government of Canada.

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“All we need is the political will to change” is an oft-heard phrase of activists and advocates on subjects ranging from global warming to income inequality. This simple slogan belies the complexity of policy transitions. Determining who wants what, who has the power to get it and who benefits, is crucial to understanding the prospect for change and how to accomplish it.

A seminal new work by Michael J. Trebilcock demonstrates that the forces that enable or block policy transitions are even more complex than is currently portrayed, but that, ultimately, change is possible. Perhaps only a scholar with the tenure and cross-disciplinary expertise of Trebilcock could have produced this Donner Prize award-winning book; as Professor of Law and Economics at the University of Toronto since 1972, Trebilcock presents a learned arrangement of political economy, policy studies, legal analysis, and behavioral psychology.

Make no mistake, this book is theoretically rigorous and thus, at times, daunting. A representative passage from the book reads: “Although reversibility provisions can reduce unexpected and inequitable adjustment costs, an excessively expansive approach to reversibility regimes is likely to erode the significance of treaty obligations” (74). Those with the tenacity to push through the complexity of the arguments made in this book will be rewarded with a remarkably practical and insightful study of policy change.

Although Trebilcock is primarily making a contribution to the theoretical literature, the majority of this book is an examination of real and contemporary policy cases. The cases explored include pensions, agricultural supply management, trade, immigration and climate change. These are hardly abstract concepts, especially when one takes into account recent fights over the age of mandatory retirement, the existence of the Canadian Wheat Board, ratification of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, temporary foreign workers, and carbon taxes.

Trebilcock centres his book between two competing and diametric views dominating the literature on policy transitions. One school characterizes the costs of policy transitions as yet one element in a constellation of political risks to be managed in order to advance policy change; another school affords considerable deference to the role of courts and the awarding of compensation proportionate to the level of disruption caused. Neither approach is satisfactory to the author because the former assigns too little weight to potential barriers to change and the latter narrowly focuses on mostly monetary loses with only a single venue for resolution, post hoc.

Ultimately, in their most simple forms, the suite of options available to aide policy transitions is generally limited to approaches such as direct compensation, grandfathering, phased implementation, or delayed implementation. However, getting to the right choice of option is far more complex.

The cases examined reveal that “the political economy of policy transitions is not easily generalizable across polities with very different institutional structures and histories” (157). Shorthand: It depends. This conclusion may prove unsatisfactory to the policy advisor looking for guidance on how to shepherd policy change through the system. However, sound policy analysis is not often easy.

There is wisdom in Trebilcock demonstrating why it is important to examine different factors at play in any particular case in order to determine what type of policy change one is dealing with and what range of options might be best suited to mitigating anticipated opposition to change. Foremost, such examination in itself is proof that an advisor is taking policy transitions seriously as “an essential feature of their political strategies” (152). That’s a good start. Secondly, there are lessons that can be drawn about what approaches are most suitable under a given set of circumstances.

In each case, Trebilcock examines the policy context from a variety of perspectives, including: defining the problem, reviewing previous and current policy responses along with attendant successes or failures, describing the institutional context and the incentives generated by those structures, and understanding the beliefs of key actors.

For example, in the chapter on agricultural supply management, he demonstrates what makes milk so expensive and dairy farming so profitable; shows why political geography and product marketing reinforce the subsidies regime; introduces potential reforms such as more inclusive regulatory bodies or a complete move to a free market and discusses how different policy choices could be accompanied by transition aides such as financial assistance or export tax adjustments in order to mitigate anticipated opposition to change. There are threads between these various points of analysis that need to be logically sequenced in order to understand potential political
responses to various policy options and the overall probability for enacting change successfully.

Readers looking for practical instruction on how to "deal with losers" may be frustrated by the absence of uniformity in the way Trebilcock draws out these threads. To wit, whereas the chapter on pensions primarily uses public choice theory to explore the political risks of various reform options, the chapter on climate change looks more broadly at the structural, institutional, ideational, and psychological elements at work.

This book is a dissertation, not a manual. It has elevated attention to the politics and mechanics of policy transitions. Policy advisors in any government would do well to read this book or even just the concluding chapter, before recommending or advising how to achieve policy change.

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Over the course of the last few presidential elections in the United States, there’s certainly one thing that can be said about them: They are anything but boring.

For the author, David Axelrod, who was instrumental in getting Barack Obama elected back in 2008, politics are all about the rush. From the day he heard John F. Kennedy speak during a campaign stop in 1960, Axelrod was hooked. And inspired.

For anyone who has politics running through their veins, this is a must-read. The author’s stories cover more than 50 years of a life spent working in journalism and behind the scenes on the inside of American politics and numerous political campaigns that have ultimately shaped it. The author takes the reader on an adventurous ride through an astonishing list of political achievements—and the names that appear in this tome of nearly 500 pages include a list of some of the most compelling figures in contemporary politics.

The political landscape of the United States is as diverse and unique as anywhere else in the world, and Chicago politics in particular—where the early parts of Axelrod’s career were spent—are an animal unto themselves. Weaving story after story of life in Chicago, through the Daley years and right up until the time a young upstart named Barack saw his opportunity to make a difference, the book covers an array of characters, of historic events, and elections from the vantage point of someone who not only witnessed these events for himself, but in many cases was instrumental in shaping them.

It is uniquely fascinating to be provided with an insider’s take on the first campaign of Barack Obama. To be given a deep analysis of the mistakes and the small victories that paved the way to his historic presidential election—a victory that many people never thought they would see happen in their lifetimes and one that filled so many with so much hope for the future. To the outsider, the challenges were vast, but in reading Axelrod’s account of the many stages, decisions and choices along the way the reader gets a better sense of just how difficult and hard-fought the battle was to get Obama to the White House.

The reader also gets an opportunity to find out a little bit more about Barack Obama and the type of person he was behind the facade. Not to say there was an entirely different persona in private from the one we saw on a regular basis when he was the President, but it is clear from the pages of Believer that there was a much tougher guy underneath the warm, collegial exterior. There we find a street fighter; a man who is more than ready to take action when needed, and one who wasn’t afraid to get into a scuffle. We see a man who did not allow his mistakes to limit him in anyway, and a man who engendered deep-seeded loyalty and commitment from all of those people that that surrounded him and helped him get to where he stood as President.

Politics aside, Believer is also the story of the author. Of a husband. Of a father. Of someone who was simply trying to earn a living to support his family in the best way he knew how. Of someone torn between wanting to stay with his family and take care of them on a daily basis and working on a campaign for the Presidency—which involves, time, travel, and extended absences from the home front. Axelrod is candid when describing the sacrifices of his career; the many trials and tribulations that he faced along the way. Axelrod succeeds in doing so in a way that pulls the reader in and allows them to realize that, as hard as one might think an election is on the people who are involved, it’s so much harder than an outsider could ever even imagine.
For Axelrod, it’s been a life well lived; a life he is more than willing to celebrate now that he has pulled himself from the game completely. Not that he doesn’t miss the chase, mind you – he’s simply moved onto a new chapter in his life. But he is not without his regrets, such as his hope of bringing a new era of politics to Washington (similar to what John F. Kennedy had done for many of Axelrod’s generation), nor is he ignorant of his own failings and mistakes.

And that is what makes this book even that much more compelling. It’s the story of a political animal, laid bare for the entire world to see.

Granted, Believer may not speak equally to all sides of the political spectrum, but it’s clear from the very first words of the introduction that if you’re looking for that kind of book, this might not be your kind of read; however, if you’re a political junkie (like myself) and looking for a compelling page-turner, this is definitely a worthy addition to your bookshelf. While its sheer size and number of pages may give it a menacing appearance when it’s sitting on your night table, this reviewer can assure you that shortly after you open its cover, you won’t find it sitting unread for long.

This review was authored by Anne-Marie Jennings, who is currently with the Registrar of the Petroleum Resources Division of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT). This review was prepared for Northern Public Affairs magazine by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada’s (IPAC) NWT Regional Group. Please note the views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of IPAC or the GNWT.
ARTICLES
Kakisa is a community so small, it’s often not included on maps of the Northwest Territories. And for the most part, members of the Ka’a’gee Tu First Nation (KTFN) prefer it that way. The community is peaceful, quiet and the people here continue to enjoy a close relationship to the lands, waters and animals that surround them. In Ka’a’gee Tu, meaning “between the willows” in South Slavey, the health of the land and the health of the people are connected. However, in recent years, community members have noticed changes to their environment due to the impact of climate change. There is a growing concern in the community that their main food sources – the fish, animals and berries harvested from the land – are at risk. The community wants to ensure access to food for future generations, and so they reached out to other organizations to help.

In 2014, the KTFN partnered with Wilfrid Laurier University and Ecology North, a territorial non-profit organization, to conduct a climate change and food security action plan for the community. This project sought to collect insights and experiences about the changes to the land, water and animals community members have witnessed over the past years. Most importantly, the project encouraged community members to identify ways they could become more self-sufficient and food secure in the future. Community members spoke

Growing a garden in Kakisa

Melaine Simba & Andrew Spring

Planting the potato garden with the school in 2016.

Photo credit: Andrew Spring
First garden boxes, delivered to the community in summer 2015.

The garden grew to six boxes in 2016.
about creating more opportunities to educate youth on the land and transfer traditional skills to the next generation of harvesters, and about the importance of research and monitoring the health of the land. One project the community identified was gardening and growing their own food.

In Kakisa, the community sees growing food as a part of the solution to food security in the community. The community wants to continue to rely on fish, moose and other traditional foods, but realizes that they will continue to need some food from the store to support their diets. The issue is that the nearest store is located roughly 100 km away in the community of Hay River, and the food there is expensive. Growing their own food would limit the amount of time they would need to travel to the store as well as the quantity they would need to buy there. Plus, by growing food they would have access to fresher and healthier foods.

Growing food in Indigenous communities in the North is an interesting topic. Some often question the appropriateness of agriculture as a solution in communities that have little to no background in growing food. Agriculture is a solution that non-Dene often bring into communities, with little involvement of locals. There is a legacy in many communities of gardens that have been planted by well-intentioned individuals from outside the community – gardens that never produced food because little education and support was provided to the community, and without community buy-in, no one took care of the garden. Nonetheless, growing food remains a potential solution that communities are interested in pursuing to meet their food needs, particularly with increasing costs of food and fuel.

Kakisa has had an interesting experience with gardening; in fact, there is a history of growing food in the community. In the 1970s Philip Simba, a past Chief, was taught how to garden, and for years he grew cabbages, carrots, potatoes and strawberries by the riverbank. Many community members fondly remembered enjoying those strawberries in their youth. But after his passing, no one took over and the garden disappeared. In the 1990s a few different gardens came and went. A large garden, where the current band office is located, was started by a teacher and grew all types of vegetables for the community. But the garden stopped when the teacher left. Other gardens, including ones build by government assistance or through non-profit organizations, have come and gone as well. Sometimes they offered training and support, other times they did not. But the community is driven to make it work this time around, and are mindful of what has happened in the past.

The need for a community champion, a person who has been instrumental in past gardens, is often considered critical. Someone who takes on the responsibility of growing food and making it their passion can be important in making a garden work. But what happens when that person moves away? Or, as is often the case in small communities, demands for time for meetings and other initiatives can burn these champions out. The way that Kakisa is growing a garden is by involving the whole community as well as by accepting help from partners outside of the community.

The community’s recent experience with growing food started in 2015 when two garden boxes were set up in the community. Provided through territorial funding, soil and boxes were delivered to the community in late June 2015. A few fast-growing vegetables were planted, and a small amount of food was grown. The next year, four more garden boxes were installed, and land was cleared at the back of the community to make room to grow potatoes. The Northern Farm Training Institute (NFTI), located near Hay River, came and provided tools, supplies and training to the community.

The KT-FN are also partners in a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Partnership Grant through Wilfrid Laurier University known as FLEdGE – Food: Locally Embedded, Globally Engaged. The grant provided funding to pay for the training and cost of gardening supplies. Planting the garden proved to be a very popular event in the community. Children from the school came out to help, as did some parents and Elders. In all, approximately 20 people, nearly half the community, turned out to take part in planting. In fact, the planting experience was captured on video in hopes of providing a how-to demonstration for other communities in the North. The potatoes grown last year were a hit and were shared throughout the community.

So, now that the community has had two successful seasons of growing food, they are willing to take on more of the responsibility in organizing the gardens and are even looking to expand the gardens to grow more foods. It will take everyone to contribute – to plant, water and weed – and in the end, everyone shares the harvest. Many people are willing to help. The success of the gardens will depend on how well the community works together and, if help is needed, their connections to other groups will make sure that support is always nearby.

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Food insecurity in the Northwest Territories (NWT) is the second highest in Canada, with over 24% of households experiencing moderate to high levels (Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner, 2016; Council of Canadian Academies, 2014). At the same time, there are further signals that all is not well with food systems in the NWT. The obesity rate in the NWT is 10% higher than the Canadian average (Government of Northwest Territories [GNWT], 2011b) and there has been a well-documented nutrition transition among the NWT’s Indigenous populations from land-based diets to dependence on imported foods of low nutritional value with detrimental health effects (Receveur, Boulay, & Kuhnlein, 1997; Sharma et al., 2009; Zotor et al., 2012; Sheehy et al., 2014). As well, climate change is fundamentally altering landscapes in the NWT (Price et al., 2013) and is limiting access and availability of traditional food sources.

NWT communities are responding to these food security crises in a multitude of ways, including through civil society action and by pursuing local food and agriculture policies. The Yellowknife Farmers’ Market (YKFM) has taken action by prioritizing food insecurity to create the Yellowknife Food Charter and the Yellowknife Food Charter Coalition. The Charter sets out a vision and principles for a just and sustainable food system in Yellowknife, expressing a community mandate for collective action on food security issues.

In this article we share the process and collaborative work that is happening through the Yellowknife Food Charter and Coalition. It begins with a description of food system actions and policy work that has occurred in the North and the NWT as well as a brief outline of what food charters are and how they have been used across North America. Then, we discuss what the Yellowknife Food Charter is and its foundation in a food systems approach. Finally, we give a history of how the Charter came to be, what it is happening now and conclude with thoughts for the future.

Northern food system action and evolution: Driving food policy by and for Northerners
Local food systems in the North have unique characteristics compared to other regions of Canada. Hunting, fishing and harvesting have traditionally been and continue to be strong pillars in Northern Indigenous and non-Indigenous food systems. Also, while in the past agricultural production in many parts of the North has been minimal, enthusiasm and activity in local food production, including farming, is on the rise. Still, imported foods make up the majority of food consumed in the North and the federal subsidy program Nutrition North (formerly Food Mail) was put in place to provide Northerners in isolated communities with improved access to perishable nutritious food.

Many actions across the North have awoken policy makers to the need for more emphasis on food at the local and regional level. In Nunavut, a Food Security Coalition was established through the Government of Nunavut’s poverty reduction strategy. The Coalition has a diverse membership including many government departments as well as organizations and businesses throughout the territory. In 2014, the Coalition produced the Nunavut Food Security Strategy and Action Plan 2014-2016. This strategy includes action areas relating to: country food and harvester support, availability and affordability of store bought foods and increased local food production (Nunavut Food Security Coalition, 2014). The Yukon government lacks policy relating directly to food security; however, it has been a strong advocate of increasing local food production, with its recently released Local Food Strategy for Yukon: Encouraging the Production and Consumption of Yukon-Grown Food 2016–2021. This strategy includes many initiatives such as providing low-cost leasing options for agricultural land, enhancing food safety systems, improving food access, building infrastructure to support community and backyard food production and processing, researching cold climate food production, and implementing food waste reduction programs (Government of Yukon, 2016).

The NWT also lacks a comprehensive strategy or policy to address food security; however, there have been many actions and some policies that address local food systems. In terms of harvesting, In-
YELLOWKNIFE

FOOD

CHARTER

A Food Security Project of the Yellowknife Farmers Market

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Food charters have been part of a broader turn to include food within municipal and urban policy wheelhouses.

