



## **National Aboriginal Women's Summit – *Strong Women, Strong Communities***

**June 20 – 22, 2007 Corner Brook, NL**

**Issue Paper Theme: Economic Development**

**Topic:** An Overview of Risks and Opportunities in Economic Development

### **ISSUE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INUIT**

#### **RISKS**

All of the Inuit communities in Canada are characterized by cold climate, sparse settlement and remote geographical location and a reliance on transportation linkages provided by air and sea. As well, all Inuit communities are characterized, in an economic sense, by the existence of a 'mixed economy' that combines traditional or subsistence harvesting of wildlife resources, either for direct domestic consumption or for commercial sale, alongside of a cash or wage economy that has developed at different speeds and to varying degrees within the northern communities.

However, while the wage economy is growing rapidly in Inuit communities, many of these new jobs are related to the expansion of public services and the devolution of government administrative positions to northern communities. As a result, in many Inuit communities, over 70% of the available jobs are often found within the public sector and are involved with the provision of health or educational services or relate to locally available government administrative positions. After taking into account a small non-profit sector (i.e., churches, charities, etc.) the remainder of the economy is composed of the private sector, which is comparatively less developed than in the south and which is faced with many challenges in terms of its potential for growth and job creation.

The success of businesses and investments in the North rests upon the social and economic well-being of the inhabitants of Canada's northern communities. The full participation of Inuit women in the northern economy is crucial, and this participation both depends on and results in healthy and viable communities. Commitment to engagement of and with Inuit women in all business and investment strategies is the strongest possible assurance for economic success.

Inuit women have not benefited to date to any great extent from the limited business opportunities that exist in their communities and regions. While resources exist at the regional and local levels to assist in the development of small businesses, Inuit women do not readily access these resources. (Statistics Canada).

Inuit women and children often bear the brunt of the impact of poverty and the concomitant health and social problems that occur. Pauktuutit firmly believes that by encouraging more Inuit women to become self-employed, these women will be taking an important step towards improving their lives and the lives of their families.

There are many challenges that Inuit women face in their communities. For example:

- Housing shortages prevent access to business space;
- Early childhood programs are lacking and access is limited or non-existent. More subsidized child care is needed;
- Women in remote communities have limited access to resources to address issues such as abuse and family violence;
- The high cost of living, transportation costs and lack of infrastructure affect the development of small businesses;
- There is a lack of internet access and air transportation. Seasonal shipping affects delivery of supplies;
- The markets are small;
- There is isolation or non-existence of skilled support such as bookkeeping, computers, legal advice;
- Lack of business information in their regional dialect of the Inuktitut language is also a barrier for women interested in learning.

### **What is Pauktuutit doing about it?**

Inuit women have the ideas, creativity, commitment and tenacity to succeed in business for themselves - but they may lack business skills, technical information, or marketing contacts. Networking, mentoring, business partners, and access to funding opportunities would help in all these areas.

Small scale women's economic initiatives need support. This means:

- Training
- Mentoring
- Access to credit – micro lending and other new economic tools
- Access to markets and
- Laws to protect the intellectual property rights of traditional knowledge holders.

Pauktuutit is devoted to increasing the economic independence of Inuit women, providing the confidence, the tools, and the opportunities to achieve economic success and to overcome the barriers that prevent Inuit women from achieving economic self-sufficiency. Pauktuutit is uniquely suited to carry out this mission.

- Pauktuutit is a unique and practical partner for the critical process of knowledge translation;

- Partnership with Pauktuutit is a direct investment in social stability;
- Investing in Inuit women as the agents of change in the north is sound economic policy;
- Pauktuutit is a non-profit charitable organization.

### **Inuit Women in Business**

The goal of Pauktuutit's *Inuit Women in Business* initiative is to enable more Inuit women to become self-employed and thus increase economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families. Ongoing partnerships with stakeholder organizations are considered key to the success of this initiative. The intent of the partnerships is to build and reinforce linkages between the partners and Inuit women entrepreneurs in order to provide ongoing support for women entrepreneurs at all stages: pre-business training, business start up and aftercare support for established businesses. Workshops have been successfully delivered in four Inuit communities in Nunavut and Nunavik and an independent evaluation has stated that:

*Perhaps Pauktuutit's most important achievement was to demonstrate that many aspiring Inuit women entrepreneurs need and want support, particularly in confidence-building and nuts-and-bolts business knowledge and skills. Training that is focused entirely on the latter is unlikely to succeed. In providing confidence building and an introduction to small business development, Pauktuutit appears to be filling an important gap.<sup>1</sup>*

At the first Economic Development gathering for Canada's Arctic regions, in December 2006, the Community Economic Development Organizations indicated their support for this project and proposed increased partnerships in order to find ways to continue the process of offering these courses in other communities.

### **International Economic Development**

At the international level, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada has engaged actively since 1996 in issues related to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and since 1998 with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). It is also a member of the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas and the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network.

Pauktuutit also holds special consultative status at the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1998. Pauktuutit participates during sessions of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), a subsidiary body of ECOSOC.

### **Intellectual Property Rights – Pauktuutit's Amauti Project**

Using the Amauti as a case study, Pauktuutit assembled seamstresses, government representatives, and NGOs for a workshop in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut 2001. The group identified

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluation of the Inuit Women in Business Pilot Training Project, 2005-2006, Stiles Associates Inc.

the needs and expectations of Inuit women and compared these with the limitations of the current intellectual property right system. The project

- Raised awareness about intellectual property rights among Inuit women;
- Engaged Elders, community leaders, and garment producers in discussions about protecting traditional knowledge;
- Sought consensus on legal mechanisms to protect collective knowledge in a way that respects Inuit cultural concerns;
- Empowered Inuit women with the tools to benefit from traditional knowledge;
- Final Report: *Inuit Women's Traditional Knowledge Workshop on the Amauti and Intellectual Property Rights* [www.pauktuutit.ca/publications\\_e.asp](http://www.pauktuutit.ca/publications_e.asp)

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREMIERS**

- A more holistic approach to economic development and collaboration between government departments and levels of government; i.e.; housing, abuse issues, childcare, food security, etc.;
- Broader financial and partnership support for the *Inuit Women in Business* initiative will empower Inuit women by providing a path towards equitable access to resources and opportunities, through the provision of a program that addresses the gaps that limit Inuit women's full participation in the main economy. The initiative will ensure economic independence, work-life balance and the well-being of Inuit Women and their families.
- Improve access to credit through the implementation of Micro lending initiatives.
- Commit to fair and adequate financial support for Canadian Aboriginal representatives who are accredited observers at WIPO. The issues are complex and the volume of material that must be processed in order to adequately contribute to inter-sessional requests and to effectively participate during the IGC sessions are a heavy burden on Pauktuutit, where representation is now provided *pro bono*. Support must extend beyond ad hoc, last minute logistical support to attend the meetings, to human resource capacity to prepare in advance for these events. Such support would improve the quality of dialogue and consultation Pauktuutit can provide the Government of Canada. As holders of much of what is considered traditional knowledge and as practitioners of traditional cultural expressions, it is not unreasonable to ensure full and effective participation at meetings that explicitly address these forms of intellectual property.
- Overcoming the barriers to economic development in the Inuit regions involves active coordination of many different bodies as well as different levels of government - all working toward the creation of innovative approaches to economic development in the communities and the development of a mature and diversified economy that will provide both economic opportunities for Inuit and a standard of living equal to that enjoyed by other Canadians