In Canada, food and agriculture has largely been a concern of federal and provincial/territorial policy, with municipalities having little jurisdictional authority. However, the consequences of food insecurity, poor health, and environmental degradation from unsustainable food production methods are keenly felt by local communities and their municipalities. As a result, many community stakeholders are working with their municipalities to embrace food policy strategies through a myriad of forms, such as food policy councils, endorsed food charters, community food assessments, and municipal food strategies or action plans (MacRae & Donahue, 2013; Runnels, 2012). Many Canadian cities and municipalities have embraced this tool, with food charters found across the country, from rural agricultural communities to large urban centres (MacRae & Donahue, 2013). The first food charter in Canada was created by the Toronto Food Policy Council, when the need was seen for the city to have a community-created document that set common ground for long term cross-sector dialogue and action that would bring about more just and sustainable policies and urban governance (MacRae & Donahue, 2013).

**The Yellowknife Food Charter**

The Yellowknife Food Charter was created through the YKFM to respond to the need for more cross-sector dialogue around food security in the city of Yellowknife, as well as to build on the food system actions that had already occurred in Yellowknife, the NWT, and the North. Influenced by the good work the community had already done on food issues, but seeing the need to create space for integrated solution-building, the Charter provides a document to help guide a diverse set of actors within the Yellowknife food system to align their work with others and find synergy for collective action based on shared vision and principles for a just and sustainable food system (see insert on next page).

The Yellowknife Food Charter provides a platform for people interested in building on the great work going on in the community; it also breaks down silos so the community can work together towards a common goal of increased food security and a just and sustainable food system.

Collaborative action and bringing actors togeth-
er is part of the Charter’s focus on a food systems approach. Championed by the Food and Agriculture Organization and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), a food systems approach “gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the outputs of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes” (UNEP, 2016). It gathers these elements in recognition that they are all part of a single system in which actions in one area will affect the system as a whole. Integrated solutions towards a common goal are possible when there is collaboration within the system. As YKFM states (Yellowknife Farmers Market, 2015):

“Developing a just and sustainable food system is possible with support and collaboration from individuals, community groups, the business community, and all levels of government who believe that strengthening local food-based businesses will bring improvements to our overall food security. Our efforts are strengthened when we come together under one network that allows us to work together on food security. The Yellowknife Food Charter is a point of entry for groups and individuals to gather, generate ideas, and identify how to collectively respond and create projects that increase food security for all Yellowknifers.”

Through the food systems approach, the Charter is built on the understanding that at the apex of improving social justice within the food system, ensuring environmental sustainability and strengthening the economy of the hunters, fishers, gatherers and growers, we can improve food security and contribute positively to the overall quality of life for the people in Yellowknife and the NWT. It is also understood that the best way to reach these synergies is through participation and collaboration among as many food system participants as possible. Further, because food is central to any functioning society a food system approach is critical to decision making in a community. As a result, the Yellowknife Food Charter creates a mandate to help community actors and decision makers work together to collectively find synergies within the food system to make it more just and sustainable.

In 2014, the YKFM facilitated a community writing process for the Yellowknife Food Charter and then took it to the City of Yellowknife where it was officially endorsed in July 2015. Since then, the Charter has been used to drive action within the community. During the fall of 2015, the YKFM used the Food Charter during the municipal, territorial and federal elections to remind the public and candidates about the importance of food and to raise awareness about food security for all Yellowknifers. The YKFM food security team called candidates and visited businesses, organizations and individuals to talk to them about the Charter and food insecurity in Yellowknife. In January 2016, the Charter was officially launched to the Yellowknife community with a giant celebration of food and community spirit. Over 125 Yellowknifers from all over the food system enjoyed locally-made food, listened to live music, and signed on to the Yellowknife Food Charter.

After this strong showing of public support, the Food Charter Coalition was created to organize and

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**Vision**

A just and sustainable food system in Yellowknife is rooted in a healthy community, where everyone has access to adequate and affordable nutritious food; more food is grown and harvested locally; and food production policies and infrastructure are in place to support an economically viable, diverse, and ecologically sustainable local food system.

**Principles**

A just and sustainable food system in Yellowknife means:

- The human right to safe and secure access to adequate food is honoured and everyone is food secure.
- Everyone has access to knowledge about a just and sustainable food system.
- Equitable, healthy relationships exist among all people in the food system.
- Food based entrepreneurial initiatives are essential to sustainable local economies.
- The benefits of local food based economic development are celebrated and leveraged.
- Food producers, harvesters, and entrepreneurs generate value from their work and use ecologically sustainable practices.
- Indigenous and traditional practices are respected and supported.
- Community members have confidence in the quality, safety, supply, and distribution of food.
- Public policy and infrastructure reflect these principles of a just and sustainable food system.
- Improved access to nutritious foods leads to better health outcomes.

(Yellowknife Farmers Market, 2015)
drive actions towards improved food security under the Charter. The Coalition includes members from the City of Yellowknife, GWNT and the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, local businesses and community organizations, farmers and harvesters, health practitioners, other members of the public all along the food system and is always continuing to build its membership. The Coalition started their work by setting up a structured plan that included short, medium and long term goals for its work, including education evenings, and continued outreach. Developing and launching the Food Charter as well as the continued work of the Coalition would not have been possible without the financial support from the Arctic Institute for Community Based Research and the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) Anti-Poverty Fund.

In 2016, the Coalition and Ecology North became partners of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Partnership Grant through Wilfrid Laurier University known as FLEdGE – Food: Locally Embedded, Globally Engaged. FLEdGE is committed to fostering food systems that are socially just, ecologically regenerative, economically localized and that engage citizens. As part of this grant, the Coalition and Ecology North became part of a network of food researchers and organizations across Canada. It was through this network that Carleton University MA candidate Carla Johnston became involved in the summer of 2016, as a research assistant with FLEdGE for this partnership. She was given a warm Northern welcome as she was taught how to stretch a moose hide as soon as she got off the plane!

Through this partnership, Carla, Tracey Williams, the YKFM Food Security Coordinator, and France Benoit, YKFM president worked together over the summer to talk with community members about their common concerns in the local food system and their ideas for improving it. This work was brought together and presented to the City of Yellowknife council in late August, when council members were invited to be members of the Coalition. The presentation was successful as a member of the council joined the Coalition shortly afterwards.

As part of their outreach and education goals, the Coalition hosted a learning evening in October 2016 as a fun and informative way to bring together different actors in the food system to talk about their role and how to work together. With standing-room-only at the venue, the discussants talked about decolonizing consumption, organics recycling, food waste rescue, restoration agriculture and food as medicine, among other topics.

The Coalition continues to partner with FLEdGE and Carla by conducting a policy analysis of existing and alternative food policy options that could be part of an urban food strategy for the City of Yellowknife. In this analysis, the Charter is being used to aid in thinking about new policy frameworks that support the interest of Northerners, such as diversification of the economy, job creation and skill acquisition in areas that protect and allow the local food system to flourish into the future. Further, that these policies should build on the past policies of the City of Yellowknife and the GNWT in supporting...
traditional economic activities and cultural connections to the land as well as responding to the growing interest in increasing the availability of locally grown or harvested, nutritious and healthy foods, medicines and value-added products. Also part of this analysis, community members are being asked what policy supports they would like to see in a strategy that would ensure integration and collaboration across the food system.

Where will collaboration and participation take the Charter in the future? The Coalition is working to stay “light on its feet” and will continue to communicate the vision and principles of the Yellowknife Food Charter to the community. The Food Charter is a fixed document for the Yellowknife community; however, how its vision and principles are realized is not set in stone. This leaves room for the community to remain fluid and dynamic in its approach to suit its needs within the current context. In this way, the Charter can continue to meet the unique needs of Yellowknife as a Northern community, while still striving for the cross-sector dialogue and collaboration that food charters have been instrumental in achieving across North America. The Coalition will learn from and evaluate its work in an effort to understand how to coordinate this complex and long-term approach to increase food security through a just and sustainable food system for all Yellowknifers.

Carla Johnston is a graduate student at Carleton University now living in Yellowknife. Tracey Williams is Food Security Coordinator for the Yellowknife Farmers Market.

Endnote
1 The co-management of wildlife in the NWT and the North has been a highly-contested process (Nadasdy, 2003). Indigenous leaders in Yellowknife and across the NWT have argued that there has been mismanagement of caribou herds by the territorial government (Sarkadi, 2015).

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Hardam, M., & Larkham, P. (2013). The rise of the ‘food charter’: A mechanism to increase urban agriculture. Land Use Policy, 400-402.
MacRae, R., & Donahue, K. (2013). Municipal food policy entrepreneurs: A preliminary analysis of how Canadian cities and regional districts are involved in food system change. Toronto Food Policy Council; Vancouver Food Policy Council; Canadian Agri-food Policy Institute.
Food insecurity in Canada’s North is an increasingly urgent issue with far reaching effects. In order to address it, the North needs immediate and long-term collaborative efforts, led by Northerners at both the community (“grassroots”) and policy (“grass-tips”) levels, towards realistic, relevant and sustainable solutions.

In the Yukon, like in other Northern territories and regions, there are distinct social, economic, environmental and political forces at play that lead to the Yukon having some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the country. The most recent data from the Canadian Community Health Survey in 2012 showed that 17.1% of Yukoners and almost 20% of Yukon children were living in food insecure households. In a territory with a population of only 37,500, that is almost 6,500 people who aren’t getting enough acceptable healthy food to meet their daily needs. In a country so geographically, ecologically, culturally and resource rich, food insecurity at any rate should be considered a national failure.

For Northern Indigenous Peoples, food security is more than just having a full stomach; food is linked to identity, culture and way of life. Food is central to the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health of Indigenous Peoples. It is an issue tied closely with survival and rights of self-determination. Yukon First Nations’ Elders have been predicting hard times ahead for some time and are encouraging their communities to plan and be prepared for long-term changes related to climate change and food insecurity. It is clear that in order to achieve long-term food security and environmental sustainability, communities need their own realistic plans that they can build from as well as the financial support to do so. Supporting food security planning led by Indigenous and Northern communities is an important part of
At the grassroots: Food, culture and community

The Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research (AICBR) has had the honour of working with two Yukon communities over the last three years on the development of community-based strategies for food security and climate change adaptation. Kluane First Nation’s Nourishing Our Future project and Selkirk First Nation’s Keeping Our Traditions project are two examples of how Yukon First Nations are using their self-determination to preserve and pass on traditional hunting, gathering and fishing knowledge and practices, sustain and protect traditional food species and adapt to shifting landscapes, cultures and rising prevalence of food insecurity. AICBR acts as a facilitator and partner in the process of community-based research, youth engagement, and knowledge translation, and has been given permission to share these community stories.

“The is a hard land. It always has been. There are no guarantees for the future, no promises. The future may be a difficult path but we know, that if we care for each other and for this land, the land will care for us.” – Diyet van Lieshout, KFN citizen and Narrator of film “Remembering Our Past Nourishing Our Future”

Kluane First Nation, Burwash Landing, Yukon

Kluane First Nation (KFN)’s Nourishing Our Future project was a three-year (2013-2016) project with AICBR and others, developed as a direct response to the rising concerns of KFN citizens and residents of the area about changes on the land and to traditional animal species in and around Kluane Lake communities of Burwash Landing and Destruction Bay, in the western region of Yukon. These changes have been well documented both by community members and scientists alike: melting glaciers, thawing of lake ice in winter, drying creeks, and declining moose, caribou, and some fish populations.

As a result of these environmental changes and the rising prices of market foods, KFN set out to develop its own community food security strategy during the first phase of the project. This process sought to maintain traditional food sources, acknowledge and honour culture, traditional knowledge and practices, enhance the community’s capacity to grow food, and contribute to a more food secure future. Themes that arose as key action items in the food security strategy included: (1) climate change, (2) sharing, (3) community hunts and fishing, (4) ancient methods of conservation, (5) outfitting concessions in KFN territory, (6) youth empowerment and mentorship, (7) healthy eating, (8,9) a community garden and greenhouse, (10) agriculture projects, (11) community store and storage, and (12) community celebrations and get-togethers.

The second phase (2015-2016) of the project arose from the recommendations in the food security strategy pertaining to climate change, the conservation of homelands and the need for ongoing traditional food species monitoring. Together with KFN and the University of Waterloo we examined fish health (nutrient and contamination levels) of Kluane Lake trout and whitefish and explored traditional knowledge and perceptions of changes in fish and fisheries practices. Results from nutrient and contaminant analysis performed by a team of KFN youth and University of Waterloo researchers showed that Kluane Lake trout and whitefish are healthy and safe to eat. This is a good news story for the community, amidst a wave of fears of contamination in lakes across the North.

The Nourishing Our Future food security project not only brought the community together to share and plan collectively for a more food secure future, but it functioned as a way to preserve culture, collect traditional knowledge around fisheries, build capacity of local youth in scientific, Indigenous and community-based research methodologies, connect Elders and youth, and promote the consumption of locally harvested traditional foods. It was a way to harness strengths, build upon existing knowledge and resources, celebrate connections to food and the land, and promote stewardship of traditional food species in Kluane First Nation traditional territory.

Selkirk First Nation, Pelly Crossing, Yukon

The community of Pelly Crossing is located on traditional Selkirk First Nation (SFN) territory in central Yukon. Shifting landscapes and animal behaviours have raised concerns in the community over the safety and integrity of traditional lifestyles. Bears roaming closer to town in search of food, riverbank erosion and declining salmon populations in Pelly and Yukon Rivers have threatened the traditional ways in which people have traveled upon and used the land for subsistence. The Keeping Our Traditions project (2015-2016) was a SFN project in collaboration with AICBR, initiated to explore ways of maintaining Tutchone knowledge, practices and
Fish sampling in Kluane Lake, 2015.
culture while strategically adapting to the threat of climate change. A key focus of the project was to look at ways to encourage youth to spend more time on the land as a pathway to mental health and wellness.

The project involved a photo and film project with youth, winter fish camp activities, and multiple focus groups and interviews with community members. The project focused on compiling strategies around the research question “What do we do at the fish camp when there are no fish?” and resulted in a community-developed adaptation plan merging climate change, cultural survival and youth mental health. The Elders also wanted to produce a fish camp guidebook for passing on traditional and local knowledge and to encourage youth to go out on the land. Emerging from the research were six core themes that had a specific focus on youth and revitalizing connections to the land. The six themes were (1) keeping our traditions, (2) connect youth to the land, (3) raise our voice, (4) thinking outside the box, (5) decision making, and (6) food security.

Some of the key actions highlighted under each theme include: supporting ongoing on-the-land activities and fish camps as a way to celebrate culture, values and traditional knowledge, skills and laws; educate youth and promote mental health through culture camps, winter/summer fish camps, and on-the-land summer employment; speaking up on local, regional, national and international stages about the impacts of climate change; encouraging inter-governmental collaboration for the management of salmon populations; making decisions based on an understanding of Indigenous rights, research and traditional knowledge; and building a food security strategy that incorporates SFN knowledge of the land and community strengths.

These grassroots examples depict the power that can arise when communities have a voice in finding their own solutions to food security. Community-based food security and climate change adaptation strategies can be fundamental in preserving connections between food, land and health from a holistic perspective, while strategically planning for future community wellbeing. As we enter into this time of reconciliation, supporting Indigenous voices and collective community action is key to mitigating the rising rates of food insecurity in this country. Reducing food insecurity rates in Canada is not only a moral imperative, but it is also of sound economic and social value. Reduced health care costs and social assistance usage, and increased ability for those who are food secure to hold down stable employment when they don’t have to worry about where their next meal is coming from, are only some of the benefits resulting from investment in food security. At the community-level, the impacts are even farther reaching: Food cultivates connection; it spurs creativity and innovation and builds community.

“The traditions have to keep going. It is our identity and who we are.”
—SFN citizen and research participant

At the grass-tips: The North providing food for the North
At the grass-tips or policy level, May 2016 was a busy time for food security planning in the territory: The Yukon Government released their Local Food Strategy for Yukon, which entailed a number of recommendations for strengthening the local growing economy, improving food access and food safety, building community infrastructure for local, cold climate production, processing and storage, implementing food waste reduction programs, and promoting the consumption of Yukon-grown food. In addition, AICBR hosted the Yukon Food Security Roundtable and related events (An Evening On Food Security and a Food Security Open House), which brought together multiple sectors working in the areas of food, education, health, environment, and economic development, to cultivate a common understanding of the Yukon food system and to discuss strengths, challenges and opportunities for advancing food security in the territory.

The roundtable welcomed representatives from
13 First Nations governments (in Yukon and Northern British Columbia) as well as municipal, territorial and federal governments, non-government organizations, academics, the private sector, food producers, and citizens. There was a wide range of speakers from local governments (First Nations, municipal and territorial) as well as representatives from municipal governments in Ontario and state departments from Alaska, scholars and experts in the field of food security, local growers, and territorial and federal non-profits working in hunger and poverty reduction, agriculture and food security. Key takeaways from the presentations were the present opportunity for national food policy development; food security as both a human right and a solution to countering climate change; the importance of developing Indigenous food systems and local, Northern solutions to food insecurity; and promoting “actionism” (action + activism, which means not waiting for others to make change).

Over the two days of the roundtable and related events arose many inspiring stories of resilience, examples of promising practices, and a collectively developed vision statement for Yukon food security, including 15 ranked values and priorities (below), and 50 recommended actions for achieving them (found here).

The development of a “shared food security agenda” in the Yukon will contribute to moving towards more coordinated actions and outcomes now and in the future. The Yukon Food Security Roundtable was the first of its kind in Yukon, where multiple sectors were able to gather and discuss this important issue that affects us all. It is clear that Yukoners want to be self-sufficient and advance their food sovereignty. Food sovereignty goes deeper into the issue of food and what it means to a people. It speaks to the fact that communities want to look after each other, defining their own vision of food security as well as to have more agency within the food system. As Northerners, we do not want to rely on the South to provide us our basic human right to food. Being at the forefront of climate change in the North, with challenging and changing economic, political and environmental times ahead, we need to work together to ensure this beautiful, plentiful land is here for generations to come.

On a broader scale, the outcomes from the roundtable and related events feed into larger, ongoing pan-Northern discussions that AICBR and partners are leading in order to develop a more comprehensive Northern picture of food security. This important networking and dialogue can contribute to the emerging national food policy that the federal Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-foods Canada has been mandated to create. Developing a Northern picture of food security, informed by Northern values and priorities, as part of the national conversation is imperative for framing the issue. Equally important however is the need to back up words with sufficient resources to sustain community action and implementation on the ground, so that policy can lead to more, higher quality, culturally appropriate food on people’s plates.

**Connecting the grassroots to the grass-tips from the middle-out**

To highlight the harsh realities of food insecurity across the North is an important part to raising awareness of the issue, but sharing stories of strength is also a significant motivator for sustained action. In order to move the bar on food insecurity in the North, we need to know where we are now, where we need to go, harness community and organizational strengths at many levels, and mobilize resources for sustained action. This means listening first to communities and to the people with lived experiences of food insecurity as well as to what they need to succeed in the future.

**Vision for a food secure Yukon:**

“We believe in a food secure, food producing and food sharing Yukon where the land and the waters are harvested and protected. Through the wise use of resources, every person has dignified, affordable access to sufficient food to sustain a healthy, happy, and productive life. Yukon leaders and citizens work collaboratively to ensure food is generated by a robust network of local gardeners, farmers, hobby growers, hunters and fishers, businesses and advanced systems that preserve and distribute food.”

**Access for all**

1. Self-sufficiency
2. Support for local food producers
3. Addressing planning and policy development
4. Encouraging community gardens and greenhouses
5. Reducing waste
6. Emphasizing healthy food
7. Education and training
8. Promoting quality food preparation, preservation and storage
9. Collaborating to share food and time
10. Harvesting the land
11. Affordability
12. Building leadership capacity
13. Engaging family
14. Consideration of promising practices
rity and moving beyond just “words” and “assumed trickle down action.” Policy and strategies need to be connected to the realities on the ground and include concrete resources and plans for their implementation. In other words, we must connect the grassroots to the grass-tips and work from the middle out.

Like a blade of grass, you cannot cut off the root from the tip and have it function the same way; the roots bring up nutrients from the soil while the tip of the blade soaks up the sun. This beautiful micro ecosystem is what keeps the field alive. Similarly, in order to achieve a healthy society we must connect community with policy makers, working on multiple levels and across multiple sectors, during multiple points in time. Each of us brings an important piece to the puzzle; no one agency, government or individual is going to solve the issue of food insecurity.

Molly Pratt, Katelyn Friendship, Norma Kassi, & Jody Butler Walker work with the Arctic Institute for Community-Based Research (AICBR). Marilyn Van Bibber works with the AICBR and Selkirk First Nation. Eugene Alfred and Roger Alfred work with Selkirk First Nation. Math’ieya Altinti and Mary Jane Johnson work with Kluane First Nation (KFN) Lands, Resources and Heritage Department and KFN Youth and Elders.

**Links:**
- Kluane First Nation’s Nourishing Our Future project final reports and film can be found at: [http://www.aicbr.ca/kfn-project](http://www.aicbr.ca/kfn-project).
- Selkirk First Nation’s Keeping Our Traditions project final report, fish camp guidebook and youth produced film can be found at: [http://www.aicbr.ca/Selkirk-project](http://www.aicbr.ca/Selkirk-project).
- Yukon Food Security Roundtable final report, summaries of outcomes can be found at [www.aicbr.ca/outcomes](http://www.aicbr.ca/outcomes).

**About the Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research:**
The Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research (AICBR) is an independent, non-profit research organization based in Whitehorse, Yukon working in the areas of food security, climate change adaptation, chronic disease prevention, and youth engagement and mental health. AICBR works to bridge the gap between the grassroots and decision makers in order to facilitate action on complex community health issues of relevance to our partners. Our approach prioritizes the principles of community-based research, youth engagement, collective impact, partnership development, community capacity building, knowledge sharing, intersectoral collaboration and evaluation.
Often resource development and food security are treated as isolated phenomena by university-based researchers. The pitfall of this approach is that the interactions between the two are overlooked and people’s experiences are fragmented and oversimplified. On July 21-22, 2015, 16 Inuit women living in the coastal communities of Nain, Hopedale, Makkovik, Rigolet, and Postville gathered to participate in focus group discussions about the impacts of nearby Voisey’s Bay mine a decade after its opening in 2005. The discussion focused on how Nunatsiavut had changed, and what they wanted to see for the future. The scope of the focus group included changing gender relations and community wellbeing, what could be improved and what future economic development should look like. Women were quick to draw connections between mine development and food security, or the absence of adequate food. This was the topic that women spoke most passionately about over the two days, and was the area where they felt the most urgent change was needed.

Women connected mining and food security in two ways. First, the mine was causing increased economic inequality in the community and this was creating greater discrepancies in access to food. Second, people felt that they were sold a bill of goods when they chose to support the development of the Voisey’s Bay mine — a bill of goods that did not materialize. They believed that the mine should be helping to alleviate poverty; given that they had allowed mining development on their territory, they felt that people should not be going hungry. Participants highlighted the injustice that the mine was making a lot of money off of their land and people still couldn’t get enough food to eat.

This summary of key themes related to food security discussed in the focus group is followed by a series of personal reflections by workshop coordinator Johanna Tuglavina.

Mining wealth, inequality and food insecurity

Employment opportunities resulting from the development of Voisey’s Bay were one of the most visible ways that participants saw the mine changing the community. One participant said that the mine resulted in “more money in the community and less people on income support.” Several women described how the flow of wealth into their communities also resulted in an increase in consumer goods such as “more buildings, homes, and boats,” and “more variety of foods in the stores...” Respondents were quick to note, however, that these benefits were primarily experienced by people who were working at the mine or who had relatives or spouses at the mine. And although some individuals were benefiting from opportunities at the mine, they also felt that wealth generated by Voisey’s Bay was not helping to alleviate poverty experienced by many residents of Nunatsiavut. Many participants contrasted the increased access to jobs and wealth experienced by some with the continuing poverty experienced by others.

Several participants recounted different examples of people who they felt were qualified for jobs but were unable to get a job at the mine or who were laid off and not re-hired. Participants linked continuing poverty in Nain and other coastal communities to what they viewed to be limited access to employment at Voisey’s Bay. Participants expressed general frustration that many in their communities continued to struggle despite the massive profits being made by the mine. One participant expressed this clearly when she said: “Look at the millions of dollars that is hauled out by each boatload, and look at the poverty that’s still here.” Participants also highlighted rising economic inequality in their communities. Those not employed at Voisey’s Bay feel that they are being left behind:

“I think a lot of people are struggling though. I know I’m struggling ... We can’t afford to buy a lot of things now ... it’s like having internet, if you don’t have it then you’re left out of the communication, when you’ve got it you’re contacting the whole world.”

A concrete example of this inequality recounted by many was how rising food prices were exacerbating already existing inequalities in access to food. As stated by one woman, “I can see how the lower income families could have it even harder, with the prices increasing because of Voisey’s Bay in stores...
for food and groceries.” Some participants also described the psychological impact of this rising inequality, stating that it “lowered self-worth because some people cannot afford high-priced products and services.” The concept of relative poverty, poverty measured as one’s ability to maintain the average standard of living within the community, is therefore important in the case of mining development since it can increase as average income levels increase while the incomes of some remain stagnant.

Another participant also used the issue of food prices to illustrate her concerns about lowering levels of self-esteem from increasing relative poverty.

“The prices are so high that accessibility to healthier food items remains a concern. It’s one thing to have these made available, but it’s a whole [other] thing if people do not have access to it, simply because it’s unaffordable to most local people in town. Imagine what that can do to someone on low income, who for the most part is buying the basics of food, flour, sugar, carnation milk, canned goods and then standing next to someone else who is purchasing all these wonderful healthy ingredients, healthy vegetables and fruit.”

Some participants felt that rising inequality among individuals and families was also creating divisions in the community. In particular, those with jobs had access to large quantities of quality food at the mine – and had greater ability to buy foods in town while others went hungry or were unable to afford healthy food. This created tension and resentment. The local grocery store also began to get a wider variety of food, much of which was unaffordable for many people.

**Mining injustice**

Before the mine was built, people in the communities surrounding Voisey’s Bay were told that the mine would help alleviate poverty – but it has not. Focus group participants highlighted the injustice that the mine was making a lot of money off of their land and people still couldn’t get enough food to eat.

“They have this boat that comes in the spring to pick up the nickel and copper and stuff, and when the first boat comes in to Labrador there’s no food on there. The first boat should be bringing in [food stuffs] and things like that, not a construction thing or nickel thing up there.”

Other women expressed similar sentiments stating: “Look at the millions of dollars that is hauled out by each boatload, and look at the poverty that’s still here,” and, “a lot of people feel the benefits don’t come from [natural resource development]”. These perceptions shaped women’s views about future resource development. Women were not opposed to development; however, they felt that greater benefits from development needed to flow to communities.

**Time on the land**

Participants felt that working at Voisey’s Bay influenced the amount of time that families spent out on the land hunting, fishing, and harvesting. However, there were differing views on how time on the land had changed. Several participants felt that working at Voisey’s Bay allowed women from Voisey’s Bay families to spend more time on the land since it provided cash needed to participate in harvesting. Others, however, felt that women were experiencing a “loss of interest in hunting and fishing,” and that both men and women were spending less time on the land. One participant attributed this to the increased time constraints faced by workers:

“[Workers] thought they’d have more opportunity to go on the land, because they had more money for gas, they had more money to buy a reliable machine and stuff like that, but I don’t think that’s really the case. You would have to make it a priority to go and do that … Generally everybody in Rigolet is going out less, to be honest with you.”
Rather than having a universally positive or negative effect, there were both costs and benefits to gaining employment at the mine. This was noted by one participant who stated: “It’s a choice you have to make on your own. If you want that money, that kind of security, or if you want your happiness and family. So it’s your personal choice.” Although employment at the mine brings an improved income, it also has the potential to reduce time with family and on the land.

Food security for the future
Focus group participants were of the view that there are not enough options for healthy and affordable food in town. To address this concern participants argued that royalties could be used to help set up community greenhouses “so that people could grow their own vegetables instead of buying the expensive vegetables from outside.” Other suggestions included a community staff person dedicated to helping people in need during a crisis, as well as supports for subsistence harvesting on the land.

“We need to support more harvesting too, if people want to go off the land, there should be little programs that can help people do that. We got the skills to survive or the transportation means. We need to help with that.”

Conclusion
According to a recent Statistics Canada report based on data from the 2012 Aboriginal People’s Survey, 42% of adult Inuit in Nunatsiavut reported that they had experienced food insecurity in the previous 12 months, a somewhat lower percentage than the 55% reported in Inuit Nunangat (the Inuit Regions of Canada). Women had a nearly 10% higher probability of living in a food insecure household. Other indicators of food insecurity noted included having children, unemployment, living in a crowded household, and having weak family ties. Unsurprisingly, Inuit adults experiencing food insecurity were less likely to self-report as being healthy, and were more likely to report at least one chronic health condition.1

These stark statistics in the region of one of Canada’s richest base metal deposits are brought to life by the experiences of the women who participated in the 2015 focus group. Not only did the women offer important insights into the relationship between mine development and widening disparities in food security – they also provided ideas about how this critical issue could be addressed, including a vision for a robust mixed economy that encompasses social and traditional components. One important learning from the focus group is that Nunatsiavut women are not just victims of food insecurity – they are an important part of the solution. Organizations like AnânauKatiget Tumingit Regional Inuit Women’s Association and local women’s self-organizing initiatives should be starting points for developing strategies and programs to build food-secure communities in the area surrounding Voisey’s Bay mine.

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Endnotes
I left my hometown of Nain in the year 2000 and returned nearly twelve years later, in November of 2011. When I returned home there were many visible changes, including changes in technology – for example, most households now have personal computers or laptops. This was not the case when I left. When I left, the only computers in town were in offices. There were perhaps seven vehicles in the entire town. Today, we cannot even cross the road without looking both ways, the amount of vehicles in the community has increased so much.

There are food items that were once not available in Nain. I recall being introduced to fresh milk for the first time in 1999. At the time, my boyfriend from Quebec was working as a chef at the hotel and requested to the Manager of the local store to order fresh milk. There is a funny story behind that. He had asked one of his co-workers in the kitchen: “Where’s the milk?” The co-worker handed him a tin of Carnation evaporated milk. Then he clarified: “No, where’s the fresh milk?” So the co-worker handed him a box of Grand Pré UHT milk. Jean-René realized that we don’t have fresh milk. This is all the milk we are familiar with, a tin of Carnation and Grand Pré milk.

Today, we can buy garlic, fresh herbs, fresh milk, and sweet potatoes. We have ready-made salads to purchase, romaine lettuce, Brie cheese, Parmesan cheese, all sorts of goodies that did not exist in Nain. Last year when I purchased cilantro, a local woman standing next to me at the counter asked: “What is that and what do you do with it? How do you cook with it?”

This may seem quite trivial to an outsider, but for someone such as myself, a local woman, it’s extremely significant. It means that I can choose to eat healthier if I want to and if I can afford it. But locals who may want to eat healthier and learn to eat new foods can only do so if they make a decent living. Unemployment, fixed incomes, and collecting unemployment insurance is quite common for the Nunatsiavut region and Nain is no exception. Furthermore, although we do have more healthy foods to purchase, we still pay high prices for foods that are no longer fresh.

I’ve had the privilege of touring and working at Voisey’s Bay. I worked there as a Cultural Awareness Facilitator when they were still in the construction
phase of the project. I’ve since gone back last year for a tour and I tell you, the amount of healthy food that is readily available and how they have excellent gym equipment is amazing.

I believe it is a great thing to make sure that all employees who live and work at the mine site have comfortable amenities and good quality products. I agree with that totally. But it would be awesome if the companies or contractors who are making loads of money from resources in the region were able to contribute at least good quality gym equipment to each Nunatsiavut community. The reason I say this is because there are millions of dollars of resources that are shipped out of Voisey’s Bay, literally, each time the ships Umiak I or II leave Voisey’s Bay with their cargo. Why not contribute to the communities, who would greatly benefit from it, and who knows, maybe even create the next Olympian, an Inuk Olympian, by simply contributing to the health of Inuit with accessible gym equipment? As I understand it now, only the school and RCMP have proper gym equipment. One can never know what these types of contributions could do for a person, for Nunatsiavut communities, near Voisey’s Bay mine.

We know that diabetes is on the increase with Inuit populations, and it’s a proven fact that the food that Inuit do harvest is much more healthier than what can be purchased from the local grocery store in Nunatsiavut. Resource development in the high arctic and subarctic could begin to make huge strides towards supporting traditional food harvesting and consumption. Food contractors who provide foods already make sure that the “outsiders” at mine sites receive what they are accustomed to in terms of eating. Why not do that for the Inuit? There’s plenty to harvest in these parts.

There are plenty of organizations, associations, and governments that could work together to take small steps in the right direction. It’s been over 10 years since the Voisey’s Bay Mine began. Maybe I am being naive when I say that I believe enough information has now been collected to improve our access to healthy foods.

We do live in isolated communities, and accordingly the struggles we can face are quite challenging and unique to the region. Why not collaborate and help one another strive towards equal opportunity in all aspects of resource development, so that everyone involved or affected can receive maximum benefits and be able to equally prepare for opportunities? Let’s start thinking “outside the box,” and start taking into account what’s already “inside the box.” The opportunities are tremendous.

Johanna Tuglavina is Project Coordinator with the Anâna-Katiget Tunngit Regional Inuit Women’s Association.

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The Liberals came to power with a majority government after the October 2015 federal election. One factor that played into that result was undoubtedly Northern residents’ dissatisfaction with Nutrition North Canada (NNC). When in opposition, the Liberals were strongly critical of NNC, with the Hon. Carolyn Bennett, then the critic for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, stating bluntly in this journal that “Nutrition North Canada … has failed,” and castigating the Conservative government for being “intransigent in admitting that their program is a failure.”

The Liberal government inherited a program that, in opposition, they had considered a failure. Nevertheless, the former Conservative government’s misleading communications material setting out how NNC was an improvement over the Food Mail Program (FMP) remains on the NNC website. We have refuted these false claims elsewhere in some detail. In our view, this new subsidy mechanism is incapable of passing any reasonable tests for program transparency, accountability, sound public administration, or fair and equitable treatment of large and small retailers across all isolated Northern communities. It involves an opaque process through which the INAC minister approves the rates for payments to Northern retailers and southern suppliers, for each category of eligible foods in each community. There is also no official oversight of the quality or eligibility of the foods as they enter the distribution system.

So how have the Liberals fared now that they are responsible for this program? In this article, we examine what the Liberal government has done so far, and some of the challenges that lie ahead.

Budget 2016
The only significant – and welcome – change the Liberals have made so far has been to expand NNC to include isolated Northern communities that the program, since its inception in 2011, had either excluded or had provided with a useless “partial” subsidy of $0.05 per kilogram.

When NNC was implemented, the inclusion of such a derisory figure for those communities may have helped senior officials and ministers to pad their subsequent claims about the increased volume of shipments subsidized under the new program. However, it did nothing to address the affordability of food in those communities.

Budget 2016, tabled in the House on March 22, 2016, announced “$64.5 million over five years, starting in 2016–17, and $13.8 million per year ongoing to expand Nutrition North Canada to support all Northern isolated communities.” This appeared to make good on the Liberals’ election platform, which had promised additional funding of $40 million over four years for NNC “to ensure that Northern families have access to affordable, healthy food.” That platform said nothing specifically about expanding the program, although this promise was made in both the NDP and Conservative platforms – a cynical move in the case of the latter, since the Conservatives on June 17, 2015, just seven weeks before the writs were issued for the election, had defeated an NDP motion calling for just such an expansion in a motion supported by the Liberals, as well as the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party. There can be little doubt, however, that the Liberals also intended to use the $40 million in their platform to expand the program to include all isolated Northern communities.

The story behind communities eligible for NNC
Why was NNC not made available to all isolated Northern communities when it was introduced in 2011? As the Auditor General (AG) pointed out in the performance audit of NNC conducted in 2014, this was because “the Department has not established community eligibility criteria that are fair and accessible,” because “community eligibility is based on past usage of the Food Mail Program” instead of current need.”

The result was that the policy failed in the government’s commitment “to having transfer payment programs designed, delivered, and managed in a manner that is fair and accessible for recipients,” as required by the Treasury Board’s Policy on Transfer Payments. In fact, this was a cost containment decision made once officials realized that the new

Michael Fitzgerald & Fred Hill

FOOD (IN)SECURITY

Nutrition North Canada: Real change is yet to come

Northern Public Affairs, April 2017
The program could not serve all the communities that had been eligible for food mail service within the level of funding approved for NNC without triggering sharp increases in food prices in communities that had made extensive use of the program.

Under the FMP, all of Canada’s isolated Northern communities (134 at that time) were eligible for the program, although only 104 made use of it in 2009-10 and, of these, only 81 used it extensively. The reason for this, though poorly understood by bureaucrats, ministers and the public, was as follows: In situations where the uniform postage rate charged by Canada Post for shipping perishable food to all isolated communities did not represent a significant saving compared to the air freight rate that a shipper was able to negotiate with an air carrier, the FMP was not used, as it required shippers to physically separate food mail from other cargo shipments. In other words, the uniform postage rate acted as a cut-off point for program use.

Under NNC, on the other hand, subsidy payments to Northern retailers and southern suppliers are only dependent on the volume of eligible foods shipped by air and the subsidy rates set by the department. Eligible and ineligible foods are shipped together, with no physical inspection carried out by departmental officials. With this kind of subsidy mechanism, then, there is an incentive for all eligible isolated Northern communities to take advantage of the subsidy, as is evident in the extent of NNC use in the 22 “partial” subsidy communities.

According to the Public Accounts, in 2009-10 and 2010-11, FMP payments to Canada Post reached $58.3 and $59 million respectively, whereas NNC was implemented with an unrealistic budget cap of $60 million, of which only $53.9 million was for subsidy payments. To live within such a cap, the department made two significant changes to the criteria under which the FMP had operated. First, it attenuated the list of eligible goods, removing all non-food items and severely constraining the range of non-perishable foods. Second, it decided to base eligibility for full subsidy on prior extensive use of the FMP, thereby forestalling greater uptake of the program than had occurred under the FMP. In this way, the government hoped NNC would appear to provide similar benefits in terms of food affordability as the FMP while reducing the risk of blowing the budget. So the list of eligible communities was reduced to 84 for full subsidy and 22 for partial subsidy, with 28 former FMP-eligible communities no longer eligible for any kind of subsidy.

The rest, as they say, is history, and a particularly sad one at that. The department got the initial subsidy rates badly wrong, leading to a spike in Northern food costs for the first six months under NNC. Between 2010 and 2014, there was a substantial increase in food insecurity in Nunavut, where all communities have been eligible for NNC since its inception, and in the Northwest Territories. Not once during this period did the department manage to live within the budget cap, and program costs increased annually. In fact, there is no evidence that NNC has ever implemented a cost containment strategy, despite the government’s commitment to do so. The reason is simple: To contain program costs, subsidy rates would have to be reduced or more food products removed from the program, thereby increasing food costs. This would be a political risk the Conservative government certainly wasn’t willing to take.

Nevertheless, AANDC responded to the AG’s recommendation that the department “should review its community eligibility criteria ... to base the criteria on need,” indicating it had been “examining this matter for a year, conducting a detailed review of all isolated northern communities.” In fact, the department estimated “that it would cost $7 million per year to add about 50 fly-in, isolated Northern communities that are not currently eligible for the full subsidy.” This was the very basis used by the NDP for its motion in the House.

**Expanding the program to all isolated Northern communities**

Arguably, then, expanding NNC to all isolated Northern communities was an easy win for the Liberal government. First, it has justifiably and commendably addressed a gross inequity that has tainted the program since its implementation, although it is somewhat difficult to reconcile this measure with the minister’s expressed view that NNC is “not working.” If this government does in fact believe that NNC is not working, then why expand such a dysfunctional program to additional communities? In explaining why the government intended to increase NNC funding, she stated that “what I’ve been asked to do is at least include the communities that weren’t included in the Food Mail Program ... so we’re including those and then we’re going to spend a year figuring out how to fix it.” Again, although it is laudable that this government is addressing the arbitrary exclusion of some communities from NNC, it is somewhat perverse that they are doing so when they believe the program doesn’t even work.

Second, it has allowed the Liberals to make good on their campaign promise to provide additional funding for the program, although the way this has been effected has hardly been transparent. The additional funding announced in Budget 2016 did...
not appear in the Main Estimates, which provided only $53.9 million in “contributions to support access to healthy foods in isolated Northern communities.” Such contributions had amounted to roughly $65.5 million in 2014-15, and the Main Estimates had provided $68.5 million for this purpose in 2015-16, a figure supported by INAC’s 2015-16 Departmental Performance Report. This discrepancy was raised during the minister’s appearance at the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (SCINA) on May 5, 2016. Her response suggested that the figures in the Main Estimates failed to reflect the additional $18 million awaiting the completion of a Treasury Board process and $10.2 million for expanding the program to cover additional communities, to be provided through Supplementary Estimates.

Not until the Supplementary Estimates were tabled in October did additional funding of $29.9 million appear for NNC, including $26.7 million for INAC contributions, $1.3 million for NNC operating expenditures, $1.4 million for Health Canada and, for the first time, funding to the Public Health Agency of Canada, in the amount of $0.4 million. This additional money was described in that document as the cost of extending the program to 37 additional communities, provided through Budget 2014 and Budget 2016. About two-thirds of the additional money for INAC contributions, however, would have been required just to maintain the existing subsidy rates in previously eligible communities. This additional funding will do nothing to make nutritious food more affordable in those communities that were already eligible for a full NNC subsidy.

At no time during the 17-month period since the election has the department or the minister been transparent about intentions for total expenditure on this program. The minister’s appearance at the Standing Committee in November, where the Supplementary Estimates were the subject of discussion, was a lost opportunity to be more forthcoming. Since this expansion did not come into effect until October 2016, the additional cost in 2016-17 could not possibly be as much as $10.2 million, let alone $29.9 million as stated.

Accountability for this additional expenditure is another matter. There has been no indication that the department has any plans to change its practice of relying almost entirely on unverified prices reported by the North West Company and La Fédération des Co-opératives du Nouveau-Québec to track Northern food costs, despite the minister having argued that “there is a lack of price monitoring, accountability and transparency under NNC,” and that “we need to resume food price surveys.” Nor has the department revealed whether baseline data for the newly eligible communities were collected before the program was expanded. Given the cost of this expansion and the amounts of subsidy per kg provided in most of these communities, one would expect the government would wish to be in a position to document a substantial drop in the cost of perishable foods in particular. As this article is being written, there have been no updates on Northern food costs covering the period since the election, and the latest compliance reports available date back to 2014-15.

Public engagement

The minister can also be commended for meeting with Northern organizations very early in her mandate to discuss NNC and access to healthy affordable food. The track record of previous ministers and departmental officials in this regard since 2006 is hardly stellar. As Dr. Bennett stated when she was the Liberal critic, “while the Conservatives superficially consulted with Northerners, they ignored their input.”

We hope the Liberal government will do a better job consulting with Northerners than their predecessors.

Early in 2015, the department awarded a $590,000 contract to “develop subsidy models and support an engagement with communities for the Nutrition North Canada Program in 2015-16.” This engagement was suspended during the election campaign, but resumed thereafter, and engagement sessions were conducted between May 30 and December 9, 2016. At the time of writing, 15 community meetings and three stakeholder meetings, plus three more rescheduled for January 2017, are listed on the NNC website. On November 28, 2016, the minister told SCINA that “it’s now time for northerners to design a program that will work for northerners,” that NNC “needs a total renovation because it goes to the stores instead of to people,” and that “I believe there’s going to be an overhaul. That’s certainly what we’ve heard. The consultations went on throughout the summer, and we didn’t hear too many people in love with the program the way it is right now.”

The stated purpose of these engagement sessions was to seek “input from community leaders and other stakeholders on how the program can be more transparent, cost-effective, and culturally appropriate in the face of growing demand for healthy food in the North,” with this input to be used to “develop options to update the program and help it stay sustainable.” One thing, however, seems evident: Northerners’
input won’t lead to substantial modifications to NNC. Nowhere in the discussion guide that INAC produced for these engagement sessions is there any mention of either “total renovation” or “overhaul.”

Unsurprisingly, then, the formulaic summaries of community and stakeholder meetings made available so far cover issues such as support for country foods, giving higher subsidies to ingredients used in making traditional foods such as bannock, the need for more information about the program, evidence that the subsidy is being passed on, the continuing high cost and unaffordability of food, and retaining direct orders. The only suggestion for radical program change is to “provide the subsidy directly to consumers.”

Real change?

Decades of studies of Northern food insecurity have established that most residents of isolated Northern communities experience food insecurity. The reasons are complex, as documented in the report of the Expert Panel on the State of Knowledge of Food Security in Canada. Transportation subsidies such as the FMP and NNC serve to make nutritious food less costly and more available, but they can only be a partial solution to the serious food security and nutrition problems in these communities. As the minister herself has acknowledged, “Northern food security cannot be addressed in the absence of dealing with the overall cost of living in the North.” A wide variety of programs and interventions to address these issues are being delivered by all levels of government (often in partnership with Aboriginal and non-governmental organizations), among them the Liberals’ changes to the child benefits system and the increase in the Northern residents deduction.

At the same time, however, the need for complementary actions should not divert the government from the urgent need to fix NNC itself — if, indeed, this method of delivering a food-focused transportation subsidy is fixable. The efficacy of NNC is questionable and difficult to determine. If the department has been collecting information on retailers’ profit margins over time, as the Auditor General recommended, we would hope to see how that information has been used to demonstrate more clearly that retailers have been fully passing this subsidy on to consumers and how it has improved the compliance reports.

It remains to be seen what the Liberal government will do about this program. We do not doubt for a minute the minister’s sincerity in wishing to see improvements, if not a complete overhaul — and not only for political reasons. We would be pleasantly surprised if, by the next election, the Liberal government had achieved measurable and measured improvements in food prices, food security and nutrition in isolated Northern communities, noting of course that food prices in the 37 communities to which the program has been extended should have declined already, since the program expansion took place in October 2016. More likely, though, the deeply flawed subsidy mechanism that the Harper government imposed will continue to be an albatross around the Liberals’ neck and in particular the necks of the ministers of Indigenous and Northern Affairs and Health.

Fred Hill managed the Food Mail Program in different capacities at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada from 1991 until 2010, in collaboration with Michael Fitzgerald between 2008 and 2010. They co-author Food for the North, a blog about Northern food security, at https://foodforthenorthblog.wordpress.com.

Endnotes

2 Carolyn Bennett, “Missing the Mark,” Northern Public Affairs, Fall 2012, p. 73.
3 From Food Mail to Nutrition North Canada.
5 This article was written before the release of Budget 2017.
6 Finance Canada, Budget 2016: Growing the Middle Class, p. 179.
7 Liberal Party of Canada, Real Change: A New Plan for a Strong Middle Class, pp. 20-21. The NDP and Conservative platforms had remarkably similar spending commitments, as we have described elsewhere (Hill and Fitzgerald, op. cit.).
9 Treasury Board of Canada, Policy on Transfer Payments, 2008.
10 In this sense, just as with the FMP, NNC is a transportation subsidy, although in the latter case it is delivered through retailers. Departmental officials and ministers have insisted on referring to NNC misleadingly as a “retail subsidy.”
12 OAG, op. cit., p. 2.
13 These items were restored for an 18-month period by the Conservatives in March 2011, just prior to the implementation of NNC, during the run-up to the 2011 election.
15 OAG, op. cit., p. 5.
16 Ibid.
17 Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, March 10, 2016. Although this statement was made 10 months ago, the minister has said nothing subsequently that would lead one to believe she has changed her views on this.
18 Ibid. As discussed above, this claim is somewhat inaccurate, since all such communities were included in the FMP.
20 Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2015-16 Departmental Performance Report, “Nutrition North Canada.” This amount was also reported in the Public Accounts (Government of Canada, Public Accounts of Canada 2016, Volume II, p. 11-17).

21 Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs – May 5, 2016. Evidently the $18 million that the minister was referring to is the Vote 10 escalator for NNC, which the 2015-16 Departmental Performance Report indicates was “frozen” until some unspecified condition was met.

22 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Supplementary Estimates (B), 2016-17, pp. 1-19, 2-37, 2-40, and 2-80.

23 Bennett, op. cit., p. 77.

24 Ibid.


26 Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs – November 28, 2016.


28 Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Nutrition North Canada: Have Your Say!


31 Bennett, op. cit., p. 77.
The Government of Canada is currently reviewing the Nutrition North Canada program, which subsidizes perishable store-bought foods in remote Northern communities. The move delivers on a Liberal campaign promise to improve the program, which has proven controversial since it replaced the Food Mail Program in 2011. The bigger question remains: How should policy address food insecurity in Northern Canada, where rates are the highest nation-wide (Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner, 2016)?

As part of the government’s review, public engagement sessions were held in 20 communities across the North last year, from Old Crow, Yukon to Rigolet, Labrador (details at: http://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca). Decisions over the future of Nutrition North are still pending, but summaries of these community meetings offer a window onto some of the frictions over Canada’s Northern food policy – as well as suggestions for how it could be improved.

Northerners call for support for traditional food

In community meetings, participants were asked for feedback on how Nutrition North can be “more transparent, cost-effective, and culturally appropriate” (Nutrition North Canada, 2016). In many communities, participants said that while the subsidy is welcome, food prices remain prohibitively high. Many expressed ongoing concern about whether retailers fully pass the subsidy on to consumers, despite changes to the way retailers are monitored following an Auditor General’s report that was critical of the program (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2014). Participants asked that the subsidy be restored to hygiene items like diapers, and extended to non-perishable staples like pasta and rice. They argued the subsidy should prioritize what Northerners actually buy and eat. (In Iqaluit, for example, participants questioned whether subsidized tofu burgers and dragon fruit made sense).

While feedback varied across communities, most people agreed on one thing: Better support for traditional food is needed, whether under Nutrition North or through a complementary program. Under current policy, the bulk of Nutrition North’s $68.5 million annual budget (2015-2016) subsidizes store-bought foods shipped north by air. Dairy products, eggs, meat, and fresh fruits and vegetables flown in from the South are available at subsidized rates through private retailers like the North West Company (Northern and North-Mart stores) and Arctic Co-operatives Ltd., both active proponents of the program.

Local fish and meat, however, are effectively excluded. While commercially produced country food is technically subsidy-eligible, the absence of licensed processing facilities in the North means few subsidy dollars go to local foods. Since the program was implemented, country food has amounted to less than one percent of subsidy expenditures, and in the most recent quarter (October-December 2016) Nutrition North reported spending a total of $88 for 153 kg of subsidized country food nationally. (That’s less than three caribou).

In many communities, participants asked that subsidies for harvesting equipment, such as fishing nets, tents, shells, and fuel, be restored (some equipment was eligible for subsidized freight under Food Mail). Participants asked for better support for community hunts and community freezers, and for family-to-family food shipments between communities. Some participants asked that program funding be administered more flexibly to allow communities to determine their own priorities, such as developing community gardens or hunter support programs. Harvester support programs do exist in some regions (notably Nunavik, and until two years ago, Nunavut) but funding for harvester support pales in contrast to Nutrition North’s annual budget.

Communities offered different responses regarding how to support traditional foods. For example, the idea of directly selling traditional food or making it available in local retail stores was raised in some community meetings, but not others, and may be controversial where food is traditionally shared, not sold. But while the form such support might take varied, participants from across the North agreed: Increased support for country foods could both help support harvesters, and fix inefficiencies in the current program.
Food politics
This is not a new story. Inuit and Northern First Nations have been calling for recognition of the importance of harvesting and traditional foods for decades. The feedback from the Nutrition North community meetings marks the latest in a series of appeals for support for traditional food. Similar calls were recorded several years ago by Nutrition North’s own advisory board (Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board, 2013). These results serve to affirm ongoing efforts to support local food sovereignty by Northern grassroots organizations like Feeding My Family. Efforts to strengthen traditional foodways are set within the wider struggle for self-determination and Indigenous rights that is underway across the North.

However, the Government of Canada’s orientation towards a more southern diet is equally enduring. Food has played a critical role in Northern Canada’s colonial history, both as a priority in its own right, and as a way to advance other policy agendas.

In the Eastern Arctic, which today is the region that relies the most on Nutrition North, federal food distribution programs date to the 1940s Family Allowance program, brought amidst a national expansion of social welfare programs. Family Allowances were initially given in-kind in the Arctic, and consisted of imported food rations such as flour, molasses, rolled oats, eggs (dehydrated or fresh), canned tomatoes, lard, and cod-liver oil. This diet was determined to be of sound “nutritional value” by the Northern Administration, with no reference to how such foods might fit within local diets or food preferences (Tester & Kulchyski, 1994).

Colonial attitudes pervaded decision making, and these early food relief programs were premised on a belief that a southern diet was nutritionally superior. For example, faced with high rates of child malnutrition in the 1940s, the Department of Health and Welfare misattributed the problem to traditional diets and mothers’ care (not the economic changes wrought by the fur trade). It embarked on a scheme to introduce powdered formula and Pablum to Inuit mothers, characterizing these as “good food” for babies (Tester & Kulchyski, 1994). In doing so, the department may have contributed to the very problem it was seeking to remedy.

Increasing reliance on outside foods was further cemented by the centralization of Arctic communities in the 1950s and 60s. Where previously the Government had dissuaded Inuit from settling near trade posts under a “Policy of Dispersal,” in the 1950s the Government of Canada embarked on policies to deliver health, housing, and education in centralized communities (Damas, 2002).

This move was catalyzed by growing concern about food shortages, after starvation conditions in the Kivalliq (previously Keewatin) region drew widespread attention and outcry in the early 1950s. Since Arctic settlements were rarely ideal harvesting sites and concentrated harvesting pressures on local species, centralization brought about greater reliance on imported foods. In turn, the provision of imported foods through the Family Allowance program encouraged Inuit to settle in centralized communities.

As food policy became increasingly interwoven with wider policy priorities, ideas of addressing food needs by expanding access to local foods was dismissed; Northern administrators viewed the idea as outdated and idealistic (Tester & Kulchyski, 1994). At the height of acculturative policymaking in the Post-War era, many policymakers and academics instead predicted the total demise of subsistence cultures and harvesting, and sought to speed it along.

The importance of country food
Of course, this has not come to pass. Across the North traditional foods continue to be nutritionally and culturally essential, and attest to the resilience of subsistence culture. If there is any doubt that wild foods make a significant contribution to the Northern food system, the Nunavut Wildlife Harvest Study (Priest & Usher, 2004) shows that the average annual consumption from all wildlife sources across the territory for the survey’s five years was over 1,325,000 kg, or about 56 kg for every man, woman and child. According to the Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic, Country foods made up half or more of the meat and fish eaten in 73% of Nunavummiut households (Tait, 2001).

Beyond its caloric and nutritional value, country food plays an essential cultural and social role. In the North Baffin region, Inuktitut-speakers refer to country food as niqituinaq – real food. Niqituinaq keeps one warm while traveling on the land, and contributes to good health and wellbeing. As it is redistributed, niqituinaq reaffirms and strengthens relationships. Niqituinaq is the product of an active subsistence economy, which continues to function together with the market system. All of this begs the question: Can one be considered food secure without access to “real food”?

Although traditional food holds such cultural and nutritional significance, and many Inuit and Northern First Nations remain actively involved in the subsistence economy, barriers to accessing traditional foods are of widespread concern. A recent survey of more than 2,000 households across Northern Canada and Alaska found that financial costs were the most widely identified barrier to harvesting, followed by time limitations associated with school, training, and employment (Natcher, Shirley, Rodon, & Southcott, 2016). Such barriers are of course embedded within colonial histories that have dramatically reshaped Northern food systems.

These challenges do not diminish the significance of country food to Northerners, who have
repeatedly articulated its importance — as they have done again in the 2016 Nutrition North engagement process. But they do suggest that support for locally available, culturally desirable food has a critical role to play in addressing food insecurity in the North.

**Finding a place for country food in Canada’s food policy**

The centrality of traditional foods to all areas of life — family, economy, health, culture — is still frequently invisible to outsiders, much as it was in the 1940s and 50s. In the southern imagination, hunting and fishing remain recreational, and traditional food is frequently treated as a throwback — views that crop up all too easily in southern policy conversations. Just last fall, Newfoundland MP Nick Whalen apologized for insensitivity after tweeting that Inuit in Nunatsiavut concerned about methylmercury contamination from the Muskrat Falls hydro development could “eat less fish.”

The review of Nutrition North offers a real opportunity for the Government of Canada to move away from a colonial policy history that has frequently positioned Indigenous foods as inferior and outdated, and instead show its support for traditional food systems and harvesting, whether by adapting Nutrition North or putting support behind alternatives like Harvester support programs.

When Nutrition North Canada was first introduced in 2011, Northerners expressed dissatisfaction that they were not properly consulted. Careful listening to the feedback given now will be critical if Canada’s approach to food policy is indeed to become more culturally appropriate and effective in addressing food insecurity in Northern Canada.

Prime Minister Trudeau has said he wants to establish a new relationship with Indigenous Peoples within Canada. The review of Nutrition North offers an opportunity to make Northern food security efforts a part of this “new relationship” with Inuit and Northern First Nations. After decades of policy measures that have undermined traditional food systems, Canada has a responsibility to do things right. 

**References**


I have created a slideshow full of photographs of food for presentations that I give on my research about food insecurity and food policy with the community of Kugaaruk, Nunavut. The photographs are of the community as the ice was just starting to break up in the spring, empty Co-op shelves after a food shipment couldn’t land, caribou and bannock, and “the-best-lunch-ever” courtesy of the school lunch program. My favourite slide contains two simple photographs: a Nutrition North tag on the floor of the Co-op, and a frozen fish on the kitchen floor of the home I was staying at.

These two relatively simple photographs speak volumes when combined. My personal experiences and research in Kugaaruk in 2016 revealed that the presence of Nutrition North, the federal govern-
ment’s Northern food subsidy program, in the community was seemingly insignificant in comparison to what country food offers. Unlike the discarded tag on the Co-op floor, a frozen fish is an event: It fills stomachs, brings family together, fills a kitchen over the lunch hour, and is a significant site where the sharing of knowledge occurs.

My research in Kugaaruk addresses food insecurity and federal food policy in Nunavut. Through interviews with community members, I consider how federal food policy needs to be reoriented to specifically accommodate Inuit food-sharing culture. My research addresses how a reorientation from food security to food sharing can produce food policy that integrates sharing between community members, which is a practice that is already carried out with both country foods and store bought foods.

Food security in Nunavut is beyond the point of crisis. According to the research group PROOF: Food Insecurity Policy Research, household food insecurity rates in Nunavut measured using Statistics Canada’s Canadian Community Health Survey were as high as 46.8% in 2014.1 In 2015, the cost of imported southern food being sold in Northern grocery stores was on the rise across the territory. These and other measures2 point to a food security crisis in Nunavut.

Astronomically high food prices, such as two litres of milk for $8.99, and 1.75 litres of orange juice for $16.89, suggest that Nutrition North’s subsidies aren’t sufficient to meet the needs of Northerners, including Inuit, who rely on the program. But this isn’t the only problem. Rather, there is an urgent need for new policy approaches that are grounded in the everyday experiences of community members. For many Inuit, this requires programming to include support for access to country food, a food source that has largely been left out of federal food policies to date.4 Policy approaches adopting a food-security framework tend to be aligned with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) definition of food security meaning access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that also meets the individuals’ dietary needs and food preferences.5 When food security hinges on access, programming has tended to focus on increasing economic capacity, affordability, or increasing access to specific foods that are either dietary staples or deemed nutritious by Southern standards. If Northern federal food policy needs to undergo change to take into account the needs of communities, then other crucial supports such as supporting local hunters or community run food programs must be part of the equation.

Nutrition North cannot be expected to fulfill all the requirements of Inuit in meeting their food needs, but it can be expected to do better than its current form. When Nutrition North replaced the Food Mail Program in 2011, it replaced many aspects of programming that were well suited to Inuit food needs such as the subsidization of non-food items that Inuit need for harvesting country food. This has created barriers for meeting food needs when items that are needed for harvesting country food are inaccessible due to high costs. Inuit communities have been asking for the return of these items to the eligible subsidy list since the transition from the Food Mail Program to Nutrition North.6

In Nunavut, food security is made possible by networks of relationships among Inuit who share country food. Nutrition North programming needs to complement this already existing system in order to support access to nutritious Northern country foods. Programming that meets the specific needs of Inuit communities will result in more long term benefits than just lowering the prices on select foods in stores. Northerners have long been demanding the subsidization of items such as fuel, ammunition, and equipment, which were previously subsidized with the Food Mail Program. While these are non-food items, their availability would result in greater access to country food. Moreover, supporting hunting and fishing in communities maintains traditional ecological knowledge, supports intergenerational knowledge transmission between Elders and youth, supports local economies, and can provide savings for families who do not want to rely on purchasing imported meat for the bulk of their diets. Most importantly, it puts fish on the floor, caribou in hungry bellies, nutrients in bodies and bones, and seal in the school’s soup.

Throughout my work in Kugaaruk, I consistently heard that retail food prices needed to be lower. But I also heard that it was not all that was needed. Kugaaruk community members work hard to ensure the community has much needed services such as a food bank, an Elders lunch, a school breakfast and lunch program, a soup kitchen, and many other services that meet needs that are unmet by Nutrition North. These programs provide essential services that will still be needed in communities, even if prices are lowered. Lower prices will not remedy the need for food sharing, social opportunities for Elders, or diversifying diets of students while ensuring they have the fuel to make it through a day of learning.

Nutrition North has been under fire by Northerners, particularly through the End the Price Hike campaign.7 The End the Price Hike campaign was created in partnership with the Feeding My Family group and was designed to raise awareness about the high cost of food in the North, and to lobby politicians for change because “the current national strat-
ogy simply isn’t working.” The campaign began at a critical time when the federal government was undergoing transition from a Conservative majority to a Liberal majority. Mere months after the election of a Liberal majority government in 2015, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada announced that it would be conducting Nutrition North Canada Engagement 2016 beginning on May 30th, 2016 and running until December 9th, 2016 to seek input from “community members and other stakeholders on how the program can be more transparent, cost-effective, and culturally appropriate in the face of growing demand for healthy food in the North.”

Nutrition North’s engagement session in Kugaaruk took place on November 3rd, 2016. The community identified several priorities and key issues that they wish to see reflected in the Nutrition North program, including: greater subsidies of staple foods; subsidies of family necessities such as infant formula; regional adjustments to reflect the needs of each community; the need to ensure Nutrition North’s programming complements other forms of programming; and promotion of access to country foods by supporting local hunters through subsidies of supplies required for hunting such as ammunition, fuel, and equipment. It is no surprise that these priorities are mirrored in other community engagement sessions across the North.

Northerners are participating in these engagement sessions and have no shortage of innovative ideas of what will work for their communities. While my research specifically considers the needs of Inuit communities, the consultation process is an opportunity for the food needs of all Northern communities to be reflected in policy. Along with many Northerners I will be curious to see whether the federal government embraces community input for a program that extends beyond the grocery store or falls back on the status quo that only subsidizes the cost of shipping and stocking perishable foods.

If the federal government is serious about revitalizing food policy, we should all be asking the following: How can the federal government be held to account to ensure the needs of Northern communities are met by Nutrition North? And perhaps most importantly, is Nutrition North bringing Inuit together to eat together, share together, and survive together, or is it actually serving to restrict access to both store-bought and country foods and limiting food sharing among relations?

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Endnotes

4 Nutrition North does subsidize country foods if they are sold commercially. However, commercially regulated country food is not available in every community and isn’t a feasible purchase for many low income families to make.
8 Ibid.
11 The notes from the engagement session in Iqaluit on September 26, 2016 include recommendations that are distinct from those suggested in Kugaaruk; however, it includes the recommendation to tailor the food eligibility list for each community because food preferences in Iqaluit likely differ from those in smaller communities.
Nutrition North label on the floor of the local supermarket, Kugaaruk, Nunavut.
Food insecurity is a chronic problem in the North American North, one that has numerous consequences for local families and communities. Despite decades of work on the problem by researchers, policymakers, and communities, limited progress has been made toward addressing its root causes. Issues such as climate change and high and volatile food and fuel prices currently capture much attention; while important, these issues only exacerbate a more fundamental problem: that Indigenous people in the North will remain fundamentally food insecure until we find the collective will to dismantle persistent inequities of power and heal the deep wounds of colonialism that lock them out of solving this problem on their own terms. To do this, we need to expand the discussion from food security to food sovereignty.

In 2015, Craig Gerlach and I performed a systematic review of research on food security in the North since the turn of the 21st century (Loring & Gerlach, 2015). We identified four areas of focus in this work: How best to define food security, who has it and who doesn’t, why, and how to improve it. Easily the most researched are the second and third questions: How many people are food insecure, and why. There is much data available on the incidence of food insecurity in Alaska and Canada’s Northern communities, albeit based primarily on outsiders’ definitions of food security, as well as numerous examinations of the causes and consequences of these higher-than-average rates.

What does this work tell us about why people are food insecure? For one, we know that Northern food systems are overconnected to global systems in multiple ways. They are connected to the global food system through foods in the store, which today represent a significant component of Northern diets but bring with them vulnerability to the vagaries of global markets. They are also connected through the fuel and supplies that hunters and fishers need to gather country foods. Finally, they are connected through the impacts that global climatic change and globally-driven development activities have on the local terrestrial and marine ecosystems where hunting and gathering takes place. Importantly, these connections are primarily one-way, in that local people have comparatively little ability to push back against or alter the systems that have increasing influence on their lives.

We also know that management and governance have a hand in food insecurity. Climate change no doubt presents important challenges, but people in the North have a long history of adapting to environmental change. Indeed, change, not stability, has long been the norm in the North, and diversity and flexibility are the tools with which Northern people once thrived in this changing landscape. Today, however, people’s ability to be flexible in how they respond to new conditions is constrained by land tenure, natural resource management regimes, and state-based leasing of rights for oil and mineral development that collectively limit where, when, and how people can hunt or fish. People in the North need sufficient opportunities to learn the new ways that these ecosystems are behaving; they also need to be able to adjust and innovate as the land changes, as opposed to waiting for bureaucratic and policy changes that happen much more slowly.

Most importantly, and related to this last issue, we know that history matters. Social and ecological legacies of colonialism, resource development, and land claims settlement all precondition how Northern communities experience food insecurity as well as how they respond to challenges such as climate change. James Ford, Marie-Pierre Lardeau, and Will Vanderbilt (2012), for example, argue that food insecurity in the North “must be understood in the context of socioeconomic transformations that have affected Inuit society of the last half century.” Similarly, David Fazzino and I (2009), writing on the experience of urban Alaska Natives coping with the food and fuel crisis of 2008, argue that our understandings of the problem need to highlight “the geographic and temporal continuity of failed food systems,” rather than focusing only on the most recent or highest profile crises. “For those … who regularly find themselves facing decisions between purchasing food or heating fuel,” we wrote, “how can this be anything but catastrophic?”
A focus on the political ecology of food insecurity, in other words, is necessary for truly understanding both its causes and possible solutions. This is not a new observation; the need for legal protections for Indigenous sovereignty and traditional food practices was a central message of the pioneering work of Justice Thomas Berger (see his two reports, Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland, published in 1977, and Village Journey, published in 1985). His message has been echoed by numerous scholars, including Thomas Thornton, Gerard Duhaime, David Case, and James Ford. In Craig’s and my 2015 review, we argue that while Indigenous food systems in the North American North do now enjoy numerous protections, some statutory and some situated in case law, these protections are piecemeal and incomplete. Northern people are still marginalized from decisions about renewable and non-renewable resource management and development, and they continue to lack influence in determining how an “opening” Arctic will reshape global markets and geopolitics.

So, while the front-line impacts of a rapidly changing arctic climate pose severe challenges to Northerners, eroding community infrastructure, interfering with country food harvests, and making land and seascapes more unpredictable and more dangerous, the real challenge for the sustainability of Northern communities and Indigenous lifeways is in continuing to allow social and political inequities and exclusions to go unaddressed. As Terry Audla, former president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and Duane Smith, former president of Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada, recently wrote,

> It is at best naïve – and at worst, highly paternalistic – to discount the efforts and the capacity of Inuit residents of the Arctic to envision and develop solutions to meet the intensifying pressures faced in their homelands. … [a] continuing challenge for Inuit is raising awareness of the obligations of non-Inuit to value and respect Inuit leadership, governance, decision making, institutions, knowledge systems, and vision for the Arctic (2014, p. 120).

Recognizing people’s right to pursue their own approaches to governance and visions for their food systems and homelands, and breaking down and rebuilding the societal structures that deny them this right, is sovereignty in a nutshell. The food insecurity with which too many Northerners presently cope is an important symptom of how much progress there is to be made in this regard.

Moving the discussion from food security to food sovereignty, I believe, is an essential step forward. Food sovereignty describes local control over food systems and over any decisions that will influence them. It also refers to an increasingly worldwide movement, born in South and Central America, by people demanding more control in response to oppressive impacts of colonialism and globalization (Schiavoni, 2016). Whereas interventions designed to improve food security alone tend to focus on issues like access to specific foods or nutrition education, interventions for improving food sovereignty focus more broadly on improving relations and interactions among people and the state. How is authority distributed? What is the process for attaining consent or consensus on development opportunities? How are conflicts resolved, and are priorities such as food security sacrosanct?

Evidence of the centrality of sovereignty to food security issues in the North is extensive. In Canada, Indigenous people from Baffin Island to Haida Gwaii have had to rely on litigation to have a say in resource development activities that will impact their food systems. In Alaska, the development of large-scale commercial fisheries has resulted in a widespread disenfranchisement of Alaska Natives from multiple fisheries, though actors within national and global markets are happy to perpetuate the narrative that these fisheries are sustainable and responsibly managed (Loring, 2013). Similarly, Alaska Natives do not have the right to sell fish and game harvested for subsistence to neighbors or friends (Jenkins, 2015), despite the widely documented importance of cash to subsistence activities and rural community sustainability.

The global gold rush mentality that has emerged in response to the prospect of an ice-free Arctic drives the point home most clearly. Emmerson, in his 2010 book The Future History of the Arctic, discusses how governments and businesses around the world are actively posturing for political influence, hoping to profit from new fishing, shipping, tourism, and oil development opportunities. Meanwhile, some Northern communities are quite literally eroding into the sea. Arctic peoples are expected to “adapt,” while outside interests capitalize. This is the definition of injustice, and the epitome of the “broken window fallacy” – it is neither valid nor moral to legitimate the new opportunities that dramatic climate change brings over the now-lost futures that Northerners were pursuing before they were forced to be resilient and adapt.

What would it look like if the US and Canada recognized food sovereignty, or even Indigenous sovereignty more generally, in the North? Firstly, it would mean abandoning the conventional fiction of an Arctic that is an unpeopled, global commons ripe for development by whoever gets there first. Like-
wise, as David Fazzino (2012) has suggested, it would also mean abandoning the assumption that agriculture and the global food system holds the solution to food security and food crises wherever they occur; imagine what people could do if the US and Canada freed up expenditures on subsidies to large-scale agriculture and instead applied those resources toward creating space for people in the North and elsewhere to innovate in the context of their food system as they understand it.

If food sovereignty was recognized, these nations, and indeed the world, would look to the North for leadership and direction in a changing Arctic. It would mean not abandoning new development, but working with Northerners to set the vision and agenda. At the local scale, one practical way to move in this direction would be to facilitate more meaningful engagement in, and even leadership of, the environmental assessment (EA) process for all new development (Noble & Hanna, 2015). Explicitly incorporating local people’s
priorities, such as food security and health, into EAs, and elevating these local needs over simple profits, would be an enormous first step. In my experience, if you ask an Indigenous person from the North, they are likely to agree that country foods are simply not replaceable, nutritionally, culturally, or spiritually.

Recently, Inuit Circumpolar Council-Alaska (ICC-AK) (2015) released a landmark report on how to define and assess food security from an Inuit perspective. This report identifies numerous key components to food security; some will be familiar to those who know the food security literature, such as the availability of and access to important foods. Others are novel, such as knowledge sources (e.g., Elder-youth relationships) and the spiritual connections that tie the world, people, and ecosystems together. The report’s central framework for food security is visualized beautifully with a drawing of a drum. Carolina Behe of ICC-AK, who is one of the many key people behind the report, told me a story of when the authors were working on an early draft of this image. They felt that the graphic was incomplete, until somebody suggested adding a handle to the drum to represent food sovereignty (Behe, Personal Communication, 2016). For the Inuit of Alaska, food sovereignty is a prerequisite to food security. It is the handle by which they pursue their destinies.

Food insecurity in the North is a problem manufactured by a long history of colonial development that marginalized local needs and concerns in favor of outsiders’ narratives for progress and civilization. Climate change, and the myriad complex challenges that accompany it, is the latest, though perhaps most pernicious, chapter. Nevertheless, I believe that climate change also offers a watershed moment, around which we might collectively act to create a more just and sustainable world. Recognizing and supporting food sovereignty can be a powerful first step. We still can head off the most extreme climate change impacts by empowering and learning from the Indigenous people in the North and elsewhere. Sovereignty is the goal that they are pursuing, and if the events at Standing Rock are any indication, their movements are both growing and succeeding. For Northerners and allies of the North, the challenge is to help turn the rights that local people are asserting, such as the rights to traditional food and food security, into political and economic realities that are impossible for the rest of the world to ignore.

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References


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Last June, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition released *Living Wage in Whitehorse, Yukon: 2016*, a report presenting the first-ever living wage calculation for Whitehorse and only the second such calculation conducted for a community in the territorial North to date. The Coalition found that the living wage for Whitehorse was $19.12 in 2016, one of the highest amounts in Canada.

The living wage is equal to the hourly rate of pay that a household requires to meet its basic needs, such as adequate housing and nutritious food, after accounting for government transfers (e.g., the Canada Child Benefit) and deductions from income (e.g., income taxes and Canada Pension Plan premiums). The living wage measures the cost of living in a community in a way that directly integrates the role of public policy, including the provision of social services and the tax-and-transfer system. Therefore, calculating the living wage provides a lens to assess and propose policies designed to improve affordability and alleviate poverty.

In 2013, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, First Call BC, and Vibrant Communities Canada developed the Canadian Living Wage Framework to provide a standardized methodology for living wage calculations across the country. Adhering to a standardized methodology enhances the credibility of these calculations by ensuring consistency and thus allows for a meaningful comparison of findings across communities, since any differences in the living wage amount reflect real differences in the cost of living. The framework provides a definition of the reference family and a list of household expenses intended to represent a modest standard of living.

The reference family purposely includes children between the ages of 4 and 7 so that the calculation captures the cost of child care while accurately reflecting the cost of raising children to ensure that the living wage can support a family throughout the life cycle. Researchers who have calculated the living wage for other household compositions typically find that the hourly wage that a single-person household requires to meet their basic needs is similar to what both workers in the reference family must earn. However, the hourly wage that an individual in a lone-parent household requires to meet their basic needs is significantly greater.

The Canadian Living Wage Framework incorporates all household expenses included in Statistics Canada’s Market Basket Measure (i.e., food, clothing, housing, and transportation) plus additional costs related to health care, child care, education, and maintaining a small contingency fund to protect against job loss or sudden illness. As such, earning a living wage enables families to enjoy a modest standard of living while avoiding the adverse health and social outcomes associated with poverty. However, the calculation does not account for many items that Canadians take for granted such as home ownership, retirement savings, and credit card debt. Other items not accounted for in the calculation include pet ownership, taking vacations, and eating at restaurants.

As stated previously, calculating the living wage in a manner consistent with the methodology outlined in the Canadian Living Wage Framework allows for a comparison of the cost of living in different communities. A community with a lower living wage is inherently more affordable than one with a higher living wage amount. The high cost of basic needs in Whitehorse compared to most Canadian communities served as the primary determinant of its relatively high living wage in 2016. For example, a family of four typically spends $1,800 each month on shelter in Whitehorse whereas the same family would pay $1,650 in Vancouver, one of the most notoriously expensive housing markets in the country. Other significant monthly expenses incurred by...
the Whitehorse reference family include child care ($1,069), food ($1,023), and transportation ($523).

The living wage provides a lens for assessing the impact of policies designed to reduce poverty and make life more affordable for low-income households. For example, the federal government replaced the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the Universal Child Care Benefit, and tax credits for eligible child fitness and arts expenses with the Canada Child Benefit in 2016. Compared to the previous arrangement, the tax-free Canada Child Benefit provides more generous assistance to low-income households. Many communities saw their living wage decrease after the introduction of the benefit; the Whitehorse living wage was $1.52 less than what would have otherwise been the case under the previous arrangement. The federal government estimates that the Canada Child Benefit will lift 300,000 children out of poverty.

The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition used the living wage report as a tool to advocate for policies to alleviate poverty such as investments in social and affordable housing, subsidized public transportation for low-income households, and the creation of a $10 per day child care program. The Coalition estimates that subsidized public transit could reduce the living wage by 49 cents while the creation of a publicly funded child care program could lower the living wage by $4.95. The Yukon Federation of Labour and the Yukon New Democratic Party used the findings of the report to call on the territorial government to increase the minimum wage from $11.07 to $15 per hour to better reflect the cost of living in the territory. The Coalition has committed to calculating the living wage every year to measure and track the impact of government policies to make life more affordable for low-income households and reduce the prevalence of working poverty by closing the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage.

The living wage can also serve as a measure of low-income as those earning less than the living wage amount for their community will undoubtedly face significant challenges meeting their basic needs. Calculating the living wage for communities throughout the territories can significantly improve our understanding of poverty in the North since Statistics Canada does not report any of its measures of low-income (i.e., the Low-Income Cut-Off, the Low-Income Measure, or the Market Basket Measure) for Yukon, the Northwest Territories, or Nunavut.

During the 2010 methodological review of the Market Basket Measure, all three territories, as well as British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador, requested that Statistics Canada calculate the Market Basket Measure for each territory and the Northern regions of each of these provinces. Despite acknowledging that calculating the Market Basket Measure would enhance our understanding of the cost of living and the prevalence of poverty in the North, Statistics Canada argued that it could not feasibly collect this information. Statistics Canada cautioned that data collected from large geographic areas with small and scattered populations where costs may vary significantly might not produce statistically reliable estimates of the Market Basket Measure.

The inability of Statistics Canada to measure low-income in Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and the Northern regions of most provinces limits our understanding of poverty in the North. A recent paper attempted to address this shortfall by developing a northern equivalence scale using econometrics to estimate the cost of living and the prevalence of poverty in the territories relative to the rest of Canada. According to Daley, Burton, and Phipps, the cost of living is 1.46 times higher in the territories than compared to the rest of Canada, and 27.1% of Northern households live in poverty compared to 10.4% of households in the rest of Canada. However, this estimate does not account for the vast differences in the cost of living both between and within territories. For example, Indian and Northern Affairs (now Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada) reported in 2008 that food was 2.4 times more expensive in Old Crow than in Whitehorse. By incorporating community-level data, living wage calculations avoid some of the uncertainty inherent in regional estimates of the cost of living.

To date, Yellowknife is the only other community in the territorial North where the living wage has been calculated. In 2015, Alternatives North found that the Yellowknife living wage equalled $20.68, the highest amount in the country at that time. One possible reason as to why the living wage has not been calculated for more Northern communities is that the calculation guide developed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives does not address data challenges unique to the North, such as Statistics Canada not reporting the Market Basket Measure. To mitigate this barrier and facilitate future living wage calculations for communities throughout the territories, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition developed a guide that explains each step of the calculation process and identifies each data source incorporated in the Whitehorse calculation.

Calculating the living wage for Northern communities can improve our understanding of the cost of living and the prevalence of poverty in the North while allowing the impact of government policies designed to address affordability challenges to be
measured and tracked over time. Additionally, calculating the living wage provides grassroots organizations with a lens to propose policies to alleviate poverty and improve affordability for their community.

Kendall Hammon is a public policy researcher and the author of the report Living Wage in Whitehorse, Yukon: 2016. The full report and accompanying calculation guide are available on the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition website at www.yapc.ca

Endnotes

The Yukon Liberals’ majority election victory last November may yet prove to be a zeitgeist moment in the territory’s political development. The election marked the end of 14 years of Yukon Party rule and opened the door for improved relations between the territorial government and Yukon First Nations.

The election results raise questions about the future role of Yukon First Nations in the executive management of the territory, the organization of its legislature based upon party politics, and the limits of Indigenous direct participation in public government.

Yukon First Nations’ recent, unprecedented engagement in territorial politics signals the possibility of a rapprochement between Yukon’s two distinct political communities. Yet, the challenge facing the newly elected government is to find a way to reconcile the settler-colonial origins of the Yukon legislature with the new reality of Indigenous self-government.

The Yukon Legislative Assembly, governed through party politics, is a distinct political community, in the sense that it represents an imagined community. Although it is the seat of the territorial government, the Yukon legislature is only one of many political communities in Yukon Territory today. With the coming into force of land claim and self-government enabling legislation some 20 years ago, Yukon First Nations became distinct political bodies within their own right, expressive of multiple collective identities and exercising the capacity to both bestow and deny political legitimacy upon others. Yet, the Yukon’s perennial celebration of its settler history — specifically immigration as a result of the Klondike gold-rush and construction of the Alaska Highway — blurs the boundary between public history and propaganda, relegating First Nation communities and their struggles to the margins of history.

Largely absent from Yukon’s public history are discussions about the conflicts which gave rise to Yukon’s two distinct, founding political communities as well as the tensions that led to their reaching the political settlement they did. All this is relevant to the election outcome where the greatest challenge facing the incoming Yukon Liberal government will be as much about educating the Yukon public about where the Yukon has been and how we got here, as finding ways to accommodate Indigenous governments within the executive legislative function.

Election turnout
In 2016, Yukon’s population is almost 38,000, with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples accounting for approximately 21% of the total population. Of these, more than 53% reside in Whitehorse on the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dun First Nation and Ta’an Kwach’an Council. Yet, many Whitehorse Indigenous residents are also citizens of one of 12 other First Nations communities situated outside of Whitehorse. They are part of a growing number of First Nation residents who work, live and cast their votes in Whitehorse, but call another Yukon community home.

With almost 80% of eligible Yukoners casting ballots, this past general election could be judged as a success based solely upon the election night turnout. First Nation participation also appears to have hit a record high. On election night, 17 out of 19 ridings reported voter turnout had increased by a margin of 10% or greater, compared to the last election in 2011. In nine of these ridings, the margin of difference exceeded 15%, while in another three the percentage increase was greater than 20%.

Since 1974, voter turnout has risen in all but six of 11 Yukon general elections, with voter turnout only ever falling below 73% of eligible voters. By comparison, in Nunavut, 64% of eligible voters turned out during the last election, while in the Northwest Territories, only 43% of voters cast ballots in their 2015 territorial vote.

Credit for the larger turnout in the recent Yukon election is due to improvements in the administration of the election itself. Changes made to the Yukon Elections Act (2016) implemented by the Chief Electoral Officer have made it easier for voters to register and be sworn in at the polls to vote. Also, voter advocacy groups have played a key role in helping to improve the flow of political information and resources to voters, with education campaigns.

Postcard from the 2016 Yukon Election

David Roddick
specifically targeting First Nations and youth.

Also, some Yukon First Nations participated in the territorial election for the first time, in supporting roles. They dedicated resources to help to register First Nation voters and to assist their citizens in getting to the polls. In some instances, they also monitored and reported on candidates’ behaviours that violated prescribed election rules. In addition to these efforts, the Council of Yukon First Nations itself endorsed First Nation participation in 2016 election processes and, by hosting their own party leadership debate, contributed to the perception that First Nations had a vital role to play in the outcome of the election itself.

Increased Indigenous participation is significant, not only because Indigenous Peoples historically have been excluded as voters in Yukon, but also because it provides evidence that that outreach efforts and resources are reaching traditionally underrepresented constituencies. As the Yukon News reported, First Nation citizens, like Elder Phil Gatensby, who never before felt the motivation, came out to vote: “This year, something changed in me and I thought, ‘I have to do this.’” In Whitehorse, where over half of Yukon’s Indigenous population resides, Indigenous engagement may signal a renewed sense of civic belonging, potentially contributing to increased voter turnout in future elections (Fournier & Loewen, 2011).

**Autonomy movements and the rise of party politics**

As Frances Abele has suggested, Northern political development sometimes plays itself out in a contradictory and unexpected fashion. The introduction of party politics into Yukon is no exception; it has not only been critical to the success of the settler rights movement, but to the Indigenous-rights movement, as well. Arguably, the settler rights movement’s successes, in terms of achieving self-government, is not only due to the perceived threat of American occupation during the Klondike gold-rush and Alaska Highway construction, but also the federal government’s zealousness in the wake of both events to deny the possibility of any Indigenous assertion of the same. Similarly, the Indigenous autonomy movement itself would not have taken the form it eventually did, through its entry into party politics, if it were not pressed into a struggle by a settler right movement which sought to deny its right to such a claim.

The Yukon settler rights movement began in postwar Whitehorse with the introduction of Western-Canadian populist thinking into territorial politics. The Whitehorse Men’s Council — which later split into several service club organizations including the Yukon Historical Society and the Whitehorse Board of Trade — played a seminal role in helping territorial politicians to articulate their particular settler rights creed. Local politicians, in turn, capitalized on popular discontent with the Commissioner-in-Council model of government to push their reformist agenda.

In 1957, the settler rights advocates discovered a federal champion in Conservative Member of Parliament, Erik Nielsen. His unanticipated victory in a federal by-election ended 10 years of Liberal postwar power. Together with settler rights advocates, Nielsen pressed for an end to the municipal ward-style, Commissioner-in-Council government and the transfer of its federal executive powers to the locally elected legislature.

Nielsen won election by contesting the legitimacy of voters’ lists and voiding the previous federal election result. Unwittingly, in the process, he discovered that Indians residing “off reserve” in Yukon also had the right to vote. In the run-off by-election, Nielsen persuaded First Nation leadership to help swing the vote in his favour. Not only might this have served to prompt the Diefenbaker government to extend the franchise to all on reserve Indians months later, but Yukon First Nations leaders enjoyed a heightened political status as well as gaining valuable experience in the game of party politics.

In 1965, Yukon’s Indigenous rights movements entered organized politics with the founding of the Klondike Indian Association, displacing the federal Commissioner’s Yukon Indian Advancement Association. As Yukon and Northern B.C.’s regional voice in Indian national affairs, they timed their entry to coincide with federal hearings on Bill-123, the federal Liberal government’s proposal to strike an Indian Claims Commission, an entity to be fashioned after similar bodies struck by the United States Congress to compensate Indigenous Peoples for unlawful land seizures.

No doubt, the Liberal legislation posed a grave threat to Yukon’s settler rights movement. Nielsen, supported by territorial politicians, the Yukon Commissioner and prominent citizens, had become a vocal advocate for the enfranchisement of Yukon Indians — their removal from the Indian register. Up to this point, Yukon Indians were considered “squatters” on their own land unless it had been specifically set aside for their use. The possibility of a Yukon treaty threatened to undermine the authority of any future settler controlled legislature.

After 1965, Yukon First Nations became active participants in the national Indian movement. The federal Liberal government eventually dropped their plan to strike an Indian Claims Commission. In 1973, however, under a new federal land claims negotiating policy, the Yukon Indian Brotherhood
won federal acceptance for their land claim proposal, *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Yukon First Nations and the Yukon legislature pursued parallel but conflicting paths towards autonomy from the federal government. By 1978, party politics in the Yukon legislature had rendered the consensus-style Commissioner-in-Council government unworkable. In 1979, the transfer of executive authority from the Commissioner to the legislature lent legitimacy to the settler rights movement’s opposition to a negotiated land claim settlement. Then, in 1985, after multiple attempts to settle the Yukon land claim had failed, the election of Tony Penikett’s New Democratic Party government served to refocus the settler-rights movement upon its original objectives and agreement was reached.

In 1988 and 1989, a *Memorandum on Devolution* and a *Land Claims Agreement-in-Principle*, respectively, were signed and, in 1993, 11 of 14 Yukon First Nations ratified a territory-wide *Umbrella Final Agreement*. In 1995, Parliament and the Yukon Legislature passed enabling legislation to bring Yukon Land Claims Settlement and First Nations Self-Government Acts into force. In 1998, accepting the recommendations of the Wright Report, the federal and Yukon government signed a devolution protocol accord to facilitate the transfer of federal programs to the Territory.

### First Nation-Yukon relations

Since the settlement of land claims and creation of self-governing Yukon First Nations, Yukon First Nations have used their collective voice on land claims boards, commissions and councils to shape the public resource management agenda in a more direct way than would have been possible through the ballot box. By and large, the Yukon and federal governments have respected this arrangement.

In the aftermath of the 2005 territorial election, however, a re-elected Yukon party government found itself in litigation with First Nations over different interpretations of the “spirit and intent” of land claim agreements. At the same time, Yukon First Nations without land claim agreements pressed the government to acknowledge the increased scope of its obligations in the wake of recent Supreme Court of Canada decisions respecting the government’s obligation to consult on development within First Nations traditional territories.

Following the Yukon party’s 2011 re-election, several First Nations took the Yukon government to court to challenge its treaty decision-making authority for land use planning. The Yukon Party government then “jumped the shark” by lobbying Ottawa to unilaterally amend the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Act (2003)* in what appeared to be a transparent attempt to render any court judgment in Yukon First Nations’ favour a pyrrhic victory. This, in turn, elicited fresh threats of court action from Yukon First Nations and set the table in terms of the issues to be debated during the 2016 election.

In retrospect, these court actions and back-room legislative maneuverings irredeemably poisoned relations between the Yukon party government and First Nations. Speaking to the problem, Grand Chief Peter Johnston observed that over the past 10 years, dealings with the Yukon government have become “treacherous and adversarial.” Looking back, he said, “I don’t think every clear opportunity has been given [by] this government to the Yukon First Nation governments to really execute and implement the agreements that we’ve signed and committed to.”

In the opening days of the 2016 election campaign Yukon Premier Pasloski did offer a qualified *mea culpa* for his government’s approach to First Nation relations. In his election call, the Premier distanced himself from the situation, declaring: this election to be “not about the past five years … [but] about the next five years.” For its part, the Yukon New Democrat party made “reconciliation” the centre piece of its election platform, while the Yukon Liberal party chose “The change Yukon needs” as their campaign slogan.

In short, in the run-up to the 2016 Yukon general election, the Yukon party government found itself time-travelling the wrong way down the highway of history. A tit-for-tat approach to land claim implementation disputes had poisoned First Nation-government relations. With the Yukon party advertising itself as the “True North” party, suddenly, the old 1960s Indigenous-settler movement rivalry was up and running, once again.

### Election aftermath

With the burden of this history now bearing down upon the incoming Liberal government, Yukon’s political *zeitgeist* moment may have arrived — just as it did for the New Democratic Party in the 1980s. Yet, unlike this earlier turning point in contemporary Yukon history, where the competing Indigenous-settler rights movements were unwillingly cast in roles as actors in a larger, national land claims policy drama, they are no longer simply actors, but instead now the authors of their own fortune or fate.

With the election behind it, the focus of public attention has now turned to the how the new Liberal majority government proposes to re-engage Indigenous communities. While recent joint public announcements reflect a need to repair the visible damage to First Na-
Fox on beach with Arctic char, Victoria Island.

Photo courtesy of Marianne Falardeau
tions-government relations, serious consideration also must be given to how to avoid future misadventures. The Yukon government’s *Cooperation in Governance Act* (2015) provides a venue for discussing the mechanics of treaty implementation, but beyond this, Yukon First Nations leadership have expressed an interest in broadening the scope of the Liberal Cabinet’s consultations with self-governing First Nations.

High up on both Yukon First Nations and the Yukon government’s “to do” list must be measures to staunch the hemorrhaging of tax dollars spent on litigation in defence of the notion of public “government,” as set out in the 1993 *Umbrella Final Agreement*. In its editorial, “The quest for the future,” published the day of the 2016 election call, The Whitehorse Star observed:

> It’s been said rather unkindly that a gin-addled aardvark could turn in a lurching though semi-competent performance at running a territory if given access to $1.4 billion a year in taxpayers’ money.

Arguably, Yukon’s ratification of the 1995 federal *Yukon First Nations Land Claims Settlement Act* and *Yukon First Nations Self-Government Act*, must today be read together with recent Supreme Court of Canada’s decisions regarding public government’s obligation to consult. A defensive litigious strategy in a context where Yukon only contributes $156 million a year from its own tax revenues towards public government, and federal taxpayers indirectly pick-up most of the tab for First Nation legal expenses, is short-sighted and doomed to failure.

In 2017, as Yukon celebrates the 75th anniversary of the construction of the Alaska Highway — a rallying point for the settler rights movement — the Liberal party government will face significant headwinds in its search for ways to share its Legislative executive authority with Yukon First Nations. In order to politically justify such reforms it must articulate a course of action that reinforces its own democratic legitimacy as well as that of Yukon First Nations governments. Looking back over the past 50 years, the general public knows little about the social reality of *antebellum Yukon* or how, during the post-World War II era, antipathy towards people of First Nations ancestry was used to rally residents to the settler autonomy cause. The 2016 Deputy Ministers’ report on the Yukon government’s proposed response to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action falls far short of challenging this ignorance. Accordingly, a public acknowledgement of government’s shortcomings with respect to truth telling in the dissemination of Yukon public history is the logical way to proceed.

The past election revealed that a majority of Yukon’s population is capable of distinguishing between “Yukonania” — the memorializing of a settler rights history — while acknowledging the substantive role First Nations-government relations play in territorial politics today. However, the steady stream of Yukonania, produced for consumption by tourists inevitably finds its way into our public architecture, museum exhibits and school curricula. The cumulative effect is a miasma of settler self-congratulation. Unfortunately, despite the best intentions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and recent government investments to promote Yukon First Nations as distinct cultures, such efforts have simply served as cover to allow the unspoken moments of a settler society’s culture war against an Indigenous Peoples to remain buried in the archives. Accordingly, today, while Yukon governments celebrate Yukon First Nation culture, the names of prominent public figures who spearheaded efforts to deny and suppress Yukon First Nations’ rights and culture continue to be revered and grace our public buildings. The fulsome history of their political views and dealings remaining obscure and untold.

The necessary corrective for the new Liberal government, therefore, is not only to make renewed investments in its intergovernmental relationship with First Nations, but to embrace “reconciliation” as an overarching vision to guide a “whole-of-government” re-investment in democratic institutional reform. In order to move past the current, unspoken “culture war” with Yukon First Nations, the Liberal government must pursue a revitalized public history of the Territory, one that begins by acknowledging that even its most revered public figures, those who won autonomy and independence for the Yukon legislative assembly, also embraced the darkest visions of such poets as Jack London and Robert Service. ●

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Endnotes
2 Nielsen, Erik, (June 10, 1958). House of Commons. Linked Parliamentary Data Project (Lipad). “A unique experience in that regard was my own at the community of Old Crow in Yukon which had not had the franchise until the by-election in that riding on December 16 last. They did not know what went on here. They did not know what our purpose was. Yet because all Indian people in Yukon are entitled to vote, certainly the people of Old Crow should not have been left out. That is the basis on which we proceeded. While I am sure these people appreciated the privilege of becoming, in a sense, first-class citizens, in common with other Canadians, they still wonder.” Retrieved, December 6, 2016 http://
3 On March 10, 1960, after a debate marked by virtually unanimous support, the House of Commons finally gave First Nations people the vote without forcing them to give up their status in exchange. A History of the Vote in Canada, Chapter 3, Modernization, 1920–1981. http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=his&document=chap3&lang=e. Old Crow Chief Johnny Abel used his community’s support in the 1957 election to elicit a commitment from Erik Nielsen to build a school in the community, a promise which Nielsen lobbied to see fulfilled.

4 Newman, D. (2014). Evolution of Yukon’s Aboriginal Law and the Goal of Reconciliation, A 360 Perspective, a paper prepared for the Action Canada Yukon Conference, September, 2014. Newman (2014) writes, “Despite the aims – especially but not exclusively on the government side – to attain legal certainty, the final agreements would now appear to have left more matters unresolved than was first realized. There are ongoing legal disputes about the meaning of particular treaty terms (as is the case in some other parts of the country with modern treaties as well) … However, the meaning of the treaty terms was not as clear as it possibly could have been, and there have been major disputes in the Peel River Watershed that have led to litigation on the meaning of the treaty terms. Yukon First Nations, in general, may be looking for a larger degree of power and larger stake in ‘co-management’ than the Yukon government may have foreseen.”
The mining industry today operates primarily with a labour force that is highly mobile since typical mining towns went out of fashion over the last number of decades. Shorter life cycles of projects, volatile mineral prices on the world market, and high costs for maintaining fully-fledged mining towns are just a few reasons for this trend.

This development means that workers live for a certain period of time in a camp near the mine site followed by a recreational period back home. The shift cycles can be two weeks in and two weeks out, but longer rosters are possible too. Accordingly, these men and women lead a very unique lifestyle characterized by permanent mobility and multilocality – meaning that two different places are very relevant in their life: The camp which becomes a meaningful community consisting of colleagues and, of course, the home where family and friends are located.

Researching labour mobility
In the research project “LACE – Labour Mobility and Community Participation in the Extractive Industries in the Yukon” we studied this unique life of mining employees and asked how new workers can learn to successfully cope with this specific situation. Our team interviewed over one hundred women and men working in the mining sector in the Yukon Territory as well as their spouses and experts in order to understand how people experienced this way of life and how they handle these unique circumstances and manage life in a good and satisfactory way.

Often this so-called “fly-in/fly-out” (FIFO), “drive-in/drive-out” (DIDO) or “long-distance commuters” (LDC) lifestyle is portrayed in a negative way due to the hardships involved for family life. This was the starting point to ask how people successfully cope and how this life can be considered as “normal” and satisfactory.

The mobile workers guide
The key applied product of the LACE project is the Mobile Workers Guide – FIFO and Rotational Shift Work in Mining. It presents a wide range of insights into a work life that is characterized by mobility, living in camps and being away from home on rotation. It contains advice from experienced workers, men and women, from a variety of professions in the exploration and mining sector in order for industry newcomers to learn how best to cope with potential difficulties and how to draw benefits from this itinerant lifestyle. The sections throughout the guide introduce the readers to topics, such as coping with boom and bust cycles, specifics of mining communities, First Nation employment, women in mining, family life and private relationships, income management and career development.

First Nation perspective
A particular focus of the guide is on employment of First Nation people in the mining sector. For this purpose the team did long-term anthropological field work in the Yukon. Our base for the study is the community of the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun First Nation in Mayo, although we did visit other mining sites and communities in the Yukon. On the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun territory, placer mining and industrial extraction of gold and silver takes place. Mining there started in the early 20th century in the Keno Hill region rich in silver deposits. Today, as part of agreements between the First Nation and the companies, the local workforce is increasingly hired and employed in a variety of professions.

For First Nations who are living off the land it is important to combine working at the mining sites and being on the land. People think carefully about what it means to work in an industry that has environmental impacts and that is therefore so important for cultural identity and subsistence activities. Very often we heard from our interview partners and people in the community that over the decades mining has become a natural part of the everyday life in the region. We heard that many people are pro-mining as long as it is done responsibly and local First Nations are properly consulted over the course of decision making. Deposits should not be exploited in short time frames just for quick profit but rather saved for future generations.

Many of the workers we talked to emphasized that income from mining is important for being able...
to afford the necessary gear for hunting, trapping and other activities. The fuel, boats, skidoos and trucks are costly. We observed that many people prefer rotational shift work over a “nine-to-five” job. During a recreational period of two weeks in the course of the shift cycle it is possible to go out on the land for a couple of days in a row and to have enough time to hunt moose or work on the trapline. A culturally sensitive work environment is also essential. For example, “it is” necessary that Indigenous workers get additional days off during hunting season. There is still a long way to go before First Nation members are employed in all levels in the industry, including management positions. A positive development is that companies have strict anti-racism policies that are also enforced.

Outreach

The Mobile Workers Guide will be available online in March 2017 at the website resda.ca/labour-mobility. It is based on examples from the Yukon Territory, but we expect it will be useful to people in other provinces and territories and to the mining industry at large. Furthermore, the guide will be available in a booklet form and will be distributed free of charge to communities in the Yukon Territory. We hope the guide will provide useful information for industry newcomers in different professions and that social workers, mining-liaison officers, and mine training courses will benefit.

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Notes

The Mobile Workers Guide was endorsed by the Yukon Chamber of Mines and the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining at the Yukon College in Whitehorse and stems from a collaboration with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun and the Village of Mayo in Yukon, Canada.

The research project “LACE – Labour Mobility and Community Participation in the Extractive Industries in the Yukon” is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through the research initiative “ReSDA – Resources and Sustainable Development in the Arctic” and by the Yukon Government, Department for Economic Development. Duration: 2014-2017. Research team: Gertrude Saxinger, Susanna Gartler (University of Vienna, Austria & Austrian Polar Research Institute), Chris Southcott (Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada), and Valoree Walker (Yukon College in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada). Project website: www.resda.ca/labour-mobility
The creation of public institutions to co-manage natural resources resulting from settlement of Aboriginal land claims has been one of the most substantive innovations in Northern politics and environmental management. “Co-management” has been repeatedly re-defined by researchers and practitioners; however, it can be thought of as local to regional-scale institutional arrangements that are intended to share some measure of control and authority for decisions about specific resources (commonly wildlife, fisheries, lands, protected areas, and water) between governments and resource users (e.g., Berkes, 1991; Natcher & Hickey, 2005; Stevenson, 2006; Armitage et al., 2011).

Like other aspects of land claim implementation, co-management in the North was never expected to be easy (Penikett, 2006). However, it is now facing simultaneous threats on two fronts. Most evidently, governments have found it challenging to adapt to this new approach and appear to have passed through phases of acceptance and resistance at multiple institutional levels. This unsurprising pattern is likely to continue. More surprisingly, though, academia is emerging as the source of another threat to the foundational principle of co-management: the principle of respectfully working together across cultures. Overly-critical academic authors are making fashionable the notion that co-management is merely another method to co-opt Indigenous Peoples, which breeds cynicism among those who will one day participate in or even run these systems. Perversely, this notion could even embolden those who actually would seek to co-opt and exploit Northern peoples, their lands, and their resources.

In practice, government agencies appear to be increasingly avoiding the term “co-management” in favour of “cooperative management” (Hayes & Allen, 2006) in order to avoid even an implicit admission that they share power. In the past year we have observed two instances where authors and reviewers for peer-reviewed journals even went so far as to state, incorrectly, that co-management was never done in the Yukon. This semantic game needs to end because it is destructive and ultimately self-defeating. Co-management has always been conceptualized as encompassing a range of power-sharing between parties, mainly because the processes and negotiations leading to such institutional outcomes are so strongly context-dependent (e.g., Pinkerton, 1989). This means that a government which says it does co-management need not fear locking itself into a power “giveaway” simply because it uses that word. Conversely, simply choosing a different label doesn’t in any way absolve a government from its responsibilities to Aboriginal Peoples that are defined in land claim agreements or other law.

Actual recalcitrance in implementing co-management provisions of land claims has been visible in the Yukon, where the case of the Peel River Land Use Planning Process is instructive. Chapter 11 of the 1993 Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA) established processes and institutions for land use planning in the territory in what is manifestly a co-management policy process. To summarize, after seven years of work the Peel Watershed Planning Commission produced a plan in 2011 that was unacceptable to the Yukon government because of the high degree of protection recommended within the watershed. The government’s response was to unilaterally alter the planning process to produce a plan with much less protected land area, starkly failing to reconcile the different perspectives and values expressed within the planning process (Staples et al., 2014). That governmental action became the subject of legal action by multiple First Nations and environmental organizations, and in 2014 the Yukon Supreme Court ruled in their favour. This decision was appealed and in 2015 the Yukon Court of Appeal partially reversed the Yukon Supreme Court’s decision. That second decision was in turn appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada, which is scheduled to hear the case in March 2017 (http://www.scc-csc.ca/case-dossier/info/dock-regi-eng.aspx?cas=36779). This series of court cases set out to establish interpretation of Chapter 11 in the UFA. Part of the challenge in implementing the UFA is that the Agreement has a “spirit and intent.” In other words, it was negotiated by First Nations to breathe and provide a management
framework that reflects cultural values and practices. However, when interpreted from a literal Western-style policy stance, the dynamic spirit of partnership and collaboration is commonly lost in the hierarchical delegation of authority and ownership. An integral aspect of this ongoing implementation challenge is the need to understand how to apply Western-style written policy developed from a First Nations-rooted vision of co-governance.

The Peel River controversy casts a long shadow over co-management endeavours throughout the territory. Two studies have independently pointed out that the stakes go far beyond the Peel watershed and that the entire land use planning system, a requirement under the UFA, is at risk (Grzybowski, 2014; Staples et al., 2014). As stated by Chief Ed Champion of the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun (one of those involved in the court cases): “The deal that’s on the table is co-management, and this is what the government’s missing.” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 2016a)

This situation is notable also because the Yukon was an early leader in creating co-management institutions through land claim settlement (Simmons & Netro, 1995; Penikett, 2006). In marked contrast to that earlier era, one aspect of the now-former Yukon government’s public response appeared to be an attempt to recast co-management as a threat to democracy. In the same CBC radio interview, former Premier Darrell Pasloski repeatedly referred to the territorial government as “democratically-elected” and a “public government” (CBC, 2016a). Although the premier did not explicitly say that co-management with First Nations was undemocratic, the inference was clear. In a related CBC article the premier is quoted as saying that land use planning commissions are “not elected and they’re not accountable” (CBC, 2016b).

While those statements are true enough there is no public expectation otherwise about those bodies. In context, then, it’s hard to conclude that such assertions are meant in any other way than to de-legitimize institutions of co-management. In fact, co-management boards were intended by the UFA to be independent of political influence. With the Peel watershed, the current government dictated they held jurisdiction over 97% of the region, as only 3% consists of settlement land (Peel Watershed Planning Commission, 2011, pp. 1-2). While the former Yukon government contested that it is their responsibility to manage crown land, affected First Nations agreed to cede surface and subsurface rights within their traditional territory in the spirit that their region would be planned and managed in partnership.

While such divisive rhetoric is dismaying to pro-

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*The Beverly herd of barren-ground caribou, Thelon River, Nunavut.*

Photo credit: Cameron Hayne. GNU Free Documentation Licence
ponents of co-management, it’s also very telling: We probably wouldn’t be seeing such desperate tactics if co-management was actually succeeding as a strategy to assimilate First Nations. One wouldn’t know it by reading academic publications on co-management though. Fourteen years ago Paul Nadasdy (2003) did a great service by warning against uncritical acceptance of the co-management “success story.” At the time of his research in the mid-1990s, many such institutions were new, and it wasn’t uncommon to see the mere existence of co-management bodies touted as evidence of their success. Times have changed since then, but unfortunately academic perspectives have not. Nadasdy’s research is still cited as if current (e.g., King, 2013), and scant attention is paid to the 20 years of progress since it was conducted. Indeed, the entire evolving approach of co-management is now repeatedly critiqued as neo-colonialist and assimilationist (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009; King, 2013; Hall & Sanders, 2015). Each of those critiques far exceeds the scope of the data they were based upon, however, by denying both the agency of Indigenous Peoples who achieved their land claims and the hard, ongoing efforts of many Northerners (Indigenous and non-) to simply make co-management work because they believe in it.

The broad and comparative evaluation that would be necessary to conclude that co-management across Northern Canada either “works” or doesn’t has not been done. Perhaps it needn’t be. It’s far from clear that such an accountability-culture approach could be either accurate or appropriate given the diversity of voices that would legitimately need to be heard, and given how time-and-context-specific judgments about specific situations would be (Westley et al., 2009). Even more fundamentally, defining success is a daunting task since there are multiple legitimate social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological goals within most co-management regimes. Tradeoffs between such goals will necessarily change over time and the ethical pitfalls in making judgments about how they’re formed and realized (or not) will be challenging to navigate. Given those limitations, generalizations and sweeping conclusions about co-management are probably best avoided (White, 2008). That said, the need for more current and better-engaged research on co-management remains.

Going forward, co-management research should draw more from Indigenous research methodology (e.g., Chilisa, 2013). As LaVeaux and Christopher (2009) point out, an Indigenous research approach differs from community-based, participatory research in a number of ways. Their recommendations for indigenizing research practice are of particular relevance to Northern co-management. These recommendations focus even more on Indigenous sovereignty, overcoming the negative history of research on Indigenous Peoples by stressing attentiveness to the specific history and cultural context of the communities involved, and the utilization of Indigenous ways of knowing. Such an approach would enrich co-management research by grounding it in practitioners’ perspectives; it would also create space for reciprocal acts of giving back so that research tangibly enhances co-management practices, policies, and outcomes for those most affected by it (Wilson, 2008). Comparative studies are ambitious but still necessary, and would need to be both long-term and sufficiently resourced to meet Northerners’ contemporary and future expectations of research practice, which keep evolving (Korsmo & Graham, 2002; Grimwood et al., 2012; Wolfe et al., 2011).

Discussion in the North, British Columbia, and elsewhere is now moving beyond co-management to “co-governance” of resources, in which the latter term denotes a sharing of both authority and control, as opposed to simply shared technical duties (Feit, 2005; Simms et al., 2016). Perhaps this trend stems from growing recognition that even at its fullest expression, co-management is still only a part of what’s required to realize the vision of self-determination that land claim agreements were intended to move society towards. A vital part, to be sure, but co-management can apparently function in the absence of co-governance (McConney et al., 2003), so disentangling these concepts will become increasingly important. Perhaps too, in the heady early days of land claim implementation, co-management was burdened with unrealistic expectations that accumulated experience is only now making clear. It’s possible that such expectations, when unmet, could be contributing to diminished enthusiasm for the term – if not the actual principles and practices of co-management. Researchers, especially, should reflect on what role we may have had in miscalibrating expectations about co-management, both in the North and outside it.

It’s not yet clear what co-governance looks like, or how it may functionally differ from co-management under a land claim regime, but it will be built by the people and institutions in place now and shaped by ongoing events. This means that there is much at stake in how co-management is perceived today. Most pointedly, we need to draw the right lessons from Northerners’ collective experience with it and avoid the perverse learning of the wrong lessons that is all too common a risk for environmental management institutions under stress (Ascher, 2001). If we’re to have the future that the ideas of co-manage-
References
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